

Public Document Pack

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Date: Wednesday, 14 February 2024

Dear Sir or Madam

The Children and Young People's Services Policy and Scrutiny Panel – Thursday, 22 February 2024, 10.00 am – New Council Chamber - Town Hall

A meeting of the Children and Young People's Services Policy and Scrutiny Panel will take place as indicated above.

The agenda is set out overleaf.

Yours faithfully

Assistant Director Legal & Governance and Monitoring Officer

To: Members of the Children and Young People's Services Policy and Scrutiny Panel

Councillors:

Joe Tristram (Chairperson), Wendy Griggs (Vice-Chairperson), Marc Aplin, Annabelle Chard, Stuart Davies, Nicola Holland, Clare Hunt, Sue Mason, Tom Nicholson, Michael Pryke and Martin Williams.

Added Members: Claire Hudson (Church of England Representative),
Vacancies: Primary and Secondary/Special School Parent Governor Representative

Right to Speak: Fiona Waters (Weston College), Kenton Mee, North Somerset Parent Carers Working Together, Vacancy: North Somerset Youth Parliament

This document and associated papers can be made available in a different format on request.

Agenda

1. **Addresses by Members of the Public (SSO 9)**

To receive and hear any person who wishes to address the Panel on matters which affect the District and fall within the remit of the Panel. The Chairperson will select the order of the matters to be heard. Members of the Panel may ask questions of the member of the public and a dialogue between the parties can be undertaken.

Requests to speak must be submitted in writing to the Head of Legal and Democratic Services, or the officer mentioned at the top of this agenda letter, by noon on the day before.

2. **Apologies for Absence and Notifications for Substitutes**

3. **Declaration of disclosable pecuniary interest (Standing Order 37)**

A Member must declare any disclosable pecuniary interest where it relates to any matter being considered at the meeting. A declaration of a disclosable pecuniary interest should indicate the interest and the agenda item to which it relates. A Member is not permitted to participate in this agenda item by law and should immediately leave the meeting before the start of any debate.

If the Member leaves the Chamber in respect of a declaration, he or she should ensure that the Chairperson is aware of this before he or she leaves to enable their exit from the meeting to be recorded in the minutes in accordance with Standing Order 37.

4. **Minutes** (Pages 7 - 10)

Minutes of the meeting of 19 October 2023, to approve as a correct record.

5. **Matters referred by Council, the Executive, other Committees and Panels (if any)**

6. **Q3 Performance Monitor** (Pages 11 - 22)

Report of the Assistant Director, Children's Services.

7. **2023-24 MTFP Progress and 2024-25 MTFP Delivery Plan** (Pages 23 - 32)

Report of the Finance Business Partner, Children's Services.

8. **Children's and Young People's Social Worker Recruitment and Retention** (Pages 33 - 40)

Report of the Chairperson, Children and Young People's Policy and Scrutiny Panel.

9. **The CYPS Panel's Work Plan** (Pages 41 - 44)

Report of the Policy and Scrutiny Senior Officer.

Exempt Items

Should the Children and Young People's Services Policy and Scrutiny Panel wish to consider a matter as an Exempt Item, the following resolution should be passed -

“(1) That the press, public, and officers not required by the Members, the Chief Executive or the Director, to remain during the exempt session, be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following item of business on the ground that its consideration will involve the disclosure of exempt information as defined in Section 100I of the Local Government Act 1972.”

Also, if appropriate, the following resolution should be passed –

“(2) That members of the Council who are not members of the Children and Young People's Services Policy and Scrutiny Panel be invited to remain.”

Mobile phones and other mobile devices

All persons attending the meeting are requested to ensure that these devices are switched to silent mode. The chairman may approve an exception to this request in special circumstances.

Filming and recording of meetings

The proceedings of this meeting may be recorded for broadcasting purposes.

Anyone wishing to film part or all of the proceedings may do so unless the press and public are excluded for that part of the meeting or there is good reason not to do so, as directed by the Chairman. Any filming must be done as unobtrusively as possible from a single fixed position without the use of any additional lighting, focusing only on those actively participating in the meeting and having regard to the wishes of any members of the public present who may not wish to be filmed. As a matter of courtesy, anyone wishing to film proceedings is asked to advise the Chairman or the Assistant Director Legal & Governance and Monitoring Officer's representative before the start of the meeting so that all those present may be made aware that it is happening.

Members of the public may also use Facebook and Twitter or other forms of social media to report on proceedings at this meeting.

Emergency Evacuation Procedure

On hearing the alarm – (a continuous two tone siren)

Leave the room by the nearest exit door. Ensure that windows are closed.

Last person out to close the door.

Do not stop to collect personal belongings.

Do not use the lifts.

Follow the green and white exit signs and make your way to the assembly point.

Do not re-enter the building until authorised to do so by the Fire Authority.

Go to Assembly Point C – Outside the offices formerly occupied by Stephen & Co

Minutes

of the Meeting of

The Children and Young People's Services Policy and Scrutiny Panel

Thursday, 19 October 2023

New Council Chamber - Town Hall

Meeting Commenced: 10.03 am

Meeting Concluded: 11.36 am

Councillors:

Joe Tristram (Chairperson)

Wendy Griggs (Vice-Chairperson)

Annabelle Chard

Nicola Holland

Clare Hunt

Apologies: Councillors: Sue Mason and Tom Nicholson.

Absent: Councillors Marc Aplin, Stuart Davies, Michael Pryke and Martin Williams.

Also in attendance: Councillor Roger Whitfield.

Officers in attendance: Carolyn Fair, Matthew Greenhalgh, Anthony Webster, Brent Cross.

CAY 12 Declaration of disclosable pecuniary interest (Standing Order 37)

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None.

CAY 13 Minutes

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Minutes of the Panel meeting held on 29 June 2023 – to approve as a correct record.

Recommended: that the minutes of the meeting of 29 June 2023 be approved as a correct record.

CAY 14 SEND Self Evaluation

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The report was presented by the Head of SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) after an introduction by the Interim Director of Children's Services, and set out the structure and findings of the most recent SEND self-evaluation. This was due to be shared with Ofsted the following Monday in their first SEND

engagement in the region. The report showed that progress was being made and was felt to be a good reflection of SEND in North Somerset.

Further work to be done in the next twelve months was highlighted, including on the Pathway to Adulthood but work on this was in progress. The Alternative Provision framework was discussed, as well as the ethos of Alternative Provision being an intervention, and not a destination for children and young people.

The following topics were raised in discussion:

- The joint working with Adults Social Services on the Pathway to Adulthood;
- That children and young people waiting for an assessment could access an EHCP (Education, Health, and Care Plan), and that resources for parents and schools needed to be communicated;
- That growth in SEMH (Social, Emotional and Mental Health) needs being higher than the national average was due to North Somerset starting from a historically low base and the resulting inability to intervene early on;
- The hurdles to getting 100% parental involvement in Statutory Needs Assessments up from the current 82%;
- That many parents still were having difficulty understanding how to access direct payments;
- The plan for any schools that were flagged as not meeting the needs of children with SEND;
- Members were grateful for the glossary attached at the bottom of the report, which was very helpful in deciphering acronyms.

Recommended: that the report be received and comments forwarded to officers in the form of minutes.

CAY 15 Annual Report of Adoption West 2022-23

The Interim Director of Children's Services spoke to the report, which gave a summary of the activity of our Regional Adoption Agency in the 2022-23 period. There had been two ILACS (Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services) of participating authorities over the reporting period, both of which had noted the strength of the work of Adoption West.

In the discussion that followed the presentation, Members queried:

- Whether the scarcity of social workers was one of the factors affecting the timeliness of adoption – a much larger role was played by the behaviour of family courts, which showed differences in outcomes nationally.
- Early permanence, where children were placed with foster parents with the intention of adoption, was well used in North Somerset, and was a strength.
- That 'adoption is a last resort' referred to older children with existing familial relationships for whom adoption was not always the best option.

Recommended: that the report be received and comments forwarded to officers in the form of minutes.

