



Council

A meeting of the Council will be held at the The Great Hall at The Guildhall, Northampton, NN1 1DE on Thursday 30 November 2023 at 5.00 pm

Councillors are hereby summoned to attend

Agenda

1.	Apologies for Absence
2.	Declarations of Interest Members are asked to declare any interest and the nature of that interest which they may have in any of the items under consideration at this meeting.
3.	Minutes of Council (Pages 9 - 24) To confirm the Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 28 th September 2023.
4.	Chair's Announcements To receive communications from the Chairman of the Council.
5.	Public Participation (1) Receipt of Petitions (if any) from Local Government Electors for the District (2) Statements (if any) from the Public
6.	Opposition Priority Business Proposed by: Councillor Bob Purser Seconded by: Councillor Wendy Randall

This council's Corporate Plan states we have "the ambition for our residents to live in good housing in places which are clean and green. So that everyone has access to affordable, safe, quality, accommodation, and security of tenure"

A target was set of to produce 500 units of social housing during the lifetime of this Council. Current house building is not meeting the needs of those on our housing list. Developers repeatedly negotiate a reduction in social and affordable housing targets from the Council's policy, meaning the social housing target will likely be missed.

This council notes:

- there are currently 4,452 families on our housing register waiting list and a further 600 households currently in temporary accommodation, according to the latest Cabinet papers
- There are 1,950 homeless households and 5,850 households in overcrowded accommodation according to the Anti-poverty Strategy.
- Significant key brown field social housing projects, namely The Clock House and Avenue Campus, have recently been deemed not financially viable and significant funds have been returned to HM Treasury
- Around 4,000 homes across West Northamptonshire lie empty and unused, according to the latest data

The personal cost of living in overcrowded or temporary accommodation to family life is significant, including stress, depression, and child underdevelopment.

This council therefore calls on the Leader and Cabinet to:

- Request the Cabinet Members for Housing, Finance, and Planning to redouble their efforts to identify the requirements needed to create a pipeline for planned, affordable and deliverable housing
- Identify those houses that are unoccupied and explore what opportunities there are to work with owners to bring them back into use
- Consider using Empty Dwelling Management Order (EDMO) powers granted by the Housing Act 2004 to take control of unoccupied properties and make them available for those in need of housing

7.	Cabinet Reports and Decision Records Taken by Cabinet (Pages 25 - 122)
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Items of Business	
8.	Youth Justice Plan (Pages 123 - 194)
9.	Annual Report of Northamptonshire Children's Trust (Pages 195 - 536)
10.	Updates to the Constitution (Pages 537 - 562)
11.	Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2024-2025 (Pages 563 - 566)
12.	Acquisition of Former Bus Depot (Pages 567 - 584)

Decision taken under urgency procedures

13. Motions

Motion 1

Proposed by: Councillor Cathrine Russell
Seconded by: Councillor Koulla Jolley

“The popularity of vapes (e-cigarettes) among young people has risen noticeably since the introduction of disposable vapes; one in nine underage children in the UK use them as of April 2023, compared to one in thirteen in 2021. In West Northamptonshire, 5% of school pupils reported using vapes (e-cigarettes) regularly last year, with almost half of year 10 girls admitting having tried them.

Vapes (e-cigarettes) were not designed for recreational use. Short term effects of vaping can include vomiting, sweating, dizziness, and difficulty breathing. But health experts warn that the excessive use of vapes (e-cigarettes) by children could be linked to lung collapse, lung bleeding and air leak. Last year, there were 15 hospitalisations of children aged under 10 due to vaping-related illnesses in the UK.

Trading Standards West Northamptonshire are working to capacity to tackle illicit sales of vapes (e-cigarettes) to children, including seizing over 5,000 disposable vapes since April. But they, and this council, are restricted in their powers of enforcement by the current lack of legislation.

