

# North Somerset Council

## Report to the Children and Young People Policy and Scrutiny Panel

**Date of Meeting:** Friday 24<sup>th</sup> February 2023

**Subject of Report:** Improvement in Children's Services 2020 – to date.

**Town or Parish:** N/A

**Officer/Member Presenting:** Becky Hopkins, Assistant Director, Children's Support and Safeguarding, and Jacqui Scott, Head of Learning and Achievement

**Key Decision:** No

**Reason:** To update the Panel on the directorate's progress since the Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) in 2020 and the Ofsted/CQC SEND Revisit in 2021.

### Recommendations

That Members note:

- the progress to date
- the role of this Panel in scrutinising performance and progress
- areas to consider for this Panel's work plan going forward

### 1. Summary of Report

- 1.1 This comprehensive report provides an overview overview of the strengths, challenges and identified areas for development within the directorate. It highlights what is going well and areas of focused work to continue to strengthen and improve the services offered to children and their families.
- 1.2 It comprises two parts, the first providing information from a Children's Support and Safeguarding perspective and the second focusing on the developments within Education Partnerships.

### 2. Policy

The work of the directorate is informed by the Council's Corporate Plan and government policies, primarily from the Department for Education. The policies are accompanied by legislation and guidance.

### 3. Details

#### 3.1 CHILDREN'S SUPPORT AND SAFEGUARDING

**Children's Services data 2022/23 to date**

- 4% of our children's population were open to Children's Services at some point in 2022/23 to date.
- In 2022/23 to date there were 7624 contacts from either the public or professionals to Children's Services. This is lower than in 2021/22.
- Of these 7624 contacts 465 (6%) converted to referrals to Children's Social Care. This conversion rate is the same as in 2021/22.
- At the end of December 2021:
  - 463 children had an Early Help offer
  - 303 children were subject to a Child in Need plan
  - 107 children were subject to a Child Protection plan
  - 214 children were in care and of these 28 were unaccompanied asylum seeking children
  - 0 children were adopted between April 2022 and January 2023. There were 22 children with a decision to be placed for adoption and out of these 17 were in adoptive placements. The delay in children being legally adopted is due to the impact of the Somerset judgment. This has now been resolved and adoption planning is being progressed through the courts.
  - 214 young people were care leavers.

### 3.1.1 Summary of Key Achievements

- Parenting programmes in Family Wellbeing are being very attended and receive great feedback.
- Appointment of a Young Director and Children's Participation Officer to ensure the views of our children and young people are sought, understood and inform service development (February 2022)
- Launch of Quality Assurance Framework in April 2023
- Launch of a Practice Framework (May 2022) – developed in consultation with the service
- Refreshed Workforce Development Strategy to support recruitment and retention (June 2022)
- Regular communication – staff briefings (ongoing), launch of monthly newsletter (August 2022)
- Positive Feedback from Mark Riddell (National Implementation Advisor for care leavers) on our care leavers offer (September 2022)
- Launch of our Practice Fundamentals (September 2022)
- Launch of the Child Protection Advocacy Service (September 2022)
- Successful Staff Conference focused on 'Relationships Matter' (September 2022)
- Introduction of, and appointment to, a Quality Assurance Officer role (October 2022)
- Permanent leadership team at Assistant Director, Head of Service and Team Manager level (October 2022)
- Increased management capacity in the Corporate Parenting Service – 1 x Fostering Team Manager and 1 x Children in Care Team Manager (agreed November 2022)
- Effective Support Guidance reviewed, refreshed and launched via multi-agency workshops in January/February 2023
- 'Go Live' with the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) at the Front Door (January 2023)
- Lead Senior Practitioner for Child Exploitation and Missing resourced and recruited to in January 2023

- Cost of Living payment to all Foster Carers in December 2022 and proposal to increase in foster carers fees and allowances proposed for 2023.
- Mock Joint Area Targeted Review on exploitation- completed February 2023
- UK Resettlement team strengthened with increase in staff, now having Family Support Working and increase of £500 payment to each host to try and prevent breakdown.
- Youth Offending Service and Prevention Service Partnership (YOS) awarded SEND quality lead status and recognised for providing a quality service to children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), their families and carers.

### **3.1.2 Areas of Focus and Development**

#### Member and corporate support

- 3.1.3 There has been strong member support for the children's support and safeguarding improvement journey with the leader and the lead member attending the partnership board, the strengthening of the corporate parenting board, which continues to be chaired by the lead member, as a formal committee of the Council and through the scrutiny sub-subgroups.
- 3.1.4 There have been Children and Young People's Scrutiny (CYPS) sub-groups in relation to the re-design and development of the Front Door, including the MASH and children and young people not in education, employment and training (NEET).
- 3.1.5 The Front Door working group met at regular intervals from March 2022, maintaining oversight of progress at the Front Door and this included a visit to the Front Door. Staff found members' interest and scrutiny helpful and it was a positive experience for them to understand the scrutiny role of members and the impact of the Front Door work on members' ward work.
- 3.1.6 The CYPS Care Leavers NEET working group met at six-weekly intervals from March 2022 and looked at understanding the barriers along with the opportunities open to care leavers who are NEET accessing Education, Employment or Training. Actions are in progress via the care leavers forum to understand what types of work experience / apprenticeship / training the YP would like. A themed Corporate Parenting panel was held with young people focusing on NEET. The Next Steps fund has supported a number of care experienced young people to access training and fund equipment needed to support employment.
- 3.1.7 The Corporate Parenting Board has seen the introduction of themed sessions. The focus of the sessions has been agreed with our Young Director in consultation with young people. The first session in July focused on education, training and employment, the session in September focused on accommodation for care leavers and the session in January focused on the physical and emotional and mental health of children in care and care leavers. Following these sessions action plans have been developed and feedback will be provided to our young people at future boards.