CAY 16 Children's Safeguarding Partnership Annual Report

The Interim Director of Children's Services presented the report covering 2022 to 2023. Although children's safeguarding had been an area of concern, an improvement was starting to be seen due to the efforts of all the members of the Partnership, some of whom had been very active. Partners from education were being reintroduced after a hiatus of some years, and officers were looking to do joint work with the Adults Safeguarding Board.

In discussion the following topics were considered:

- the narrative behind the increase in children going missing – it was important to understand the reasons for this, and an emphasis was being placed on the return to home interviews; the report lacked clarity on the number of children involved versus the total number of episodes which would be improved on in future.
- The use of the MOMO (Mind Of My Own) app to support children and young people to communicate their views and needs, and how children and young people's voices could be used to improve services.

Recommended: that the report be received and comments forwarded to officers in the form of minutes.

CAY 17 Panel's Work Plan

The Senior Policy and Scrutiny Officer discussed the Panel's work plan and invited discussion with Members for additional items to add to it, as well as picking up any actions from the meeting.

Members requested that the invitations for working group meetings be sent to all CYPS Members, and not only those who had previously expressed an interest in attending.

Chairman

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North Somerset Council

REPORT TO THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SERVICES POLICY AND SCRUTINY PANEL

DATE OF MEETING: THURSDAY 22ND FEBRUARY

SUBJECT OF REPORT: Q3 PERFORMANCE MONITORING

TOWN OR PARISH: ALL

OFFICER/MEMBER PRESENTING: JANE ANSTIS – ASSISTANT DIRECTOR, CHILDREN'S FAMILY SUPPORT & SAFEGUARDING

KEY DECISION: NO

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Panel is asked to note the performance information presented in this report and to give comment on both areas for improvement and areas of good performance.

1. SUMMARY OF REPORT

The Children and Young People's Services Policy and Scrutiny Panel receive regular performance management reports to help members evaluate the extent to which the council and its partners are achieving key plans and objectives for children and young people's services, and to provide appropriate challenge and suggestions to improve performance.

This report presents an overview of the newly developed Key Performance Indicators basket for children's support and safeguarding services and evaluates performance across:

- Early Help and Front Door Responses
- Robust and effective social work practice
- At risk of Care, Cared for and Care Experienced Children and Young People
- Quality Assurance and Audit (auditing)
- A Stable and able workforce

This basket gives a detailed view of the performance of the directorate and is reported in addition to the Key Corporate Performance Indicators basket, which measures progress against our Corporate Plan for the whole organisation and is shared regularly with members and reported on the North Somerset website.

2. POLICY

The council's Performance Management Framework includes a requirement for quarterly reporting of our performance position so that members and officers can monitor progress against our key plans and objectives and take appropriate action where progress is below target or needs additional focus.

3. DETAIL

Children's services safeguarding exception report – KPI data extract Quarter 3 2023/24

Notes:

- Each KPI has been given a RAG rating as follows. **GREEN**: on target. **AMBER**: within 5% tolerance of meeting target. **RED**: not on target. Where KPIs are not targeted, no RAG rating is given.
- Each KPI is given a direction of travel. For targeted KPIs this is either **POSITIVE**, **STABLE** or **NEGATIVE**. For none targeted KPIs it is either INCREASE, STABLE or DECREASE.
- Population as of Q3 = 43,367

Area	Indicator	Data type	QUARTERS				TARGET	POLARITY	RAG	DOT	COMPARATORS 2021-22			
			22-23	2023-2024			23-24				21-22			
			Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q3 DETAIL				Statistical Neighbour	South West	England	Ofsted good
Page 10 Early Help and Front Door Responses	Number of Request for Support received in quarter	Number	1,953	1,998	1,876	1,720	N/A	N/A	Not targeted	DECREASE	Local measure			
	Percentage of Family Wellbeing Assessments completed within 45 working days	Percentage	70%	43%	52%	51%	80%	Higher is better	RED	NEGATIVE	Local measure			
	Percentage of Family Wellbeing episodes closed within the last 12 weeks who have been transferred up to Social Care	Percentage	17%	21%	11%	24%	7%	Lower is better	RED	NEGATIVE	Local measure			
	Number of children stepped down from Child in Need to Family Wellbeing	Number	9	10	11	2	N/A	N/A	RED	NEGATIVE	Local measure			
	Number of MASH Enquires	Number	583	336	339	402	N/A	N/A	Not targeted	INCREASE	Local measure			
	Percentage of repeat contacts where previous contact was within previous 12 months	Percentage	62%	65%	66%	61%	N/A	N/A	Not targeted	DECREASE	Local measure			
	Percentage of Initial contact decisions made within 24 hours	Percentage	68%	60%	76%	67%	90%	Higher is better	RED	NEGATIVE	Local measure			
	Percentage of MASH Enquires that progress to Social Care Assessment / Referral	Percentage	28%	21%	22%	36%	N/A	N/A	Not targeted	INCREASE	Local measure			

Area	Indicator	Data type	QUARTERS				TARGET	POLARITY	RAG	DOT	COMPARATORS 2021-22			
			22-23	2023-2024			23-24				21-22			
			Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q3 DETAIL				Statistical Neighbour	South West	England	Ofsted good
Page 11	Number of new children social care referrals started	Number	313	275	246	289	N/A	N/A	Not targeted	INCREASE	Local measure			
	Percentage of Request for Support leading to 'No Further Action'	Percentage	26%	24%	23%	22%	7.6%	Lower is better	RED	POSITIVE	4.1%	6.8%	7.6%	-
	Percentage of referrals leading to 'No Further Action'	Percentage	1%	2%	2%	0%	N/A	N/A	Not targeted	DECREASE	21.4%	22.6%	21.5%	-
	Percentage of re-referrals within previous 12 months (rolling 12 months)	Percentage	15%	17%	18%	17%	22%	Lower is better	GREEN	POSITIVE	21.4%	23.0%	22.0%	-
	Percentage of strategy discussions held within one working day of referral (where a Strategy Discussion was deemed necessary)	Percentage	55%	80%	94%	92%	90%	Higher is better	GREEN	NEGATIVE				
	Percentage of strategy discussions leading to a Section 47 Enquiries	Percentage	70%	66%	76%	81%	N/A	N/A	Not targeted	INCREASE				
	Percentage of Section 47 Enquiries leading to ICPC	Percentage	15%	31%	33%	16%	31%	N/A	RED	NEGATIVE				31%
	Percentage of return home interviews accepted for children who went missing within the quarter	Percentage	66%	59%	36%	52%	65%	Higher is better	RED	POSITIVE	Local measure			
	Percentage of return home interviews completed within 72 hours	Percentage	36%	58%	56%	58%	85%	Higher is better	RED	POSITIVE	Local measure			

Green to celebrate:

- Percentage of request for support leading to 'No Further Action'.

While this measure remains overall above target, the direction of travel is steadily positive.

- Percentage of re-referrals within previous 12 months (rolling 12 months)

This measure shows a consistent picture of low re-referral for further support within the first twelve months of services ceasing.

- Percentage of strategy discussions held within one working day of referral (where a Strategy Discussion was deemed necessary)

This measure indicates that children identified at risk of significant or imminent harm are mostly and consistently subject to multi-agency strategy discussions in a timely way. This shows a substantial improvement on last year and the dip in Q3 is marginal.

Ambers on watching:

- None

Reds on watching:

- Percentage of Family Wellbeing Assessments completed within 45 working days
- Percentage of Family Wellbeing episodes closed within the last 12 weeks who have been transferred up to Social Care

Area	Indicator	Data type	QUARTERS				TARGET	POLARITY	RAG	DOT	COMPARATORS 2021-22			
			22-23	2023-2024			23-24				21-22			
			Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q3 DETAIL				Statistical Neighbour	South West	England	Ofsted good

- Number of children stepped down from Child in Need to Family Wellbeing

In Q3 the Family Wellbeing service was operating a significant waiting list for support. This inhibited the number of families that were able to be accommodated stepping down from CIN support. In addition, some families waiting for support found their needs increasing in the absence of intensive support. The family wellbeing service has made positive progress in reducing its waiting list – a reduction of circa 2/3 at beginning Q4. In Q4 we expect the volume of transfers to children’s social care reduce and assessment timeliness increase as a result of the reduction in waiting times.