This Council recognises:

- Youth vaping is becoming a national public health issue, with the extent of the damage to our Children’s health still unknown
- Current government plans to end youth vaping as part of its Smoke Free Generation, which includes the reduction in the number of appealing flavours available, regulating colourful and attractive eye-catching packaging, and moves to close legal loopholes around giving free vape (e-cigarette) samples to under 18s.
- The strenuous efforts of West Northamptonshire Trading Standards within existing legislation in combating illegal vape (e-cigarette) sales and
- West Northamptonshire Public Health in educating young people and families on the consequences of youth vaping

And resolves to invite:

- The encouragement of West Northants residents to take part in the government’s open consultation on its anti-smoking and youth vaping plans by the deadline of 6 December 2023
- The Leader of the Council to write to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care on the pressing need for tighter restrictions on the marketing of vape products, their availability to underage children, and for more powers to be given to local authorities to confront and issue on-the-spot fines for traders found selling to children
- Officers to increase communications to the public on the Council’s ongoing efforts, alongside Public Health and Trading Standards, to tackle underage use of vape products
- The Cabinet Members for Community Safety and Wellbeing to work with Public Health in accelerating and expanding current plans on educating young people and the wider public on the consequences of youth vaping.”

Motion 2

Proposed by: Cllr Sally Beardsworth

Seconded by: Cllr Rosie Humphreys

“Council Notes:

Four years ago, this government pledged to ban Section 21 no fault evictions. The Renters Reform Bill, promised in the Conservative 2019 election manifesto, was debated in the Commons for the first time last month. It has since been announced that the no fault ban will be indefinitely delayed until reforms to the justice system have been implemented.

Ministry of Justice data show no-fault evictions in England between April and June this year increased by 41%, compared with the same period in 2022. Due to high interest rates and mortgage reaching unaffordable rates many landlords with financial pressures are selling their properties. Others take advantage of the scarcity of rented housing and use a Section 21 notice to evict tenants and relet on a high rental return.

According to the Ministry of Justice between April and June 2023 2,228 households were evicted by bailiffs through no fault of their own following a Section 21 notice. No fault evictions have made the prospect of a stable home impossible for England’s 11 million private renters and the uncertainty and disruption is causing misery and hardship to families. This Council, like most, is reporting significant pressures to find alternative accommodation. Pressure on its temporary accommodation budget is another direct consequence of our local housing crisis, where demand for decent, affordable housing completely overwhelms available supply.

The 16th Housing Minister since 2010 has recently been appointed, six of which were appointed in 2022 alone. Such a high turnover cannot contribute to solving this nation’s housing emergency.

Council resolves to:

1. Write to the Housing Minister to express concern that banning no fault evictions have been delayed indefinitely.
2. Write to local MPs requesting that they raise concerns with the Housing Minister as to this indefinite delay.
3. Commission an urgent review, either via a task and finish group or officer led, to quantify the impact that no fault evictions is having in West Northants in order to make recommendations to mitigate the problem.

Motion 3

Proposed by: Councillor Paul Joyce

Seconded by: Councillor Keith Holland-Delamere

“Our parks in West Northamptonshire are amongst the best maintained in the country. We recognise the positive affect that our green spaces have on our mental health and wellbeing and the benefits of access to a stress-free environment. We would like to commend and acknowledge the contribution that Friends of park groups, park rangers and volunteers have had, also highlighting ongoing voluntary work which has proved invaluable in maintaining our parks. With the predicted rise in global warming the

trees and plants of parks cool the air and control the temperature and absorb carbon dioxide and other harmful gases reducing air pollution.

We believe that now is the time to preserve them for today and future generations for the benefit of local communities and ensure that their existing boundaries are defined and free from any future developments or changes.

This council therefore recognises:

- The protection of our Parks and green spaces for today's and future generations as a priority.
- The positive support of Friends of parks groups, park rangers and volunteers in maintaining our parks and thanks them for their service to our communities.

And resolves to request the Cabinet:

- Aim to ensure all parks in the WNC area continue to be maintained at current levels and, where possible, improved.
- Aims to ensure our parks will not be redeveloped on beyond their current purpose.
- Finalise and publish the council's Parks Development Strategy as soon as possible.
- Proceed with all haste the recruitment of the Tree Protection Officer and Nature Recovery Strategy Officer.
- Request the above officers, once in position, conduct a survey of our parks and green spaces to identify areas for improvement in biodiversity and public use.