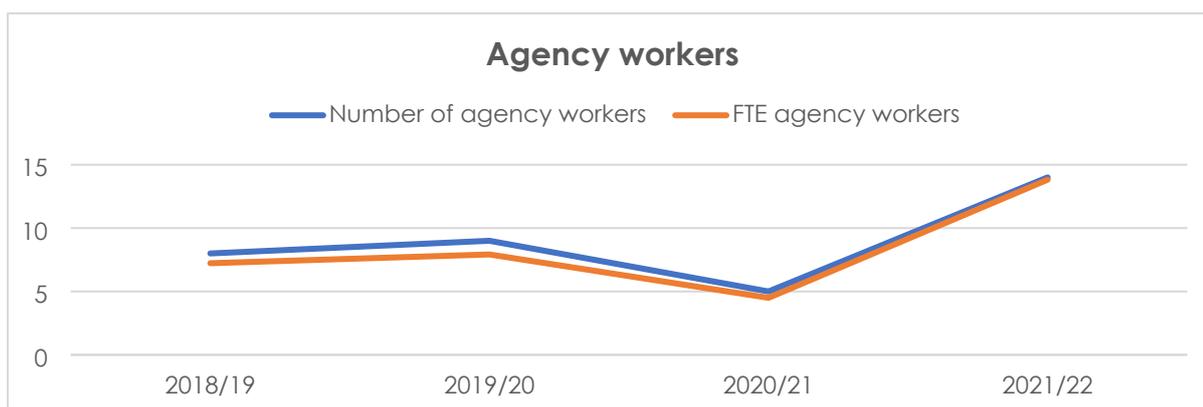
### 3.1.8 Workforce

3.1.9 A permanent senior leadership team has been sustained; an assistant director, 7 heads of service, and a permanent team manager group, giving stable capacity and a shared sense of collective purpose.

3.1.10 The information below is taken from the Department for Education statutory social care workforce return which is an annual snapshot from the 1st of September to the 31st of August. It only looks at those staff who are qualified social workers working in our authority in that time period.

3.1.11 Challenges regarding recruitment and retention of social workers are ongoing and this is a national picture. This does have an impact on workforce morale and ability to maintain practice standards. Current average caseloads are 18/19 which is higher than has previously been the case in North Somerset. A Workforce Development Strategy is in place which includes continued, pro-active recruitment activity to key management, social work and social care practitioner posts

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Number of social workers	92	91	92	78
FTE social workers	82.6	81.40	85.08	74.52
Number of agency workers	8	9	5	14
% Of agency workers (FTE)	9.07%	9.00%	5.02%	15.64%
Turnover rate (FTE)	9.01%	9.82%	11.17%	37.18%

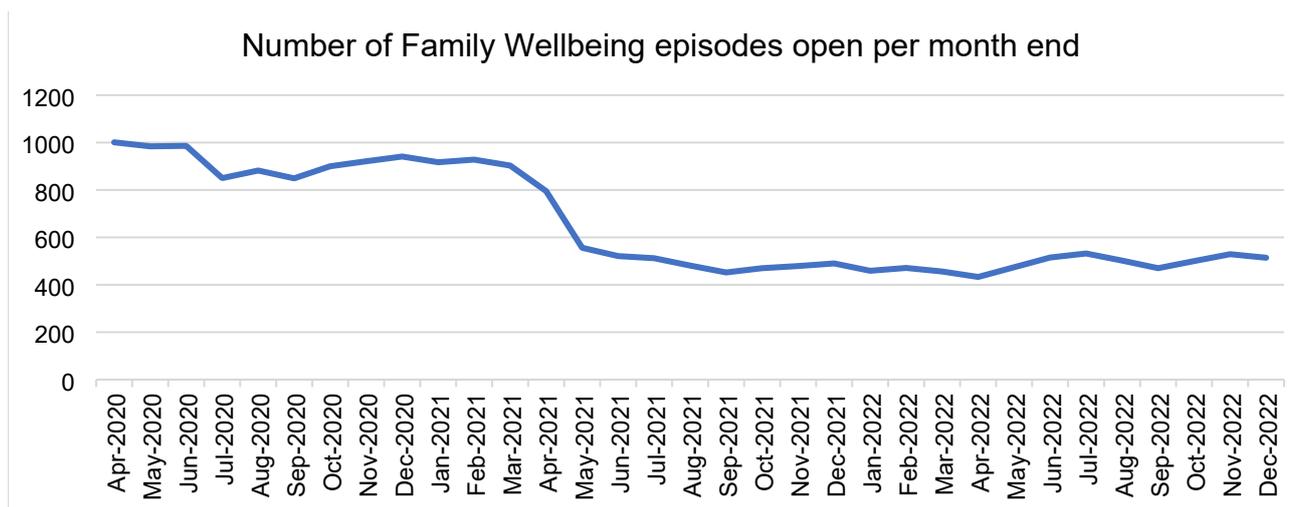


### 3.1.12 Performance

3.1.13 Performance remains relatively stable; demand at the Front Door for social work intervention continues to be low in comparison, in part because of relatively low overall deprivation (despite some pockets of very high deprivation) but also because of a well-developed range of early help services. Re-referrals, open cases and Child Protection plans per 10K children are also low by national comparators and stable over the last two years. The number of children in care is now steadily increasing and the main reason for this is the increasing number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.