Reds of concern;

- Percentage of Initial contact decisions made within 24 hours

Current review of Front Door triage and capacity will report end February 24 with key actions to increase efficiency.

- Percentage of Section 47 Enquiries leading to ICPC

Thematic dip sample in motion to determine reason for drop which indicates potential overuse of s47 or under-use of ICPC.

- Percentage of return home interviews accepted for children who went missing within the quarter

- Percentage of return home interviews completed within 72 hours

Both measures sit below target range. ROTH team now providing additional capacity to support.

Robust and effective social work practice	Rate of Children in Need plans per 10,000 children	Rate	61.39	53.50	52.57	47.73	N/A	N/A	Not targeted	DECREASE	-	-	-	99.6
	Rate of Children subject to a Child Protection Plan per 10,000 children	Rate	25.21	26.29	31.59	28.59	N/A	N/A	Not targeted	DECREASE	38.8	40.5	42.1	41.7
	Rate of Children in Care per 10,000 children	Rate	52.06	47.96	52.81	56.03	N/A	N/A	Not targeted	INCREASE	55.0	60.0	70.0	72.8
	Rate of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children in care per 10,000	Rate	6.77	5.30	5.76	6.00	N/A	N/A	Not targeted	INCREASE				6.9
	Percentage of single assessments completed within 45 working days	Percentage	81%	63%	60%	71%	85%	Higher is better	RED	POSITIVE	83.2%	81.7%	84.5%	85%
	Percentage of single assessments completed within 45 working days (year to date)	Percentage	79%	63%	61%	65%	85%	Higher is better	RED	POSITIVE	83.2%	81.7%	84.5%	85%
	Percentage of Initial Child Protection Conferences held within 15 working days of Strategy Discussion	Percentage	74%	80%	82%	81%	90%	Higher is better	RED	NEGATIVE	82.1%	79.6%	79.2%	-
	Children subject to Repeat Child Protection Plans within 2 years (rolling 12 months)	Percentage	14%	12%	13%	13%	9%	Lower is better	RED	STABLE				9%

Area	Indicator	Data type	QUARTERS				TARGET	POLARITY	RAG	DOT	COMPARATORS 2021-22			
			22-23	2023-2024			23-24				21-22			
			Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q3 DETAIL				Statistical Neighbour	South West	England	Ofsted good
	Percentage of PLO (Public Law Outline) concluding within 16 weeks (12 months rolling)	Percentage	53%	44%	42%	48%	90%	Higher is better	Not targeted	INCREASE	Local measure			
	Percentage of Child in Care statutory visits within timescales	Percentage	84%	85%	84%	85%	90%	Higher is better	RED	POSITIVE	Local measure			
	Percentage of Child Protection statutory visits within timescales	Percentage	81%	90%	82%	77%	90%	Higher is better	RED	NEGATIVE	Local measure			
	Percentage of Child in Need Plan visits within timescales	Percentage	68%	77%	75%	74%	90%	Higher is better	RED	NEGATIVE	Local measure			
	Percentage of Child Protection core group meetings within timescales	Percentage	69%	83%	67%	55%	90%	Higher is better	RED	NEGATIVE	Local measure			
	Percentage of single assessments leading to closure	Percentage	37%	43%	42%	50%	N/A	N/A	Not targeted	INCREASE	Local measure			

Overall volumes of children receiving services remain comparatively low although complexity of need is accepted to have increased in lone with national trends.

Green to celebrate:

- None

Amber's on watching:

None

Reds on watching:

- Percentage of single assessments completed within 45 working days
- Q3 shows marked improvement towards target
- Percentage of single assessments completed within 45 working days (year to date)

Overall YTD figure still reflects overall shortfall against target.

- Children subject to Repeat Child Protection Plans within 2 years (rolling 12 months)

Measure is steady but falls below our target range against Ofsted 'Good' comparators

- Percentage of Child in Care statutory visits within timescales

This measure is not yet on target and reviewed on a weekly basis through the Performance Framework (PF)

Reds of concern:

- Percentage of Child Protection statutory visits within timescales
- Percentage of Child in Need Plan visits within timescales
- Percentage of Child Protection core group meetings within timescales

These measures are indicative of the staffing pressures within the FSS. Interim 'central' team now in place and ambitious new recruitment and retention strategy and plan launch end Feb 24.

			QUARTERS				TARGET	POLARITY	RAG	DOT	COMPARATORS 2021-22			
			22-23	2023-2024			23-24				21-22			
Area	Indicator	Data type	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q3 DETAIL				Statistical Neighbour	South West	England	Ofsted good
At risk of Care, Cared for and Experienced Children and Young People	Number of unregistered placements – Under 16	Number	3	4	12	9	0	Lower is better	RED	POSITIVE	Local measure			
	Number of unregistered placements – Age 16+	Number	31	26	34	35	0	Lower is better	RED	NEGATIVE	Local measure			
	Number of residential placements	Number	9	12	15	22	15	Lower is better	RED	NEGATIVE	Local measure			
	Number of unplanned admissions to care	Number	2	1	7	3	3	Lower is better	GREEN	POSITIVE	Local measure			
	Percentage of discharges from care to Special Guardianship Order	Percentage	5%	19%	0%	0%	13%	Higher is better	RED	STABLE	11.2%	16.1%	12.9%	-
	Number of Special Guardianship Orders in place	Number	140	145	147	145	N/A	N/A	Not targeted	DECREASE	Local measure			
	Percentage of children placed with 'In house' foster carers	Percentage	49%	46%	39%	40%	50%	Higher is better	RED	POSITIVE	Local measure			
	Short Term Placement Stability (month end snapshot) (whether the child has had 3+ placements in the last 12 months)	Percentage	15%	15%	16%	14%	10%	Lower is better	RED	POSITIVE	10.1%	11.0%	10.0%	10%
	Long Term Placement Stability (month end snapshot) (whether a child in care for at least 2.5 years has been in the same placement for at least 2 years)	Percentage	68%	73%	69%	70%	68%	Higher is better	GREEN	POSITIVE	70.9%	71.0%	71.0%	68%
	Percentage of children in care with health checks up to date	Percentage	65%	72%	65%	67%	89%	Higher is better	RED	POSITIVE	82.0%	85.0%	89.0%	-
	Percentage of children in care with Dental checks up to date	Percentage	41%	38%	34%	34%	70%	Higher is better	RED	STABLE	66.0%	64.0%	70.0%	-
	Percentage of Care Leavers aged 19 to 21 in Education, Employment or Training	Percentage	49%	53%	55%	54%	70%	Higher is better	RED	NEGATIVE	54.9%	56.0%	55.0%	-
	Percentage of Care Leavers aged 19 to 21 in suitable accommodation	Percentage	94%	93%	94%	95%	95%	Higher is better	GREEN	POSITIVE	88.9%	89.0%	88.0%	-

Area	Indicator	Data type	QUARTERS				TARGET	POLARITY	RAG	DOT	COMPARATORS 2021-22			
			22-23	2023-2024			23-24				21-22			
			Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q3 DETAIL				Statistical Neighbour	South West	England	Ofsted good

Green to celebrate;

- Percentage of Care Leavers aged 19 to 21 in suitable accommodation
- Number of unplanned admissions to care

Amber to watch:

- Long Term Placement Stability (month end snapshot) (whether a child in care for at least 2.5 years has been in the same placement for at least 2 years)

Reds to watch:

- Short Term Placement Stability (month end snapshot) (whether the child has had 3+ placements in the last 12 months)
- Percentage of Care Leavers aged 19 to 21 in Education, Employment or Training

Red of concern:

- Number of unregistered placements – Under 16
- Number of unregistered placements – Age 16+
- Number of residential placements
- Percentage of discharges from care to Special Guardianship Order
- Percentage of children placed with 'In house' foster carers

These indicators reflect the sufficiency pressures which are a local and national challenge. Key transformation plans are in place and will be reported through the Transformation board.