14.	Urgent Business (previously agreed with the Chairman) The Chairman to advise whether they have agreed to any items of urgent business being admitted to the agenda.
15.	Exclusion of Press and Public In respect of the following items the Chairman may move the resolution set out below, on the grounds that if the public were present it would be likely that exempt information (information regarded as private for the purposes of the Local Government Act 1972) would be disclosed to them: The Committee is requested to resolve: "That under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following item(s) of business on the grounds that if the public were present it would be likely that exempt information under Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act of the descriptions against each item would be disclosed to them"

Council Members:

Councillor John Shephard (Chair)

Councillor Jo Gilford (Vice-Chair)

Councillor Ann Addison

Councillor Rufia Ashraf

Councillor Jamal Alwahabi

Councillor Azizur Rahman

Councillor Anthony S. Bagot-Webb

Councillor Fiona Baker

Councillor Dermot Bambridge

Councillor Harry Barrett

Councillor William Barter

Councillor Sally Beardsworth

Councillor Phil Bignell

Councillor Lizzy Bowen

Councillor Rebecca Breese

Councillor Adam Brown

Councillor Michael Brown

Councillor Muna Cali

Councillor Alan Chantler

Councillor Pinder Chauhan

Councillor Nazim Choudary

Councillor Imran Ahmed Chowdhury BEM

Councillor Paul Clark

Councillor Stephen Clarke

Councillor Maggie Clubley

Councillor Fiona Cole

Councillor Raymond Connolly

Councillor Karen Cooper

Councillor Daniel Cribbin

Councillor Julie Davenport

Councillor Janice Duffy

Councillor Paul Dyball

Councillor Gareth Eales

Councillor Terrie Eales

Councillor Alison Eastwood

Councillor Penelope Flavell

Councillor Louisa Fowler

Councillor Rupert Frost

Councillor Terry Gilford

Councillor Matt Golby

Councillor André González De Savage

Councillor Andrew Grant

Councillor Mike Hallam

Councillor Enam Haque

Councillor Lauryn Harrington-Carter

Councillor Jonathan Harris

Councillor Cheryl Hawes

Councillor Rosie Herring

Councillor Stephen Hibbert

Councillor James Hill

Councillor Nigel Hinch

Councillor Keith Holland-Delamere

Councillor Mark Hughes

Councillor Rosie Humphreys

Councillor Cecile Irving-Swift

Councillor David James

Councillor Koulla Jolley

Councillor Paul Joyce

Councillor Andrew Kilbride

Councillor Anna King

Councillor Jamie Lane

Councillor Phil Larratt

Councillor Daniel Lister

Councillor Malcolm Longley

Councillor Greg Lunn

Councillor Charles Manners

Councillor Peter Matten

Councillor Ian McCord

Councillor Dennis Meredith

Councillor Colin Morgan

Councillor Charles Morton	Councillor Jonathan Nunn
Councillor Kevin Parker	Councillor Suresh Patel
Councillor Ken Pritchard	Councillor Bob Purser
Councillor Wendy Randall	Councillor Emma Roberts
Councillor Jake Roberts	Councillor Sam Rumens
Councillor Cathrine Russell	Councillor Lisa Samiotis
Councillor Brian Sargeant	Councillor Sue Sharps
Councillor David Smith	Councillor Zoe Smith
Councillor Richard Solesbury-Timms	Councillor Laura Stevenson
Councillor Danielle Stone	Councillor Winston Strachan
Councillor Nick Sturges-Alex	Councillor Walter Tarasiewicz
Councillor Mike Warren	

Information about this Agenda

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence and the appointment of substitute Members should be notified to democraticservices@westnorthants.gov.uk prior to the start of the meeting.