- 3.1.14 Over the last 6 months the number of contacts made to Front Door has remained stable over in the last 6 months there has been a slight increase in the number of referrals made for Family Wellbeing and social work services. This has also led to an increase in the number of Children in Need and children subject to a Child Protection Plan – see below for details.
- 3.1.15 Our focus on strength and relational-based practice and proportionate intervention has continued during 2022. Work is ongoing to ensure we clearly evidence our understanding of the child’s lived experience, their needs and identified risk in our assessments and clearer analysis of the impact of parental problems on their ability to meet their children’s needs. There remains work to do to ensure that visits to children and their families are focused and purposeful, assessments and plans are sufficiently focussed on the needs and experiences of children and that focus on parent’s/carer’s needs is about what needs to change to enable them to meet the needs of their children.
- 3.1.16 Family Wellbeing (North Somerset Council’s Intensive Early Help Offer)
- 3.1.17 The Family Wellbeing Service offers high-quality, flexible, responsive support empowering positive parenting, building on family strengths. The age range remit for the Family Wellbeing Service extended from 0-5 to 0-19 (25 for SEND) from 2021. The service is working with over 514 children which shows a steady increase, matched by a consistently low rate of referrals to the Family Support and Safeguarding Service.
- 3.1.18 Family support workers are delivering parenting groups such as Mellow, Time to Shine, Non-violent reduction, Parent Plus Programmes for adolescents and children with SEN, working things out direct work with adolescents, Incredible Years, Caring Dads and Domestic Abuse groups.
- 3.1.19 Family support workers are also in the Resettlement Teams, supporting refugees into North Somerset, working within our start to finish programmes helping integrate re-offenders back into society and also offer a drop-in group for advice and support with a multiagency approach. Since January 2022 family support workers have been on a rota to complete the missing children Return Home Interviews for children who are not in care and they will also provide a duty worker on the front door to work with multi-agency colleagues.
- 3.1.20 Children’s Centres offer a variety of groups for parents and children to attend for example muddy boots, construction fun and young parents. Health services and midwifery are co located in all localities along with local libraries Request for rooms and space from multiagency partners and voluntary sector are increasing to deliver services alongside us within our communities. Outreach work continues in partnership with community learning and local community projects to deliver services in hard-to-reach areas.
- 3.1.21 Plans remain underway to develop Family Hubs to coordinate multi-agency early help activity for children, young people and their families; our satellite and linked Family Hubs have been identified.

3.1.22 Demand for the Family Wellbeing Service continues to increase steadily. The higher numbers in the graph below up to May 2021 are due to changes in reporting rather than actual numbers of children.



3.1.23 During November 11% of contacts converted to a new Family Wellbeing episode and we are seeing a month on month increase in referrals to the Family Wellbeing Service.

#### 3.1.24 The Front Door

3.1.25 The Front Door is the first point of contact for the community and professionals to seek advice, support or raise their worries and concerns in respect of a child.

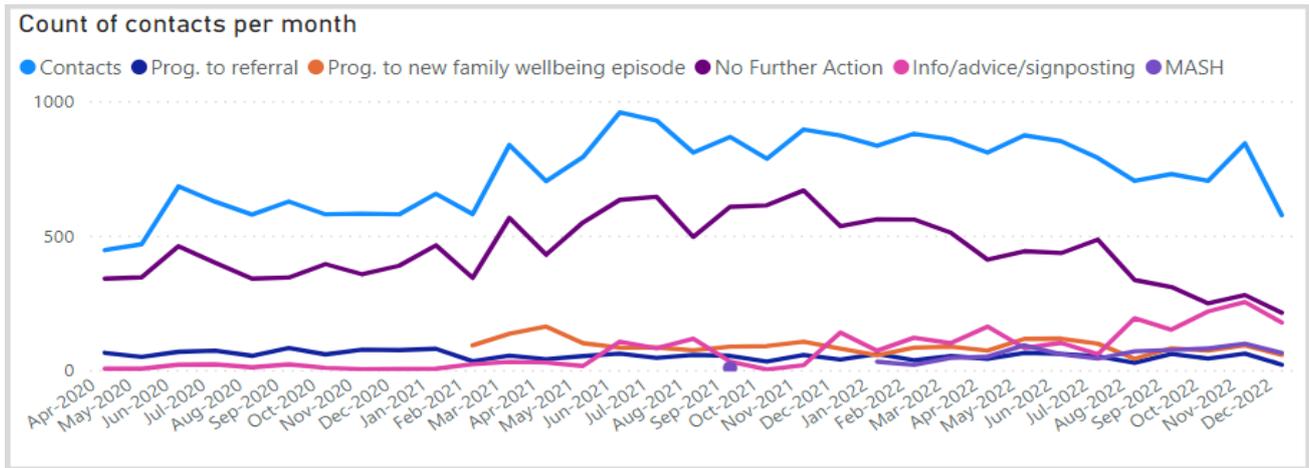
3.1.26 Our aim is to have an integrated, multi-disciplinary service which supports early identification of children’s needs and timely decision making by a range of professionals, ensuring the Right Service and the Right Time and that, wherever possible they stay safe at home, healthy and connected to their local communities.

3.1.27 From August 2020 – July 2022 support was in place from North Tyneside, our sector led improvement partner, to support the redesign of the Front Door. One Front Door was implemented February 2021 following the closure of 21 different access points. Since this time the following has been progressed:

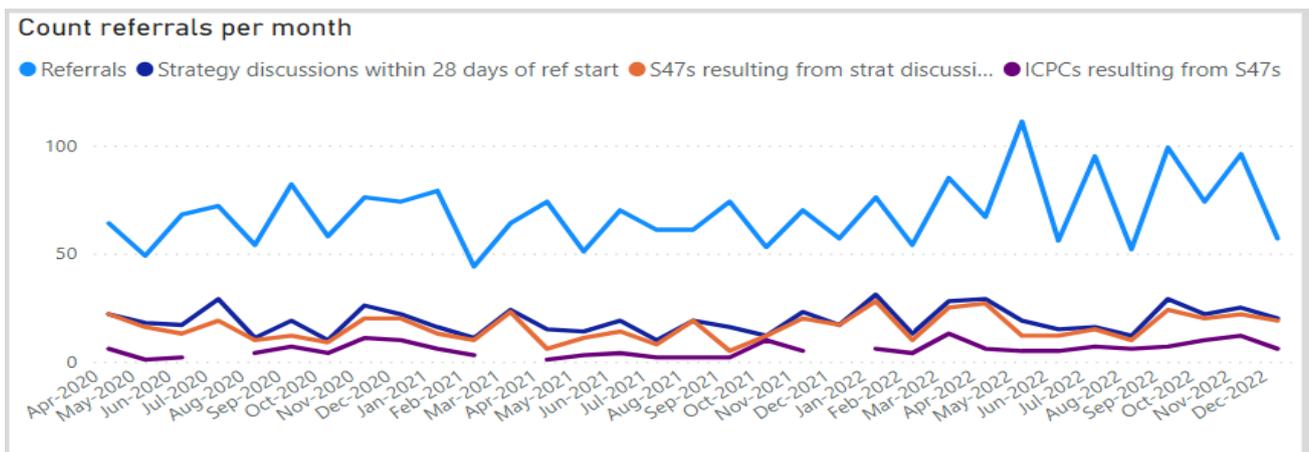
- Relaunch of the professional consultation line
- Request for Support Form designed and launched
- Refresh of the Effective Support for Children, Young People and Families
- Early Help Hub located in the Front Door
- Commitment to confident conversations focused on needs not thresholds
- Improved timeliness from point of contact
- Chairing of strategy meetings on new referrals moved back to the Front Door
- Fortnightly dip reviewing

3.1.28 The Front Door was subject to a Focused Visit from Ofsted in September 2022. This visit was discussed at the Children and Young People’s Scrutiny meeting in November 2022 and recommendations made by Ofsted are included in the attached Service Plan for 2023.