- Percentage of children in care with health checks up to date
- Percentage of children in care with Dental checks up to date

Both remain below the expected range, reflecting local and national challenges.

Access to dentistry in North Somerset remains a challenge with too few NHS dentists operating in N Somerset in common with the picture around national access. Health assessment data for Q4 already showing strong improvement from Q3 position.

Quality Assurance and Audit (safeguarding)	Timeliness of Reviews of Child Protection Plans	Percentage	100%	100%	100%	97%	95%	Higher is better	GREEN	NEGATIVE	90.1%	89.9%	89.3%	
	Timeliness of Reviews of Children in Care	Percentage	98%	83%	89%	86%	95%	Higher is better	RED	NEGATIVE				
	Timeliness of Reviews of Children in Need plans	Percentage	63%	67%	59%	60%	90%	Higher is better	RED	POSITIVE				
	Overall number of practice reviews completed	Number	25	37	43	32	30	Higher is better	GREEN	NEGATIVE	Local measure			
	Overall percentage of practice reviews completed within timescale	Percentage	88%	95%	88%	84%	90%	Higher is better	RED	NEGATIVE	Local measure			
	Overall percentage of practice reviews graded as good or better	Percentage	36%	54%	47%	69%	70%	Higher is better	RED	POSITIVE	Local measure			

Area	Indicator	Data type	QUARTERS				TARGET	POLARITY	RAG	DOT	COMPARATORS 2021-22			
			22-23	2023-2024			23-24				21-22			
			Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q3 DETAIL				Statistical Neighbour	South West	England	Ofsted good
	Overall percentage of practice reviews graded as inadequate	Percentage	4%	0%	14%	3%	10%	Lower is better	GREEN	POSITIVE	Local measure			
	Percentage of Children in Care reviews held within the month in which the subject child participated	Percentage	68%	69%	76%	77%	90%	Higher is better	RED	POSITIVE	Local measure			
	Overall percentage of practice reviews moderated	Percentage	0%	8%	0%	9%	10%	Higher is better	RED	POSITIVE	Local measure			
	Overall percentage of practice reviews moderated where the grading was unchanged	Percentage	0%	67%	0%	67%	80%	Higher is better	RED	POSITIVE	Local measure			

Green to celebrate:

- Timeliness of Reviews of Child Protection Plans – remains very strong.
- Overall percentage of practice reviews graded as inadequate.

This measure has fallen and correspondingly, percentage of practice reviews graded as good or better has increased in Q3.

Amber to watch:

- None

Reds on watch:

- Overall percentage of practice reviews completed within timescale
- Overall percentage of practice reviews moderated
- Overall percentage of practice reviews moderated where the grading was unchanged

Reds of concern:

- Timeliness of Review of Children in Care
- Timeliness of Reviews of Children in Need plans
- Percentage of CIC reviews held within the month in which the subject child participated

All measures fall below expected target and are addressed within weekly Performance Framework.

Children in Care reviews impacted in Q3 by staff vacancies which are now filled.

A Stable and able workforce	Percentage of Social Workers with more than 20 children allocated	Percentage	33%	26%	20%	15%	5%	Lower is better	RED	POSITIVE	Local measure			
	Average caseload of allocated Social Workers	Number	15.8	15.2	14.7	14.0	16.6	Lower is better	GREEN	POSITIVE	16.41	15.9	16.6	-
	Percentage of case supervisions in time	Percentage	51%	46%	50%	62%	90%	Higher is better	RED	POSITIVE	Local measure			

Area	Indicator	Data type	QUARTERS				TARGET	POLARITY	RAG	DOT	COMPARATORS 2021-22			
			22-23	2023-2024			23-24				21-22			
			Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q3 DETAIL				Statistical Neighbour	South West	England	Ofsted good
	Number of agency workers	Number	15	19	26	18	Decreasing	Lower is better	RED	POSITIVE	Local measure			
	Percentage of ISROs with more than 55 children allocated	Percentage	0%	0%	14%	17%	0%	Lower is better	RED	NEGATIVE	Local measure			
	Percentage of care leaver PA's with more than 20 children allocated	Percentage	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	Lower is better	GREEN	STABLE	Local measure			

Green:

- Average caseload of allocated Social Workers
- Percentage of care leaver PA's with more than 20 children allocated

Red:

- Percentage of Social Workers with more than 20 children allocated
- Percentage of Case Supervision's in time
- Number of agency workers
- Percentage of ISROs with more than 55 children allocated

This is a complex picture in which impacts of staff turnover and profile of experience within the services need to be factored in.

To note:

Glossary

- **MASH** – Mutli-Agency safeguarding hub
- **ISRO** – Independent safeguarding and reviewing officers
- **PLO** – Public law order
- **ICPC** – Initial child protection conference
- **Each reporting year runs from 1st April to 31st March**

List of statistical neighbours (from LAIT, updated March 2022)

- Worcestershire
- South Gloucestershire
- West Sussex
- Hampshire
- East Sussex
- Gloucestershire
- Essex
- Dorset
- Leicestershire
- Warwickshire

4. CONSULTATION

Directors have been fully consulted over the content of this report.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no additional financial implications as a consequence of this report.

6. LEGAL POWERS AND IMPLICATIONS

N/A

7. CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

N/A

8. RISK MANAGEMENT

N/A

9. EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

The equality objectives (part of the Corporate Performance Management Framework) are regularly monitored and are reported to the Corporate Management Team and the Council's Equality Scheme Implementation Group.

10. CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

It is important that we are aware of the areas in which we are performing well and where further action is needed to address any concerns.

11. OPTIONS CONSIDERED

N/A

AUTHORS

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BACKGROUND PAPERS

- Support and Safeguarding Team quarterly reports (2019/20 to 2023/24)
- P&C Annual Directorate Statement
- North Somerset Council Corporate Plan

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North Somerset Council

REPORT TO THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SERVICES POLICY AND SCRUTINY PANEL

DATE OF MEETING: 22nd FEBRUARY 2024

SUBJECT OF REPORT: 2023/24 MTFP PROGRESS AND 2024/25 MTFP AND DELIVERY PLAN

TOWN OR PARISH: ALL OFFICER/MEMBER PRESENTING: FINANCE BUSINESS PARTNER (CHILDREN'S SERVICES) AND DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

KEY DECISION: NO

RECOMMENDATIONS

i. That the Panel notes the progress against the 2023/24 Medium Term Financial Position (MTFP) savings targets and the savings targets built into the 2024/25 MTFP for children's services and the risks and opportunities associated with the medium-term position.

1. SUMMARY OF REPORT

1.1. This report summarises and discusses the in-year budget monitoring position for the Children's Services directorate highlighting key variances, movements and contextual information. The report also provides further information in respect of the delivery and progress against the savings targets for 2023/24.

1.2. The report also makes reference to the principles and outcomes associated with the setting of the 2024/25 budget and on-going financial risks.

2. POLICY

2.1. The council's budget monitoring is an integral feature of its overall financial processes, ensuring that resources are planned, aligned and managed effectively to achieve successful delivery of its aims and objectives. Revenue and capital budgets are set within the context of the council's medium term financial planning process, which supports the Corporate Plan.

3. DETAILS

Revenue budget monitoring summary for 2023/24

3.1. Revenue budget summary

The Children's Services directorate has a current budget of **£31.348m** to deliver a range of statutory and discretionary services to support children and young people across North Somerset.

Table 1 below provides a high-level summary of the different services and costs that will be incurred by the directorate and these have been separated into two main areas; those that focus on children's social care related activities, and those that support education and partnership activity.

The forecast out-turn position reported against the budget at the end of November 2023 (i.e. month 8) is £38.323m, which would result in an **overspend of £6.975m** at the end of the financial year.

Given the scale of the financial challenges being faced senior officers from across the directorate have focused a great deal of attention on all aspects of the budget, although clearly the greatest focus has been on those areas which are contributing towards the overspend so that the reasons can be properly understood and issues escalated so they can be integrated into the council's wider financial strategies. This report therefore provides more focus on those areas of the service and the budget that are reporting material variances.