Declarations of Interest

Members are asked to declare interests at item 2 on the agenda or if arriving after the start of the meeting, at the start of the relevant agenda item

Local Government and Finance Act 1992 – Budget Setting, Contracts & Supplementary Estimates

Members are reminded that any member who is two months in arrears with Council Tax must declare that fact and may speak but not vote on any decision which involves budget setting, extending or agreeing contracts or incurring expenditure not provided for in the agreed budget for a given year and could affect calculations on the level of Council Tax.

Evacuation Procedure

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Queries Regarding this Agenda

If you have any queries about this agenda please contact Democratic Services via the following:

Email: democraticservices@westnorthants.gov.uk

Or by writing to:

West Northamptonshire Council
The Guildhall
St Giles Street
Northampton
NN1 1DE



Council

Minutes of a meeting of the Council held at The Great Hall at The Guildhall, Northampton, NN1 1DE on Thursday 28 September 2023 at 5.00 pm.

Present:

Councillor John Shephard (Chairman)
Councillor Jo Gilford (Vice-Chairman)
Councillor Rufia Ashraf
Councillor Jamal Alwahabi
Councillor Anthony S. Bagot-Webb
Councillor Fiona Baker
Councillor Dermot Bambridge
Councillor Harry Barrett
Councillor William Barter
Councillor Sally Beardsworth
Councillor Phil Bignell
Councillor Lizzy Bowen
Councillor Rebecca Breese
Councillor Adam Brown
Councillor Muna Cali
Councillor Pinder Chauhan
Councillor Nazim Choudary
Councillor Imran Ahmed Chowdhury BEM
Councillor Paul Clark
Councillor Stephen Clarke
Councillor Maggie Clubley
Councillor Fiona Cole
Councillor Raymond Connolly
Councillor Karen Cooper
Councillor Daniel Cribbin
Councillor Julie Davenport
Councillor Janice Duffy
Councillor Paul Dyball
Councillor Alison Eastwood
Councillor Louisa Fowler
Councillor Rupert Frost
Councillor Matt Golby
Councillor André González De Savage
Councillor Andrew Grant
Councillor Mike Hallam
Councillor Enam Haque
Councillor Lauryn Harrington-Carter
Councillor Jonathan Harris
Councillor Cheryl Hawes
Councillor Rosie Herring

Councillor Stephen Hibbert
Councillor James Hill
Councillor Nigel Hinch
Councillor Keith Holland-Delamere
Councillor Rosie Humphreys
Councillor Cecile Irving-Swift
Councillor David James
Councillor Koulla Jolley
Councillor Paul Joyce
Councillor Andrew Kilbride
Councillor Anna King
Councillor Jamie Lane
Councillor Phil Larratt
Councillor Daniel Lister
Councillor Greg Lunn
Councillor Charles Manners
Councillor Peter Matten
Councillor Ian McCord
Councillor Dennis Meredith
Councillor Jonathan Nunn
Councillor Kevin Parker
Councillor Ken Pritchard
Councillor Bob Purser
Councillor Emma Roberts
Councillor Sam Rumens
Councillor Cathrine Russell
Councillor Lisa Samiotis
Councillor Brian Sargeant
Councillor Sue Sharps
Councillor David Smith
Councillor Zoe Smith
Councillor Richard Solesbury-Timms
Councillor Laura Stevenson
Councillor Danielle Stone
Councillor Nick Sturges-Alex
Councillor Walter Tarasiewicz
Councillor Mike Warren

Substitute Members:

Also Present:

Apologies for Absence:

Councillor Ann Addison
Councillor Azizur Rahman
Councillor Alan Chantler
Councillor Gareth Eales
Councillor Terrie Eales

Councillor Penelope Flavell
Councillor Terry Gilford
Councillor Mark Hughes
Councillor Malcolm Longley
Councillor Colin Morgan
Councillor Charles Morton
Councillor Suresh Patel
Councillor Wendy Randall
Councillor Jake Roberts
Councillor Winston Strachan

Officers:

Anna Earnshaw (Chief Executive)
Cath Whitehead (Head of Legal & Democratic and Monitoring Officer)
Paul Hanson (Head of Democratic Services & Elections)
Tracy Tiff (Deputy Democratic Services Manager)
Ed Bostock (Democratic Services Officer)

138. **Declarations of Interest**

None advised.