3.1.29 As noted above, the MASH went 'live' in January 2023. This was delayed due to the challenge of ensuring an information sharing agreement was in place which met the requirements of all partners, the need for clear processes and our vision that partners would be physically co-located to support strong working relationships and confident and effective decisions making.



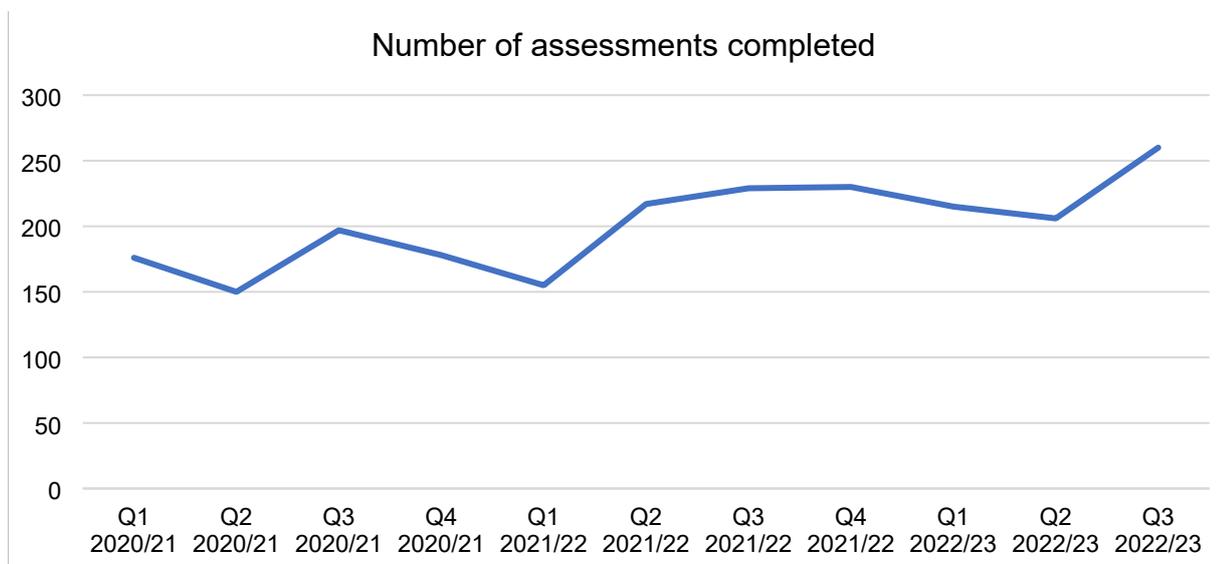
3.1.30 The number of contacts overtime is indicating an overall slight decline. The number of contacts with an outcome of No Further Action is a decreasing trend over the past 6 months and is considered positive and a result of ongoing work at the front door in relation to decision making and how decisions are defined, the use of the consultation line by partners and also due to developments in our performance reporting.



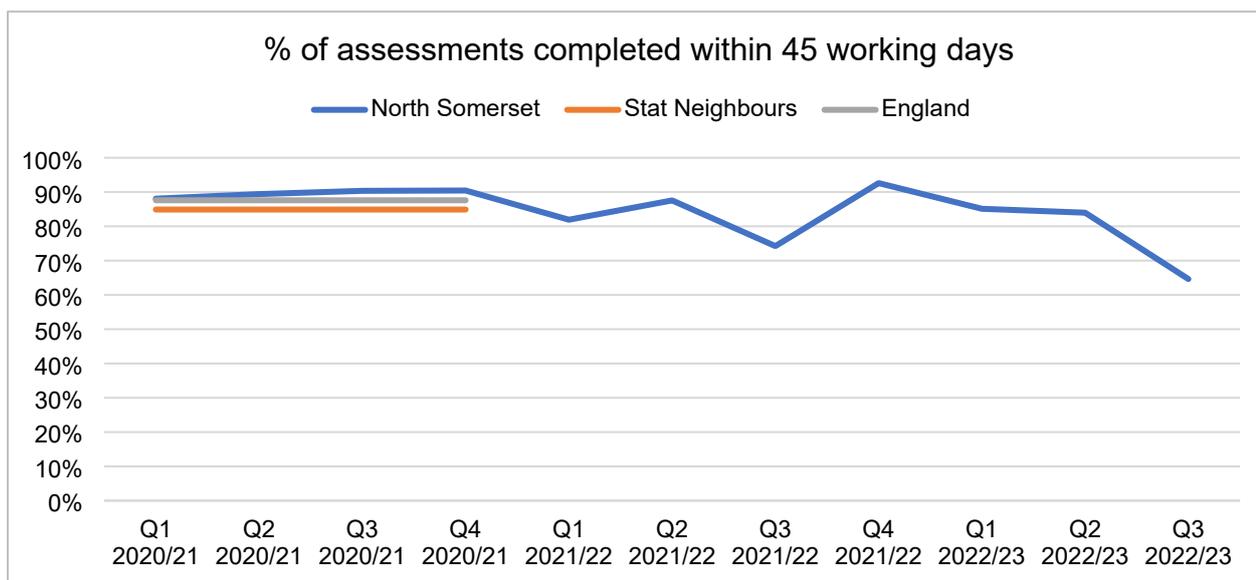
3.1.31 The rate of referrals remains low at 21.9 in comparison to the England average of 41.9 and statutory neighbours average of 35.1. However, in recent months there has been an overall increase in referral starts. Work is underway with partners to ensure we have a shared understanding of levels of need and that contacts are being made at the right time and that our response at the Front Door is right the one, taking into account finding from our quality assurance activity which identifies the need for us to ensure our response is professionally curious and that information is triangulated.