Table 1 – Childrens Services forecast out-turn as at P8 2023/24

CHILDRENS SERVICES REVENUE BUDGET SUMMARY, AS AT 30 NOVEMBER 2023 (MONTH 8)	REVISED BUDGET	FORECAST OF PROJECTED OUT-TURN	PROJECTED OUT-TURN VARIANCE
	£	£	£
Corporate Parenting	13,210,850	18,980,487	5,769,636
Front Door	583,258	659,604	76,345
Family Wellbeing	2,603,941	2,342,727	(261,214)
Children With Disabilities	2,199,946	3,266,461	1,066,516
Children With Disabilities Occ Therapy	229,689	182,582	(47,107)
Family Support and Safeguarding	3,481,811	4,223,227	741,416
Quality Assurance and Safeguarding	511,250	560,413	49,164
Adoption	576,268	474,937	(101,331)
Social Work Development	135,365	145,330	9,965
Contracts and Commissioning	614,433	658,471	44,037
Youth Justice Service	299,362	291,603	(7,758)
Children's Support and Safeguarding Sub total	24,446,172	31,785,841	7,339,669
Inclusion Service	448,741	452,602	3,860
SEND	1,541,761	1,605,462	63,701
Virtual School	83,997	86,693	2,697
Music Service and Education Hub	1,051	1,051	(0)
Learning and Achievement	889,499	859,247	(30,252)
Strategic Planning and Governance	640,410	674,344	33,934
Education Funding	1,332,231	1,319,343	(12,888)
Education Partnerships Sub total	4,937,691	4,998,743	61,052
Children's Services Directorate	1,102,191	924,738	(177,453)
Children's Support Services	861,891	613,422	(248,469)
Children's Services Directorate Sub total	1,964,082	1,538,160	(425,922)
TOTAL - CHILDRENS SERVICES	31,347,945	38,322,744	6,974,799

The table shows that there is currently projected to be a significant overspend on Children's Support and Safeguarding services of £7.34m which is an area of the budget that provides care and support to those children who need it, including children in care, children who receive support within the community and also who may be on the edge of care.

Analysis shows that the majority of the increase in costs during the current financial year has arisen within the **Placements budgets** because of increasing numbers of children in care, inflationary pressures faced by providers being passed on in fee rates and the increasing complexity in children's needs.

Another key area of overspending within the directorate budget is in relation to **staffing** and this is because the council has needed to appoint more agency workers because it has not been able to recruit to posts within the establishment structure. The council is not alone in this regard as there have been a well-documented national challenges in social work recruitment and retentions. The council, however does need to ensure there are sufficient numbers of staff to support our children, and the higher costs paid to the agency does put pressure on the revenue budget. The council has worked proactively with the HR recruitment team and launched a new website which will specifically promote these vacancies and increase recruitment in this area. A working group of the Scrutiny Panel has focused on social work recruitment and retention, the report received today will inform the development of a new recruitment and retention strategy which seeks to increase the permanent workforce and reduce spend on the agency workforce.

3.2. Medium term financial plan savings for 2023/24

The total amount of savings built into the 2023/24 budget was £0.764m. The savings are detailed in Table 2 below, along an indication of their delivery, demonstrating progress against achievement as at the end of December 2023:

The total deliverable savings currently identified is £0.533m, which is 70% of the total savings target. The main area of under delivery continues to be Childrens Centres and creation of Family Hubs which were due to deliver budget reductions of £0.150m by the end of the current financial year.

Table 2 – Monitoring of Childrens Services MTFP savings in 2023/24

Ref	Savings plans included within the 2023/24 revenue budget	Budget change £000	Budget forecast £000	RAG Rating
CH01	Efficiency savings or reductions in budgets in line with projected or historic spend or demand	-85	-85	G
CH03	Deletion of vacant post in Education Funding, Fostering Training, Strategy & Policy and Training Teams	-121	-121	G
CH12	Uplift to fees and charges	-13	-13	G
CH05	Increase in vacancy management target	-100	-100	G
CH02	Relocate FSS Team to alternative office accommodation	-20	-12	A
CH10	Review funding arrangements for staff costs in Youth Justice Service	-29	-15	A
CH04	Family Time Team	-60	0	R
CH06	Review of costs for children with complex care needs	-50	-50	G
CH08	Family Group Conferencing	-56	-42	A
CH09	0-2s discretionary funding	-80	-80	G
CH11	Children's Centres and creation of family hubs	-150	-15	R
	Totals Children's Services budget reductions in 2023/24	-764	-533	70%

3.3. Childrens centres and creation of family hubs

Family Hubs bring together a range of services in one location so that families find it easier to get the support and advice they need, which will have a positive impact on outcomes for families. Services will vary, but at the heart of all family hubs are comprehensive multi-agency service offer for families with 0-2 year-olds but the service offer extends up to the age of 19 or to 25 years for those with special educational needs. Family hubs could also help families to access a wider range of support including youth services, support for physical and mental health as well as housing and debt advice. Family hubs are important because investing in families and making sure they get the support they need from birth to adulthood will help with children's educational attainment, well-being and life chances.

A steering group was set up in April 2023 to commence delivery of this project. Six sub-groups were set up to look at specific themes:

1. Buildings
 2. Digital
 3. Data
 4. Communications
 5. Workforce and
 6. Consultation
- These sub-groups have been meeting and gathering information to provide a robust rationale for identification of sites which would support the family hub vision to the steering group. There have been several barriers that have resulted in delays to date including access to information, the need for further work with partners who are also deliver services from some buildings and changes in leadership. There is work to do now to pick up the pace of this work to move to delivery of a new service model which will form the basis of consultation with community stakeholders and our employees. Work undertaken over the course of the year has highlighted that this is an exciting opportunity for families but a complex area that needs all aspects to be properly considered to ensure that the model will work for families and will be sustainable moving forward.

To fully realise the vision for family hubs, it is envisioned that further capital funding will be required and these will need to go through the council's usual governance processes at the appropriate stage. It is recognised that this may be a challenge given the council's current financial situation however it is anticipated that the new proposals will be supported by a business case to show that they are affordable and sustainable across the medium term.

Given the need for further engagement, delivery of the 2023/24 savings are not anticipated to be achieved until the new financial year.

3.4 National context for Children's Services

Many local authorities have serious workforce shortages, with the highest levels of turnover since 2013, in the meantime demand for children's social care continues to increase. Many sectors are facing recruitment and retention issues and children's social care is no different. These resource challenges mean that councils are having to use increasing numbers of agency staff, driving higher costs. The shortage of residential placements in the sector is also exacerbating the problem. Recent trends have seen an increase in spend on acute services from by 43.2% from between 2009/10 and 2021/22 at the expense of universal and preventative services which fell by 73.4% over the same period (based on research by the Institute for Government).

Meanwhile demands on children’s services are increasing. Referrals have returned to pre-pandemic levels and the number of children in care continues to rise. In line with our adults counterparts, there is evidence that the children’s cases have become more complex. There is also further pressure on the system from record numbers of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. The social care sector continues to lobby government for sufficient levels of funding and policy changes to tackle the problems it faces.

3.5 Local context for Children’s Services

In line with the national picture, North Somerset Council is seeing an increasing number of children with complex needs which results in higher costs, and this is clearly demonstrated in the tables and commentary below.

It should be noted that senior leaders within the directorate review all of the core data on a weekly basis and this information is fed into a series of panels so that it is possible to assess the broader impacts across the service and the council.

Weekly information is summarised into a monthly forecast and these totals are reported across the organisation through the budget monitoring framework and also the performance management framework as they will be used to collate a council-wide position and support strategic discussions focused on risk, resources and future planning.