139. **Minutes of Council**

The minutes of the meetings held on 29 June and 20 July 2023 were agreed and signed by the Chairman.

140. **Chairman's Announcements**

The Chairman referenced paragraph 29.4 of the Constitution which related to the matter of standing when making statements at meetings of the Council and noted that in recent months, this rule had not been observed. He asked members to debate and take a vote on debate on a proposal to suspend standing orders in respect of this.

Upon a vote, the proposal to suspend standing orders to allow members to remain seated while speaking at Council and addressing the Chairman was carried.

141. **Public Participation**

(1) There were no requests to submit petitions.

(2) The Chairman advised of 3 requests to address Council.

David Garlick addressed Council in relation to motions 1 and 2 and commented that without action, the Council would be contributing to further avoidable ill health and deaths due to poor air quality. He asked that the Council consider implementing lower speed limits in residential areas, 60mph limits on arterial roads in and around

Northampton, cease the licensing of diesel taxis, introduce electric buses and improve active travel.

Dave Pearson addressed Council in relation to motions 1 and 2 and commented that there were 6 areas within West Northamptonshire with “illegally high” levels of air pollution, but no action plans to address the issues. He stated that the political and economic systems that brought on the climate crisis were incapable of solving it and that it was time to put the voice of communities at the heart of decision making. Mr Pearson further stated that the Council should set up a citizen’s assembly to address its response to the climate crisis.

Jane Wood addressed Council in relation to motion 2 and commented that, when looking at how the Council operated overall, it seemed like “business as usual” 2 years after a climate emergency was declared by WNC. She stated that the Council had an opportunity to make West Northants cleaner, safer and more resilient to the effects of climate change by supporting the motion.

The Chairman thanked the speakers for their contributions.

142. **Opposition Priority Business**

Councillor Purser proposed and Councillor Z Smith seconded:

“West Northamptonshire Council has the duty as corporate parent to support the Northamptonshire Children’s Trust (NCT) in improving the lives of our children in care. We take this opportunity to reaffirm our confidence in and commitment to the senior management and the selfless work of its staff.

Not for the first time, this Council is faced with another overspend by the Trust, currently estimated at £14 million. The vast majority of this overspend (£11.29m) is due to the exploitation of the Trust by profiteering private placement and fostering providers and poor systems within WNC.

This council notes the 2022 report of the Competition and Marketing Authority (CMA) into the Children’s Care market, which found a “fundamental failure” in the way private placement providers and Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs) are making higher profits and charging higher prices whilst vulnerable children are put in inadequate placements which fail to meet their needs. The report highlighted competition should be between private placement providers and not local authorities purchasing services.

The Department for Education charged us in 2020 to wholeheartedly support NCT. We believe this duty also includes protecting both the Trust and this Council from profit-centric providers who are taking advantage of the most vulnerable young people in our area. We cannot continue to empty our precious reserves shoring up what has been declared a ‘broken’ market.

Therefore, this Council calls upon the Cabinet and Leader of the Council to:

- Offer financial advice support to NCT to ensure their budget is no longer overspent due to the private sector
- Work alongside NCT to produce a report on the current cost of placements to the trust in comparison to a base-budget model
- Assess and install robust financial processes within the Council to ensure both NCT and WNC are not further abused by private placement providers and IFAs
- Invites the trust to conduct a review into the remuneration of in-house foster carers.
- Request the Chief Executive to urgently provide a costed report to Cabinet on the feasibility of WNC developing a prevention and support service for families with young children
- Instruct the Cabinet Members for Housing and Children to liaise with the CEO of NCT to develop options to support those leaving care with independent accommodation
- Appeal our Members of Parliament to meet with the Secretaries of State for Education and Levelling Up, Housing and Communities on the need to implement the recommendations of the CMA's report."