### 3.1.32 Family Support and Safeguarding

3.1.33 The number of social work assessments completed over the last 6 months has risen. The reason for this increase is due to an increase in the number of Referrals progressing from the Front Door following more robust triangulation of information.

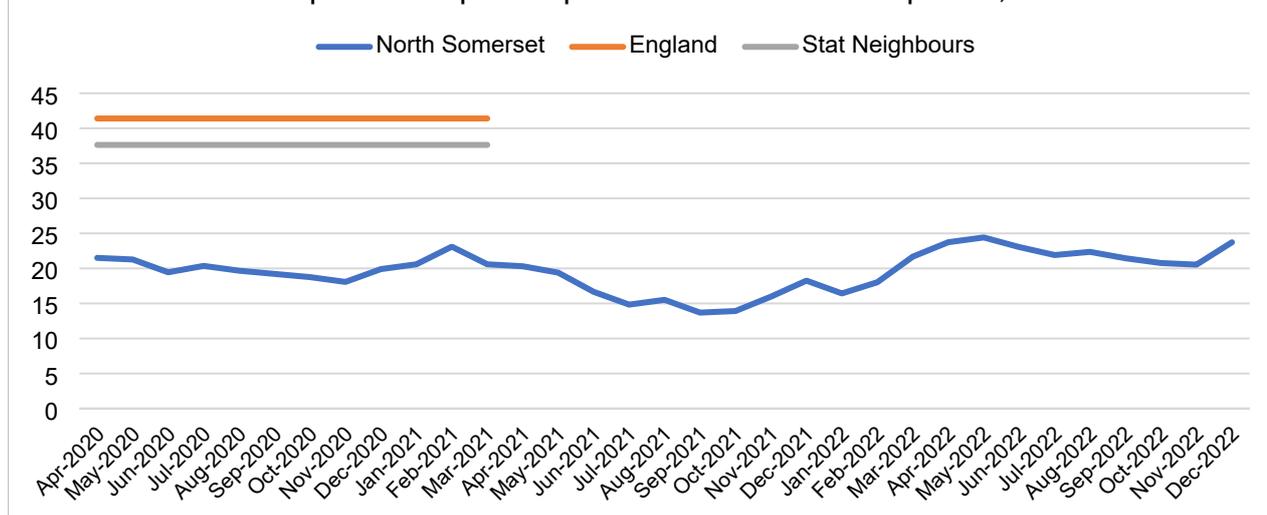


3.1.34 Assessment timeliness dipped in Quarter 3 of 2022. The higher than average caseloads and social work capacity has had an impact on assessment timeliness however, actions are in place to address this, including ensuring that assessments are proportionate to need, and timeliness in January was back up to 80%.



3.1.35 The number of children currently subject to a Child Protection Plan is 105. Overall, we have seen an increase in the number of children on Child Protection Plans since January 2022, when the cohort size was 70. This is likely to be due to practice changes which are referenced above.

Child protection plans open at month end - rate per 10,000



3.1.36 The number of children subject to repeat Child Protection Plans where they have already been subject to a plan within the last 2 years has reduced to 10% bring North Somerset in line with the national average and below the South West average of 11%. The number of children in North Somerset subject to a second or subsequent Child Protection Plan ever remains high at 45%. This is due to a steep increase in November where there were some large sibling groups. Audit work is being completed in relation to this cohort and will be shared with the service and partners. The main reason for children being made subject to a Child Protection Plan is neglect.

3.1.37 Responding to risk outside the family

3.1.38 We are developing more confident practice when managing extra-familial risk. A key focus and part of our Fundamentals is to view parents as active partners in safeguarding. An Exploitation Needs Assessment was completed in August 2022 to inform the next steps in this area of practice and the following is now in progress via the North Somerset Safeguarding Children Partnership (NSSCP):

- Child Exploitation Strategy and plan
- Mock Joint Targeted Area Inspection
- Refresh of the Multi Agency Child Exploitation Screening Tool
- Development of a Child Exploitation pathway
- Development of contextual safeguarding conference to support inclusive planning and an alternative to disproportionate use of child protection conferencing

3.1.39 Our focus since November 2022 has centred on 4 domains of action:

1. Target the context
2. Deliver a response through the lens of contextual safeguarding
3. Utilise our partnerships
4. Measure success

3.1.40 Funding has been sourced to create a senior practitioner post with a lead for exploitation and recruitment has been successful with an expected start date of

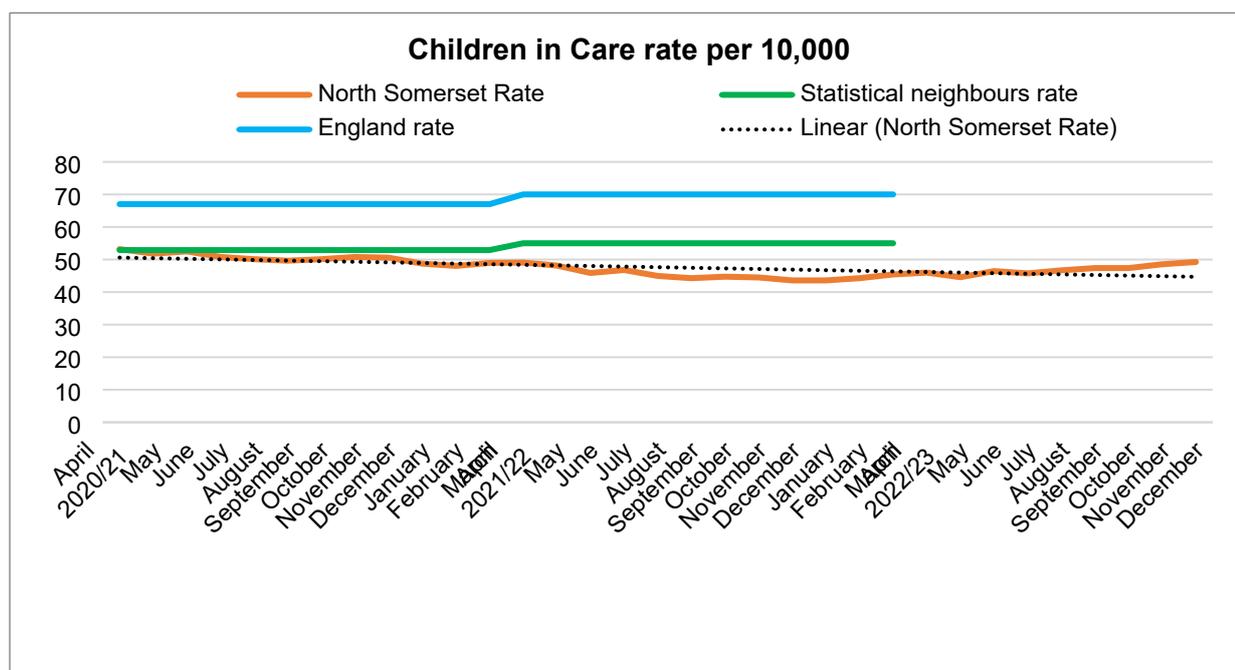
March 2023. This post will be supported by 2 x specialist family support workers and our current missing and exploitation co-ordinator.