Table 3 – Childrens Placements Costs By Type And Financial Year

	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24 forecast	Change from 2020/21	Change from 2020/21
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	
In-house	1,204	1,221	1,184	1,298	94	7.81%
IFA	2,198	1,841	1,859	2,853	655	29.80%
Residential	2,489	2,568	2,890	7,941	5,452	219.04%
Supported Living	2,116	526	1,051	585	-1,531	-72.35%
Other	1,670	1,924	2,681	2,758	1088	65.15%
TOTAL	9,677	8,080	9,665	15,435	5,758	59.50%
FTE	271.3	275.9	308.6	327.3	56	20.64%
Avg. cost per place	36	29	32	47	11	30.56%

IFA: Independent fostering agency

There is almost a 60% forecast increase in total costs when comparing the forecast for 2023/24 to the previous financial year with the biggest percentage and monetary increase being in residential placements.

There are several children currently in residential placements who are suitable to be stepped down into either in-house or independent fostering placements however, it is proving difficult to identify appropriate placements. Having a larger pool of suitable fostering placements to draw on would help mitigate the number of children requiring residential placements, thereby reducing total costs.

Fostering placements is an area of focus and the council is looking at refreshing IFA engagement also exploring strategic relationships with providers. Work is underway to ensure that there is sufficient expertise and capacity in the commissioning team to support this approach. A further worrying trend identified in other nearby local authorities is an increase in the number of single

occupancy placements due to the increasing complexity of children’s needs. On average, these placements cost £2k-£5k per week more than a multi-occupancy placement. Children’s Services are working on the development of a Sufficiency Strategy to ensure that there are the right types of placements available in the right places for children.

Table 4 – Childrens Placements Volume Activity By Month For 2023/24

Children looked after	Average 2022/23	Budget for 2023/24	Forecast @ P2	Forecast @ P3	Forecast @ P4	Forecast @ P5	Forecast @ P6	Forecast @ P7	Forecast @ P8
In-house fostering	72.33	73.95	73.95	75.24	69.91	68.70	67.01	65.60	59.79
Independent fostering	40.20	40.20	43.24	46.11	52.31	50.59	55.67	57.17	59.08
Residential placements	12.73	12.99	13.82	15.97	18.39	18.58	11.59	12.68	13.10
Unregistered placements							7.72	9.63	9.58
Supported living	5.29	5.35	5.35	3.82	3.82	4.67	4.34	4.78	3.73
Secure accommodation	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Parent and Child	0.45	0.45	0.45	0.59	0.55	0.70	1.48	1.59	1.83
Special guardianship	100.00	101.60	95.28	98.40	99.61	99.61	99.61	99.61	104.27
Kinship	34.48	35.03	33.13	28.42	24.59	26.43	27.60	30.40	33.52
Child arrangement orders	12.68	12.68	11.00	11.00	11.00	11.00	12.00	13.17	13.17
Adoption allowances	23.93	24.45	20.33	22.00	22.00	22.00	21.04	21.04	21.04
Other	6.51	6.56	8.94	8.14	7.68	8.76	6.20	6.87	7.65
Total	308.60	313.26	305.49	309.69	309.86	311.04	314.26	322.54	326.77

The table above shows the volume and numbers of children and young people in the various placement types. The number of residential and unregistered placements has broadly doubled compared to 2022/23 and this supports the increase in the financial forecast.

We can also see around a 50% increase in the use of independent fostering placements compared 2022/23 along with a 17% reduction in in-house fostering placements. This change in profile has resulted in further financial pressure on the placements budget, resulting in estimated spend on IFAs of £2.853m (almost £1m more than budgeted), representing a 29.8% increase compared to 2020/21.

The changes in numbers from month to month reflect updates to the underlying number of children and young people as well as changes in approach and assumptions within the forecasting, largely relating to timescales for placements and step-down arrangements.

Table 5 – Childrens Placements Cost Forecast By Month For 2023/24

Children looked after	Budget for 2023/24	Forecast Spend @ P2	Forecast Spend @ P3	Forecast Spend @ P4	Forecast Spend @ P5	Forecast Spend @ P6	Forecast Spend @ P7	Forecast Spend @ P8	Potential Variance
In-house fostering	1,412,413	1,412,413	1,500,674	1,404,155	1,348,221	1,302,279	1,313,036	1,314,017	(98,396)
Independent fostering	1,859,435	2,000,000	2,354,773	2,654,222	2,475,432	2,660,713	2,762,443	2,875,383	1,015,948
Residential placements	2,820,381	3,000,000	4,199,858	5,475,656	6,764,338	3,335,771	3,403,236	4,023,394	1,203,013
Unregistered placements	0	0	0	0	0	3,296,769	4,051,703	4,007,780	4,007,780
Supported living	906,355	906,355	716,225	707,469	368,422	375,501	418,320	579,982	(326,373)
Secure accommodation	348,024	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	(348,024)
Parent and Child	186,560	186,560	204,629	166,707	577,290	425,015	493,022	593,582	407,022
Special guardianship	1,041,423	976,632	1,020,206	1,046,907	1,070,475	1,044,301	1,056,062	1,060,452	19,029
Kinship	553,285	523,353	453,777	409,038	447,878	456,692	505,167	507,894	(45,391)
Child arrangement orders	138,342	106,081	106,081	106,081	106,082	122,647	122,647	122,647	(15,695)
Adoption allowances	218,383	181,586	182,444	182,444	182,444	183,444	205,291	205,491	(12,892)
Other	734,930	1,002,000	663,765	674,789	547,657	464,724	389,229	292,546	(442,384)
Total	10,219,531	10,294,980	11,402,432	12,827,466	13,888,239	13,667,858	14,720,157	15,583,169	5,363,638
	22%	75,449	1,107,452	1,425,034	1,060,773	(220,381)	1,052,299	863,012	52%

The council is developing strategic relationships within the market with a view to improving outcomes for children and young people by ensuring capacity is available to support them when required. Furthermore, long term relationships enable the council to better plan and understand its medium-term financial commitments through negotiation and agreement of weekly rates and future price uplifts that recognise both the cost pressures faced by providers and the funding pressures faced by local government. Having available capacity will mean that the council can avoid paying high spot rates when looking to find a suitable placement for a child requiring support. These relationships may also allow providers to reduce costs/rates as they are better able to plan their resource as they will receive a known level of income over a given timeframe.

3.6 IMPOWER – Valuing Care

Recognising the challenges faced in terms of demand and cost the council has engaged IMPOWER to support transformation of Children’s Service. IMPOWER are an organisation that have a lot of experience and proven track record in this area and have been working closely with the service to understand the current position and the challenges faced by the service.

Using this knowledge the joint team have reviewed opportunities to develop service delivery, many of which are already being implemented to improve outcomes for children and young people with a particular focus on enabling more children to remain in family-based arrangements and have fewer children in care.

Changes include the introduction of a new panel process, as well as profiles and dashboards that enable the team to better understand the support pathway, longer term ambitions and cost implications of the decisions being made.

Savings and cost avoidance opportunities have been identified but these will need to be closely monitored and actioned so that the benefits are realised within the planned timescales and do not slip, resulting in further cost pressures for the council.

3.7 Looking ahead and building budgets for the future – MTFP Growth & Savings

Work on the council’s medium-term financial planning for 2024/25 is now in the final stages. One of the core principles that has been applied is to try to close the gap between the budget and the projected spend so that the service have a robust and sustainable platform to move forward from in the new financial year. This particularly relates to the budgets for Placements and Children with Disabilities where demand and cost are extremely difficult to manage.

The budget has recently been reviewed and significant growth of £7.999m has been applied to the directorate budget for next year. This includes:

- +£0.96m for pay inflation on staffing budgets
- +£5.40m to re-base placements budgets for children in care,
- +£0.72m for price inflation on children’s placements costs,
- +£0.82m to provide increased staffing capacity,
- -£0.11m a reduction in energy budgets from new contract,
- +£0.22m for increasing legal costs.

Whilst the increase in budgets is extremely welcome and will put the directorate back on a sound financial footing, the council’s wider financial position means that it needs to reduce costs in order to balance its overall budget for next year.

The means that all directorates need to reduce spending on the delivery of services, although a lot of these measures are focused on transforming what we do. Savings of over £16m have been included within the council's budget plans for next year, with £2.001m of these allocated to Childrens Services.