Council debated the motion and the following comments were made:

- Children's Service cost pressure was a national issue; however, Northamptonshire Children's Trust had seen a reduction in cost per head.
- The Council's Finance teams and the Director of Children's Services would soon be visiting the Children's Trust to look over its finances, quality of figures, projections, forecasts and commissioning decisions.
- Appropriate housing for looked after children was needed, and it was noted that 5 applications for children's homes had recently been refused.
- An article in the LGA magazine reported that 5 children's charities had set up the Children's Service Funding Alliance and found that spending on children's services had increased nationally by 8% on the previous year. 81% of this went to crisis management and £4 of every £5 was spent on late interventions.
- Over the last 12 years there had been a 45% decrease in spending on early help and prevention nationally.
- It was suggested that under the new Children's Trust regime, bureaucracy was "seeping in" and children were not at the forefront of decision making.
- A question was asked as to why the administration had watched the Children's Trust struggle for 2 years before taking any action.
- More money should be spent on preventing children from ending up in care.
- It was imperative that the Children's Trust succeeded; the DfE would not hand Children's Services to the Council if it failed.
- The Council was not building children's homes quickly enough to keep up with demand.
- A question was asked of the administration as to whether a meeting had been booked with government ministers in relation to the care market.

Upon a vote, the motion was lost.

143. **Cabinet Reports and Record of Decisions Taken by Council**

Cabinet Members each highlighted the salient points of their reports. Members made comments and asked questions and the following points were raised:

- The Council's Emissions Reduction Strategy would be forthcoming early in 2024.
- A recent meeting of the Police, Fire and Crime Panel had sat for 5 hours where PC Stephen Mold had admitted to errors of judgement but had done good work otherwise; the administration would continue to work with him.
- Diversity was an important aspect that was being taken on board when developing the bus strategy and the Local Transport Plan.
- Regarding issues around road closures for the recent half-marathon event, it was confirmed that consultation took place with the organisers prior to the event; communication was sent out to the organisers, but no response was received.
- The interim bus policy would be consulted on in the near future. This would be reviewed following consultation on the LTP.
- Concessionary fares were currently under review; some changes were likely. There was some concern around government clawback of finances, however, if this did not happen, the Council may be in a position to provide additional assistance.
- The Council was continuing to press on with the Active Travel Strategy; schemes were being funded and the Council was bidding for additional funding.
- Tree/Flood officer appointments – Tree and Nature Recovery Officer posts were out for recruitment, and a Flood Officer post had recently finished going through the job evaluation process and would go out to recruitment in the near future.
- The Cabinet Member for Adult Care, Wellbeing and Health Integration confirmed that he would look into issues relating to the delivery of Household Support Fund vouchers.
- Assurance would be sought on behalf of members in relation to whether the Council had capacity to offer support to vulnerable people when they sought help.
- There were twice the number of hospital admissions in central Northampton due to COPD complications compared to national figures; part of the Council's work was understanding the underlying causes, which also fed into wider work around air quality.
- The Council had followed an informal process with the Children's Trust which allowed some visibility. Confidence was growing continually in the figures that the Trust was quoting.
- The government gave Family Hub 'Start for Life' funding to 75 of the most deprived areas in the country; Northampton, in the context of the wider rural West Northamptonshire area, made it less of a priority. The Council had been assured that it would be included in the next tranche of funding.
- An inspection of the Fostering Service took place at the same time as the Children's Service inspection; the inspection of an independent fostering organisation was separate to those and was the first of that kind. Issues identified had now been addressed.
- It was confirmed that the Northampton Market Square regeneration project was on track for completion in late summer of 2024.

RESOLVED:

Council noted the Cabinet Member reports and the decision records from 11 July and 19 September 2023.

144. **Annual Reports from Overview and Scrutiny Committees**

Councillor McCord presented the report which asked Council to note the Annual Reports of the three Overview and Scrutiny Committees (Corporate, People and Place) for 2022/2023.

Councillor Bambridge seconded the report.

Members discussed the report and made the following comments:

- There were high levels of apologies at meetings and low levels of participation. It was suggested that if members were struggling to attend meetings or did not have an interest in them, they should discuss this with their group leaders.
- In relation to waterways in Talavera where excess water from new nearby housing estates ran off, there was to be no regeneration contract until 2028 and no maintenance of the rivers and lakes was in place.
- The Scrutiny Committees were commended on their work in relation to LAPs and the modernising of IT systems.
- The Cabinet were able to take several recommendations forward from the Corporate OSC when setting the budget.