- 3.1.41 The weekly missing meeting form and function has been reviewed with partners to emphasise the focus on the child at the centre, early identification of potential harm, triangulation of information and assurance of outcomes to bring it in line with our Fundamentals and recent feedback from Ofsted during the Focused Visit in September 2022.
- 3.1.42 Since October 2022 return home interview thematic audits have been completed and the findings analysed to influence practice. The findings identified the following areas of practice for further focus:
- Our collective response to children in care who go missing / absent from placement
  - Application of 'language that cares' in the return home interview document
  - All children to be offered a Return Home Interview
  - Emphasis on authorising managers to quality assure before finalising / authorising
  - Collaborative practice review of all children with Child Exploitation hazards – summary report of findings and actions due February 2023
- 3.1.43 Return Home interview practice guidance has been provided and return home interview training via a workshop and feedback from quality assurance activity has been delivered.
- 3.1.44 Alongside working with our workforce we have also been working with partners to encourage a joined-up response via the following:
- Successful Topaz CSE project – in the process of expanding to include Child Criminal Exploitation
  - Partnership day of action June 2022 to raise awareness about exploitation in the community
  - Child Exploitation conference November 2022
  - Research in practice 'Relationship-based family support and child protection', Jan 2023
  - Appreciative Inquiry training Jan 2023
  - Multi agency exploitation training scheduled through 2023
- 3.1.45 Children with Disabilities
- 3.1.46 It was identified that the Children with Disabilities Service (CWD) required further development, in tandem with the SEND improvements and in response to this additional resource via an improvement lead was identified in July 2022. Improvement work is ongoing and to date the following has been achieved:
- Refresh of the Children with Disabilities Resource Panel to support clear and timely decision making
  - Introduction of the use of Widget to communicate with children and families
  - Work started to reshape the CWD service – which will be built around a spectrum of support
  - Time spent with parent carers to strengthen our understanding of what is needed to improve our offer.

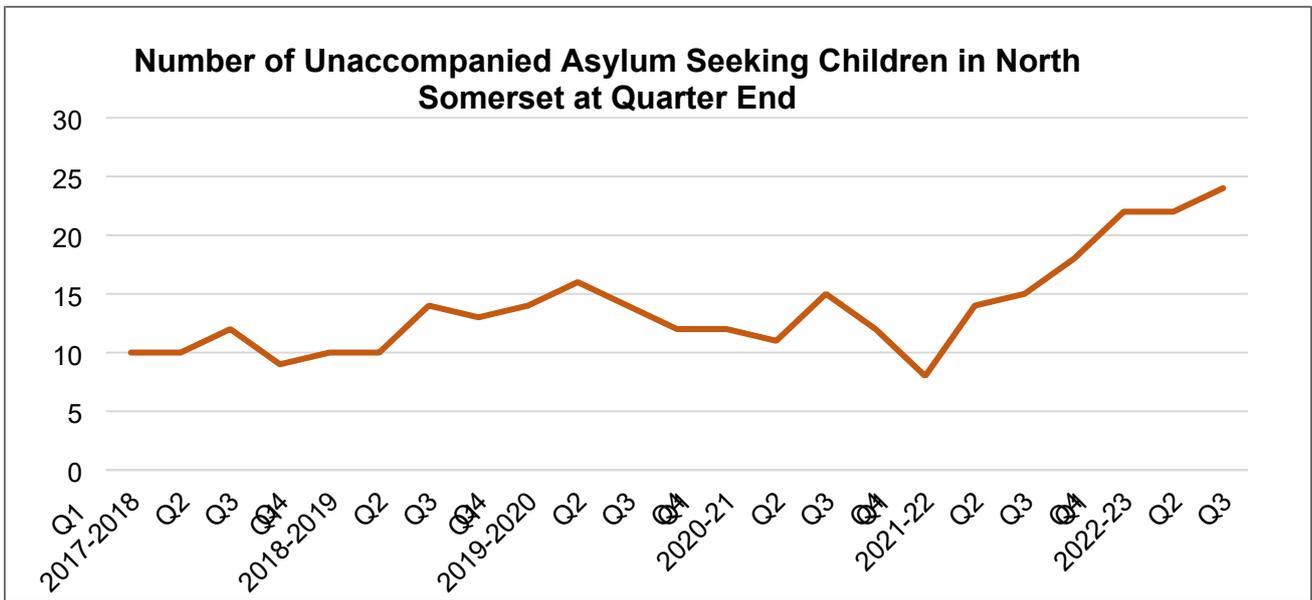
- Key areas of commissioning work started – Short Breaks and Community Support Project to strengthen the offer to Parent Carers
- Quality assurance work in respect of social care contributions to EHC Needs assessments
- A better understanding of 'Preparing for Adulthood' and strengthened the Governance Board
- A better understanding of Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards and joined with adult colleagues in preparation for Liberty Protection Safeguards

### 3.1.47 Corporate Parenting

3.1.48 As above, the number of children in care is 214 with 24 of these being unaccompanied asylum seeking children. Overall our rate for children in care remains low but is steadily increasing.