The vast majority of these savings (£1.837m) will be delivered from the change programme underway in Childrens services. It is anticipated that these savings will be achieved through management of the numbers of children requiring council funded services, including "stepping down" children to more suitable forms of care and support where it is appropriate to do so. Based on the current position, this target will be extremely challenging to deliver however, officers will continue to work closely with all aspects of the service in implementing the delivery plan. There is also a further £0.150m saving from the Family Hub programme.

3.8 Prevention or cure?

Prevention is often thought of as a healthcare issue, but good health is not only dependent on our health services. Our health is shaped by a range of factors including our early life, the work we do (and associated remuneration), our education and the homes and places we live. Our public services are intertwined, and most will impact in investing in good health as an asset and in preventing ill health.

Councils play a vital role in our health and wellbeing. They provide a range of services including housing, education, public health and social care. Many of these services can be preventative, averting the need for more complex and costly acute interventions, either by council themselves, or wider public services. A key imperative for our system and within the Children's transformation programme will be to progress further opportunities to provide timely and appropriate help to children and their families at the earliest point, which prevents escalation (or re-referral) to statutory services.

Unfortunately, in the current economic climate, there is a tendency to make more reactive, short-term responses, with resources being targeted towards immediate pressures. This is usually at the expense of long-term investment, and whilst it may ease short-term pressures, it fails to recognise the long-term consequences. To ensure we make decisions that are financially sustainable, provide value for money and reduce inequalities, we need to consider both the short-term and long-term outcomes.

4. Consultation

This is a report of the directorate's progress, there are no decisions requested.

5. Financial Implications

The financial implications are set out in the main body of the report.

6. Legal Powers and Implications

All the work outlined above is undertaken in the context of a range of legislation, regulations and guidance from the relevant government departments.

7. Climate Change and Environmental Implications

There are no specific actions proposed in this report which could impact the environment over and above those which are known. The directorate's accommodation needs are being considered as part of the Accommodation Strategy and the other significant area is travel where there is ongoing work to reduce car travel unless in electric vehicles and to use public transport, including trains for longer distances.

8. Risk Management

Risk is considered at all levels of the directorate, mitigations identified and logged, and shared with the Corporate Leadership Team and elected members.

9. Equality Implications

None.

10. Corporate Implications

None.

11. Options Considered

N/A.

Authors:

Alan Shakespeare, Interim Finance Business Partner, Children & Young People Services

Melanie Watts, Head of Finance & Deputy S151 Officer

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North Somerset Council

Report to the Children & Young People Policy & Scrutiny Panel

Date of Meeting: 22 February 2024

Subject of Report: Children's and Young People's Social Worker Recruitment and Retention

Town or Parish:

Officer/Member Presenting: Councillor Joe Tristram

Key Decision: N/A

Reason:

Recommendations

That the Children and Young People's Policy and Scrutiny Panel (CYPS) endorse the report and recommendations found in the report in Appendix 1.

1. Summary of Report

CYPS tasked a working group with examining the reasons for the high proportion of agency workers in the Children's Social Work team. The report of this working group is laid out in Appendix 1.

2. Policy

The following links are made with the Corporate Plan: a council which empowers and cares about people; an open and enabling organisation.

3. Details

The CYPS Social Worker Recruitment and Retention working group met on 25 October 2023, 27 November 2023 and 11 January 2024. The first meeting was an overall discussion of the service, the second involved obtaining feedback and testimony from officers involved in children's social work and the final meeting looked at the current recruitment methodology and whether there were any improvements or efficiencies that could be made.

4. Consultation

See details within Appendix 1.

5. Financial Implications

See details within Appendix 1.

Costs

N/A

Funding

N/A

6. Legal Powers and Implications

See details within Appendix 1.

7. Climate Change and Environmental Implications

See details within Appendix 1.

8. Risk Management

See details within Appendix 1.

9. Equality Implications

See details within Appendix 1.

10. Corporate Implications

See details within Appendix 1.

11. Options Considered

See details within Appendix 1.

Author:

Brent Cross, Policy and Scrutiny Senior Officer, 01275 888 078

Appendices:

Appendix 1: Children and Young People's Social Worker Recruitment and Retention

North Somerset Council

Draft Report to the Children's and Young People's Services Scrutiny Panel

Date of Meeting: 22nd February 2024

Subject of Report: Children's and Young People's Social Worker Recruitment and Retention

Town or Parish: N/A

Officer/Member Presenting: Joe Tristram

Key Decision: Yes

Reason: Children's Services has been judged "Needs Improvement". The status of our social worker team is a critical element of our service.

Recommendations to the Executive Member:

1. That career progression within the social work team be reviewed.
2. That staff retention be promoted by implementing a revisit of the learning and development offer, improving the quality and consistency of North Somerset's children's services presentation online and in other public fora, considering "golden handshakes" or retention bonuses, and to insert the question at leaving interviews: "what would make you want to return at a later point in your career?"
3. That the permissions on social workers' work phones be reviewed.
4. That regular invitations for members to observe and understand the work of children's services be created.

1. Summary of Report

This report is commissioned by the Children and Young People Services (CYPS) scrutiny panel for a working group tasked with looking into why the children's social work team has 40% agency workers.

For most family interventions, continuity of support is crucial and this necessitates a team of long-term committed social workers. Research conducted by the working group confirmed that our problem is part of a national one, but the picture is not consistent. Other local authorities in the southwest with a similar demographic have made great improvements. North Somerset benefits from being a very attractive and relatively cheap place to live, and our council has the reputation for being a kind and caring employer but this is not widely enough or well enough publicised.

Research also questioned current social workers and managers and found a number of suggestions to improve the service's working practices and public profile that it was felt would encourage social workers to work with us and stay.

2. Details

The need for a review of career progression was highlighted by a number of social workers who gave evidence that the post of deputy team manager (recently abolished) had been a valuable one as it both provided support and oversight and a small step up the promotional ladder.

A number of evidence givers discussed the current difficulties over learning and development, that there isn't a clear plan or pathway, and that when an individual does find time to attend a learning event there is no time made to pass this learning on, so it can feel wasted. The 2019 learning and development pathway authored by Shelley Caldwell "was a gold standard that social workers aspire to return to".

Evidence from Torbay Local Authority, backed up by our own team, suggests that the establishment of an in-house Children's Services Academy would boost morale and create a structure to hold learning and development.

It was also evidenced that although some of our children's services team post about the service on social media, principally LinkedIn, other local authorities do this in a more managed way that means the good aspects of their service are highly visible compared to ours. It was also suggested that LinkedIn is not viewed by the generation of younger social workers or SW students we might want to attract, and that the same content would be more useful on Instagram and TikTok. It was felt that we come across as badly presented and that social workers wondering whether to relocate to N Somerset may be influenced by this. Suggestions for making a consistent improvement in our media visibility were:

1. that we make it an existing officer's responsibility to post on social media about NSC children's services.
2. That we coordinate with the Council's graphics and comms teams on how we publicise ourselves and on what platforms.
3. That when creating content or printing literature, such as those we use at recruitment fairs, we compare our output to that of other local authorities' posts and publications.
4. That it is given to a member of HR or Comms to make a weekly request to the children's social work team to ask for content to post, and that they take charge of this presentation rather than the children's team themselves.

There was inconsistent evidence about the use of golden handshakes/recruitment or retention bonuses. In some London boroughs we were told that a yearly retention bonus had a significant effect on keeping staff, whereas in Devon this was not found.

Social worker work supplied phones are apparently locked down so that they can neither use the MOMO (Mind of My Own) app nor read QR codes to access this app. It is hoped this will be a relatively simple and inexpensive IT change to make.

Create regular invitations for councillors to view the work of our children's teams, eg by extending the invitation at "practice week" to all councillors, and all CYPS scrutiny members to have a standing invitation to observe the work of the MASH.

3. Consultation

Councillors: Joe Tristram, Wendy Griggs, Catherine Gibbons, Nicola Holland, Clare Hunt, Sue Mason, Michael Pryke

Officers: Jane Anstis, Kate Chilcott, Sarah Heather, Elena Morales Pozo, Joe Suckling, Linda Walsh, Jo Ratcliffe.