RESOLVED:

Council:

- a) Noted the Annual Reports 2022/2023 of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees – Corporate, People and Place.

145. **Annual Reports from Democracy and Standards Committee**

Councillor Grant presented the report which asked Council to note the Annual Report of the Democracy and Standards Committee for 2022/2023.

Councillor Cribbin seconded the report.

Members discussed the report and made the following comments:

- It was requested that a summary of Code of Conduct issues be contained in the report rather than a link.

RESOLVED:

Council:

- a) Noted the Annual Report 2022/2023 of the Democracy and Standards Committee.

146. **Community Governance Review – Terms of Reference**

Councillor Grant presented the report which sought Council's agreement of the terms of reference for a community governance review of parish arrangements within West Northamptonshire.

Councillor Kilbride seconded the report.

Members discussed the report and made the following comments:

- A request was made to ensure that there was a solid communication plan in place for ward changes for all areas affected.
- It was requested that the parish of Yardley Gobion be added to the Areas under Review on Appendix 1, paragraph 6.1, subject to officers confirming the inclusion of the area in line with communication received from the parish council.
- There would be plenty of opportunity in the coming months for discussions with members to take place.

RESOLVED:

Council:

- a) Agreed that the Terms of Reference for a community governance review of parishes in West Northamptonshire, as set out at Appendix 1 of the report, be adopted;
- b) Noted the recommendation of the Democracy and Standards Committee that, rather than establishing a task and finish group to provide democratic input into the review, officers consult relevant ward members when drawing up proposals for consultation and eventual adoption;
- c) Agreed that Yardley Gobion be included in the Areas of Review listed at paragraph 6.1 of Appendix 1, subject to officers confirming the inclusion of the area in line with communication received from the parish council.

147. **Updates to the Constitution**

Councillor Grant presented the report which sought Council's consideration of the recommendations made by the Democracy and Standards Committee in relation to proposed updates to the Constitution and changes to committees.

Councillor Hinch seconded the report.

Members discussed the report and made the following comments:

- Officers may not be aware of community uses for assets and these assets must not be disposed of without member input.
- A review of the Cabinet system should be imminent if the Council was to be ready for a less centralised system of governance following the 2025 local elections.

RESOLVED:

Council:

- a) Noted and approved the updates to the Constitution as set out in Section 5 of the report; and
- b) Delegated to the Monitoring Officer the power to make these amendments and any consequential amendments that may be necessary.

148. Chief Officer Fixed Term Appointment and Remuneration

Councillor Hallam presented the report which sought Council's approval for a proposed remuneration package in excess of £100,000 for a number of key roles across the Council as temporary agency workers. The report also highlighted potentially senior IT specialists, which may also come into scope.

Councillor Nunn seconded the report.

Members discussed the report and made the following comments:

- There was concern that appointments in the report had already been made and concern about the number of interim appointments hitting the £100,000 mark.
- 3 of the posts were being funded by the Public Health grant and so were not costing the Council any money.

RESOLVED:

- 1) Council approved the proposed remuneration over £100,00 for the listed roles.

149. Changes to Committee Places

This item was withdrawn from the agenda as the decision required was covered by an existing delegation.

150. Motions

Motion 1

Councillor Joyce proposed and Councillor Stone seconded:

“Poor air quality is among the greatest health threats in West Northamptonshire. The British Heart Foundation attributed 1 in 20 deaths in Northampton to air pollution in 2017 and predicted air pollution would cause 1,700 deaths in Northamptonshire before 2030.

In 2021, the World Health Organization (WHO) updated its guidelines on safe pollution levels. This included a maximum annual average of 5 µg/m³ for PM_{2.5}, the most dangerous pollutant which causes heart and lung disease and cancers. Recent measurements from IQ Air shows levels in areas of Northampton are worryingly twice this amount.