3.1.49 We have seen a sharper than expected increase in the number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) that we will need to provide care for, either through the agreed National Transfer Scheme and spontaneous arrivals through such routes as Bristol Airport and the four hotels in North Somerset supporting asylum seeking individuals and families. We currently have 28 unaccompanied asylum seeking children in care and 32 care leavers. This is 12% out of the total Children in Care cohort which is higher than the England average of 7% and our statistical neighbours 8%. These young people require placements and an allocated social worker support (under 18 years) and personal assistant and leaving care services (post 18 years) and support to ensure their holistic needs are met.



- 3.1.50 The increasing numbers of asylum-seeking children has increased pressure on both the Children in Care Team and Care Leaver Team. There is insufficient capacity in either team to meet the additional demand, including the need to complete age assessments and there will be an impact on the ability of the Corporate Parenting Service to fulfil their statutory duties towards children and young people in our care and leaving care. Additional resource has been identified to meet immediate pressures and work is underway, including linking with neighbouring authorities, to consider what resources are needed in the medium to long term.
- 3.1.51 The percentage of black and ethnic minority children in care is 20% which is higher to what would be expected as a comparison against the population (School Census January 2022 – 6.6%). If we exclude unaccompanied asylum-seeking children from the cohort, the figure is 12%.
- 3.1.52 Placement sufficiency, as per the national picture, remains a challenge. We are experiencing a significant pressure on placement capacity at both a local and national level. This current paucity of available placements can limit our ability to appropriately match children to carers and can result in children being placed away from the local area and their family and social networks, schools and community support however, our performance in relation to children placed in foster placements (69%) is in line with the national average and children placed with our own foster carers (51%) remains higher than the national average. We are planning a significant recruitment drive in 2023 to increase our numbers of in-house mainstream and specialist foster carers. North Somerset does not currently have any children under the age of 16 placed in unregulated arrangements.
- 3.1.53 At the end of Q3 2022/23, 67% of all Children in Care were placed inside North Somerset (compared to 71% same time last year) and 25% were placed outside local boundary (compared to 26% same time last year). This performance is better than the England averages of 56% placed inside LA boundary and 41% placed outside. This excludes children placed for adoption.
- 3.1.54 At the end of January 2023, 19% of our children in care experienced 3 or more placement moves during the last 12 months. This is an increase on previous years

and of the 41 children in this cohort, 8 are unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and it can often be more difficult to identify suitable placements for this group. Further work is required to understand this increase.

- 3.1.55 We continue to perform reasonably well in terms of long-term stability of placements. At the end of January 2023, our long-term stability indicator was 70%. This is a decrease from 70% in 2022 although remains in line with the national average.
- 3.1.56 The end of 2022 saw the launch of the 4th Mockingbird constellation. This foster care model is a real strength in our fostering offer in North Somerset.
- 3.1.57 The development of 16+ Supported and Independent Living schemes within the area remains successful in meeting demand and providing best value.
- 3.1.58 The percentage of 19-21 year-old care leavers who were in education, employment and/or training (EET) in North Somerset at the end of Q3 2022/23 was 50%. The figure has improved compared to Q2, however it is currently lower than the same time last year at 59% and also lower than our statistical neighbours at 55% and England average at 55%. Of the care leavers who are NEET, the main reasons are illness and pregnancy.
- 3.1.59 The percentage of 19-21 year-old care leavers who were in suitable accommodation at the end of Q3 2022/23 in North Somerset was 97% which is better than when compared to the same time last year at 90% and above the England average of 88% and statistical neighbours at 89%.
- 3.1.60 Quality Assurance
- 3.1.61 A new Quality Assurance Framework was launched in April 2022. This included:
- the introduction of a range of new and revised QA activity
  - increasing our pool of reviewers
  - offering training and support to build reviewer confidence and support consistency
  - improving our reporting mechanisms via Power-Bi
  - building the majority of our review tools into the child's electronic record
  - being relentless in our determination to develop our QA system to inform and support practice improvements for our children and young people
- 3.1.62 To support quality assurance development sector led improvement support is being provided by Wiltshire.
- 3.1.63 Please refer to attached Quality Assurance report dated January 2023.
- 3.1.64 Youth Justice Service
- 3.1.65 Our Youth Justice Service (YJS) is an integral part of Children's Services. Since the Probation Inspectorate Inspection in September 2020 the Management Board has been revitalised in terms of membership and ownership following a period of turnover in agencies' representatives and the challenges posed to each agency through the impact of the pandemic.

- 3.1.66 The YJS has a range of services and teams: Court and Community Supervision team, Avon & Somerset Enhanced Case Management Project, Substance Advice Service, Junction 21 Mentoring and Advocacy Service; Youth Inclusion Support Project, and the Education Diversion Project (September 2021 – March 22 pilot). The latter is already evidencing significant traction and engagement with academies. The YJS, since November 2021, has had the benefit of a CCG commissioned service from Sirona Care and Health of a Speech and Language Therapist for two days a week which is in response to the significant needs of many children and young people known to the YJS.
- 3.1.67 Challenges
- 3.1.68 Workforce capacity needs to improve to ensure the capacity required to practice in a relational based way and to provide the interventions which families need to make lasting changes.
- 3.1.69 While there has been considerable progress made, ongoing work is still needed to ensure our Practice Framework is well embedded and consistently applied. We know that children's plans need to be achievable and outcome-focused and taken forward more authoritatively by social workers in a high support and high challenge environment. Assessments and plans need to consistently reflect and be informed by the child's lived experience and their voice.
- 3.1.70 We need to continue to support team managers to ensure that their supervision and management oversight evidences reflection, clear direction of travel and responsive planning. Further work has been undertaken on the supervision form to ensure that this supports managers to reflect the conversations they have with their practitioners.
- 3.1.71 Progress has been made in relation to Quality Assurance, with a new framework launched in April 2022 and significant Quality Assurance activity underway. Further work is needed to ensure that learning from quality assurance is taken back into the service and practice changes as a result to ensure a positive impact for children and their families. Please see attached Quality Assurance report.
- 3.1.72 Ongoing work is required in relation to placement sufficiency to ensure, where possible, placement choice and suitable provision for children who need to come into our care.
- 3.1.73 Next Steps**
- 3.1.74 In summary our priorities for 2023 are:
- Continue to develop a strong and confident leadership team and workforce
  - Maintain a relentless focus on continuous practice improvement – embed our Practice Fundamentals – Relationships Matter, Seeing the child, Hearing the child, Responding to the child, Outcomes and Impact and Language that Cares
  - Embed our Practice Framework including the consistent use of Signs of Safety as part of this with a common use of language
  - Progress our plans for a Family Hub model and a strengthened Early Help Strategy
  - Continue to develop our multi-agency Front Door