Outside agencies/individuals: Cordelia Law of Torbay Council (summary of meeting attached as an appendix), and a working group of Devon County Council (report and infographic attached).

4. Financial Implications

This report has explored some of the needs of the current team of children's social workers and the recommendations for improving their working life and the visibility of the service. Further work would be needed before any financial implications or costs could be defined.

Costs

See "financial implications" above.

Funding

See "financial implications" above.

5. Legal Powers and Implications

It is implied that there might need to make small changes in contracts of employment if an additional step in the employment ladder were made.

6. Climate Change and Environmental Implications

Better cared for children and families produce better citizens who are able to be more aware of their social responsibilities and thus be less of a burden on the environment. They are also likely in the longer term to cost the council less.

7. Risk Management

Further work on risks will need to be done once the recommendations in this report are implemented.

Equality Implications

No equality impact assessment undertaken. No equality impact implied.

8. Corporate Implications

Cross directorate cooperation may be requested of HR and Comms.

9. Options Considered

Given that there are seven recommendations made with some detail as to how they could be followed, there are many options.

At one extreme it is an option to take no action which would make it more likely that our children's services continue to operate under considerable staffing and other stress, fail to gain permanent staff and find it difficult to fulfil our obligations to the families and children under our care.

Preferably actions will be taken of the types recommended here and this helps lead our service to improvement in morale, staffing levels and provision, and helps us move from "needs improvement" towards "good" in our OfSTED inspections.

Author:

Joe Tristram (Councillor)

Appendix:

Notes from meeting with Cordelia Law, ex lead for Torbay Council's children's services

During the time she was in charge they went from 10 years of "inadequate" to good.

She said: churn at senior level is very important/disruptive and need to look at why it's happening.

Is the IT too hard for SW to use?

Is there good CPD support?

What's the availability of supervision?

Is there clear progression?

Do we run exit interviews?

They have/had 5 themes: 1 workload

2 learning and development

3 staffing

4 pay and reward

5 morale

Cordelia says to all councillors whenever she gets the opportunity that our children are our resource for the future (this is to appeal to the ones mainly interested in buildings roads and money).

Suggests reading the Case for Change report [Case for change: initial report of the independent review of children's social care in England | NSPCC Learning](#) from which comes how crucial it is to have good synergy between the lead member (Catherine) the leader (Mike) and the director of children's services (currently Carolyn).

She established a Learning Academy (all in house) which addressed Workload, learning and development and (one other topic from the list of 5 above).

They trained everyone in restorative practice.

They started a 3 year training and development programme from Y1 to advanced practitioner.

They started a "grow your own social worker" scheme so that people could retrain from other areas.

(ask Rachel.setter@torbay.gov.uk about the learning academy)

They have a Wellbeing Officer and a wellbeing offer too.

They go big on employee recognition, with a weekly star who can be nominated by anyone. They don't only get recognition, the reason why they're a star is published so everyone can see the good practice. They have length of service recognition with a celebration at 1 year, then every 5 years. They also have an annual "conference" (= get-together at a leisure centre with awards) and again get to nominate one-another for these awards. (Ditto for foster carers) A keynote speaker is invited to this.

This all cost £44K (which Cordelia was suggesting was not much). UK Engagement journal did a Gallup poll which found that employee disengagement cost 34% of their salary so these sorts of things quickly pays for themselves.

They invite councillors to visit and experience service delivery and generally they come out with eyes properly opened.

They regularly ask any business the council engages with for sponsorship and get for instance free panto tickets, free trips on the Santa train, for fostered children and carers, and also for social workers (this last seems a bit unlikely, but that's what I wrote!)

They have applied to be a Unicef Child Friendly Town [Child Friendly Cities Initiative | Child-Friendly Cities Initiative](#).

Background Papers:

[Devon Childrens Services Recruitment and Retention Spotlight Review:](https://democracy.devon.gov.uk/documents/s47310/Spotlight%20Review%20Report%20-%20Recruitment%20and%20Retention.pdf)

<https://democracy.devon.gov.uk/documents/s47310/Spotlight%20Review%20Report%20-%20Recruitment%20and%20Retention.pdf>

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Children and Young People’s Services Policy and Scrutiny Panel Work Programme February 2024

(to be updated following each Panel meeting)

The Panel will consider issues of significant public concern, areas of poor performance and areas where Members think the Council could provide better value for money. This is a “live” document and is subject to change as priorities or circumstances change.

Section One – planned panel working groups.

Topic	Reason for scrutiny	Method of scrutiny and reporting process	Timeline	Progress	Contact
School Organisation Steering Group	1. In-depth investigations of proposed school changes 2. Pupil Projections – methodology as applied generally and in particular in respect of new builds, including affordable housing 3. Admission Arrangements	Steering Group Corporate Aim: Promoting lifelong learning opportunities Key issues for the public To include Education Transformation	Varied, depending on work strand Ongoing - to meet as required. Regular reporting to Panel	Last meeting: 8DEC23	Sally Varley
Social Worker Recruitment	For assurance on the current position of the recruitment of social workers for Children’s Services	Working group; Report to 22 February 2024 CYPS Panel.	4 meetings end Feb24	Last meeting 11JAN24	Matt Greenhalgh Jane Anstis
Home to School Transport	Examination of the issues involved with Home to School transport	Joint working with TCC Panel; informal joint meeting 8FEB24	Next meeting April 2024		Gemma Dando
Children’s Mental Health	To examine some of the issues involved in the increase of children’s poor mental health	Joint working with HOSP; ongoing	Meetings ongoing	Last meeting 14DEC23	Georgie MacArthur

Section Two – briefings, workshops, and informal panel meetings. Outcomes may, with Chairman’s agreement, generate panel agenda items (for inclusion in S3 below) or, with panel agreement, be escalated to S1 above:

Topic	Reason for scrutiny	Date	Outcome	Contact

Section Three - agenda reports to the Panel meetings as agreed by the Chairman. This section provides for the forward planning of agendas and a record of panel meeting activity.

CYPS 29 June 2023

Report Title	Purpose of Report	Outcome (actions)	Contact
Role, Remit and Work Plan of the CYPS Policy and Scrutiny Panel	To consider and agree the Panel’s Work Plan.	Working groups to be set up.	
Performance Monitoring	To note the performance information presented in this report and to give comment on both areas for improvement and areas of good performance.	Members comments collected.	
Ofsted Inspection Update	To note the outcome of the Ofsted Inspection March 2023 and the identified areas for improvement and plan.	Discussions around the areas of improvement.	
SEND Improvement Plan and the Safety Valve	To note the Council’s progress and commitments.	Members noted progress and provided comment	

CYPS 19 October 2023

Report Title	Purpose of Report	Outcome (actions)	Contact
SEND Self-Assessment	The Panel to note and comment on the SEND self-assessment.		
Adoption West Annual Report	To advise officers of any areas for further information.		

Children's Safeguarding Report	For the CYPS Panel to receive and comment on the Children's Safeguarding Board annual report		
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CYPS 22 February 2024

Report Title	Purpose of Report	Outcome (actions)	Contact
Q3 Performance Monitoring	to note the performance information and to give comment on both areas for improvement and areas of good performance.		Jane Anstis
2023/24 MTFP Progress and 2024/25 MTFP Delivery Plan	To note the progress against the 2023/24 Medium Term Financial Position (MTFP) savings targets and the savings targets built into the 2024/25 MTFP for children's services and the risks and opportunities associated with the medium-term position.		Alan Shakespeare
Children's and Young People's Social Worker Recruitment and Retention	To endorse the recommendations of the report of the Children's Social Worker Recruitment and Retention working group.		Cllr Joe Tristram

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Section Five - Recommendations - Response from Executive Member

Area for investigation/ Recommendations	When were the recommendations to the Executive agreed?	Expect answer by (first panel meeting after recommendations were submitted)

Section Six - Progress and follow-up on implementing Panel recommendations

Panel Recommendation	Date of response	Actions – implementation progress

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