- Develop an intensive family support team to provide intensive short-term support, supporting children to remain within their families. The expected start date is May 2023
- Embed the Quality Assurance Framework and processes including routine arrangements at the Front Door and 'closing the loop' activity.
- Strengthen our focus on family and friends' networks as part of our permanence planning for children
- Further focus on capturing the voice and views of children and families on the quality and impact of the help they receive, using this to inform and support our next steps
- Strengthen the strategic and operational partnership response to risk outside the home and children being exploited including the development of contextual conferences
- Think permanence - ensure pro-active, concurrent permanence planning for children at the earliest opportunity
- Ensure we have sufficient placement and accommodation options for our children in care and care leavers.
- Continue to work with education and health colleagues on the SEND and school inclusion agenda.

## **3.2. EDUCATION PARTNERSHIPS**

### **3.2.1 SEND Improvement Task and Finish Group**

3.2.2 A Scrutiny Task and Finish Group was established to monitor the progress of the Council's work to provide for children's special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). The group adopted a broad remit of support and challenge following the issue of a Written Statement of Action following inspection of the Local Area SEND Partnership by Ofsted and CQC in March 2018 and a subsequent SEND Improvement Notice issued in November 2022 following a revisit by inspectors in May 2021.

3.2.3 The Task and Finish Group has actively monitored the service improvement and progress against the original action plan 'Accelerated Action Plan' which was superseded by the SEND Improvement Plan following the issue of the Improvement Notice.

3.2.4 During the term of the Task and Finish Group, members have been keen to understand the lived experience of children, young people and their families and have visited schools to engage in direct conversation with them. Findings from the visits have been fed back to officers to help improve performance and parents, carers and schools were very reassured that Members had taken such interest in their experiences.

3.2.5 During the period of enhanced scrutiny, there have been some significant improvements in performance. These include:

- Where a previous administration had stripped out £2.6m of resources from Local Authority Education and Early Years services, £1m was re-invested into the team to increase leadership and team capacity, particularly in the SEND team

- Two areas of ‘serious weakness’ within the SEND Improvement Plan have been ‘stepped down’ from the Improvement Notice by DfE following evidence of significant improvement. These areas are the strategic leadership and management of SEND and the active use of a shared comprehensive data set.
- The DfE also noted that there was meaningful improvement in the other areas of the SEND Improvement Plan.
- The number of children with EHCPs attending mainstream school has risen from 28% to 36%.
- The number of permanent exclusions from school of children with EHCPs has reduced to 1 child in 2020/21 and 2021/22, where there had been 10 and 11 in the previous two years
- 5 Nurture Groups have been created in schools to support children with unmet social, emotional and mental health needs
- All schools have received Council funded training in Quality First Teaching – Every Teacher a Teacher of SEND
- All school Governors have received Council funded training in their responsibilities for SEND
- All schools have received an analysis of their own performance in SEND to allow them to set improvement targets
- The progress and attainment of children with SEND has improved for the first time in several years in a number of areas and North Somerset children on SEND Support are now performing ore highly than their peers nationally and regionally
- New measures of Quality Assurance have been introduced and the quality of Education Health and Care Plans has increased significantly.
- A SEND Children and Young People’s Council was established with membership drawn from across North Somerset Schools

### **3.2.6 A forward look**

3.2.7 Following the agreement in 2022 to re-invest some of the capacity in Education and Early Years that was previously removed, much of the work until now has created the foundations on which strong confident and expert SEND services can be built.

3.2.8 Like most other Councils, North Somerset has experienced significant increases in demand in special educational needs and budgets have suffered significant and increasing over expenditure as a result. The Council was invited to take part in a DfE programme called Safety Valve in 2022 through which large High Needs Block deficits can be written off by the Department to recalibrate expenditure where they are confident that the Council has robust deliverable plan in place to maintain a balanced book within the High Needs Block. Senior Leaders from the Council have conducted a successful negotiation with the DfE over several months and our proposals are now with Government Ministers. If approved, the DfE will contribute over £21m to the Councils deficit in the High Needs Block and £2.9m in capital funding to support our expanded SEND provision.

3.2.9 From September 2023, the Council will commence a 3-year programme of increasing capacity in mainstream schools, creating 8 additional Nurture Groups and 5 specialist Resource Bases. In February 2024, the Baytree 2 site will open in Clevedon, creating the capacity for a further 65 local school places for children and young people with Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties. In September 2024, the Lime Hills SEMH school is due t open its doors in new accommodation

to 65 local children who might otherwise need to be placed out of area. We are currently working with the VLC to expand its offer to support more children with social emotional and mental health needs and those who have medical needs which prevent them attending school full time.

- 3.2.10 The SEND Improvement Notice will remain with North Somerset for an 18-month period from the date of issue. In parallel, the Council is taking the lead role in the Local Area Partnership to prepare for inspection under the new SEND Inspection Framework.

#### **4. Consultation**

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

#### **5. Financial Implications**

None.

#### **Costs**

None.

#### **Funding**

N/A.

#### **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 Department for Education, and research.

#### **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.

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**Appendices:**

North Somerset Children's Family Support and Safeguarding Strategic Plan.  
Quality Assurance Report January 2023.  
Letter from DfE re progress on Improvement Notice.

**Background Papers:**