West Northamptonshire Council have made several commitments to deliver clean air, including signing up to the UK100 Net Zero Pledge in 2022, committing to be 'Clean and Green' in the corporate plan, and inheriting Northampton Borough Council's Northampton Low Emission Strategy (NLES) until 2025. Yet this council still has no overarching policy towards tackling air quality.

Recognized change in pollution levels has been achieved by reducing idling through introducing smart traffic lights and School Streets initiatives. A trial of school streets in London effectively reduced levels of lethal nitrogen dioxide outside schools by 23%, whilst the introduction of smart traffic lights at roadworks in Kent successfully reduced car idling and journey times by up to 41%.

This council recognises:

- Poor air quality is a major problem that is affecting the health of residents in West Northamptonshire and pollutant levels are dangerously above recognised safe levels.

This council resolves to request the Cabinet to:

- Publish a cohesive clean air policy, pulling together the efforts of LAPs, parish councils and community groups, for their meeting in January 2024.
- Commit this council to meet WHO guidelines on safe air pollution levels by 2028.
- Outline its plans for the £292,378 given to WNC to improve air quality for their meeting in December 2023.
- Consider and explore a trial of the School Streets Initiative for West Northants, looking at available sites, appropriate locations and inviting members and local residents to suggest locations to plan and initiate a trial.
- Conduct research into trialling smart traffic light systems for future roadworks in West Northants and any funding available to trial a sensor or AI-based traffic system"

The Chairman notified Council that an amendment to the motion had been received and copies of it had been circulated to members.

Councillor D Smith proposed and Councillor A Brown seconded the amendment.

Amended motion to read:

"Poor air quality is a matter of concern in West Northamptonshire. The British Heart Foundation attributed 1 in 20 deaths in Northampton to air pollution in 2017 and predicted air pollution would cause 1,700 deaths in Northamptonshire before 2030.

West Northamptonshire Council have made several commitments to deliver clean air, including signing up to the UK100 Net Zero Pledge in 2022, committing to be 'Clean and Green' in the corporate plan, and inheriting Northampton Borough Council's Northampton Low Emission Strategy (NLES) until 2025. Yet this council still has no overarching policy towards tackling air quality.

Recognised change in pollution levels has been achieved by reducing idling through introducing smart traffic lights and School Streets initiatives. A trial of school streets

in London effectively reduced levels of harmful nitrogen dioxide outside schools by 23%, whilst the introduction of smart traffic lights at roadworks in Kent successfully reduced car idling and journey times by up to 41%.

This Council recognises that:

- More needs to be done to tackle poor air quality where it is affecting the health of residents in West Northamptonshire and where pollutant levels are above legal limits.

Council therefore endorses the administration's ongoing work to:

- Develop the local evidence base for assessing the health, economic and social impacts of extending the existing smoke control areas in West Northamptonshire through the grant funding of £292,378 awarded to WNC, consulting with parish councils and local communities to inform the data gathering.
- Publish and implement a comprehensive clean air policy as early as possible in 2024.
- Implement a project with public health and active travel colleagues to pilot a programme of schools engagement around reduction of idling and promotion of active travel. In accordance with good scientific practice, the selection of trial sites should be based on health data, air pollution and traffic data.
- Improve traffic management systems to reduce pollution levels linked to idling traffic

In addition Council resolves to request the Cabinet to:

- Commit this council to meet or surpass all relevant legal provisions on safe air pollution levels.”

Councillor Joyce, as the proposer of the motion, accepted the amendment.

Council debated the amendment and made the following comments:

- The issue of idling cars was concerning; smart traffic lights were needed as idling vehicles contributed significantly to poor air quality and wasted fuel.
- The motion did not add anything to the work already carried out by the administration.
- It was suggested that the amendment was an attempt to skirt around and dilute the issues faced by those suffering from poor air quality.
- It was disappointing that the school streets concept had been removed and the administration was urged to investigate which schools might be appropriate for having school street trials.

Upon requisition of a vote, the motion as amended was carried.

Motion 2

Councillor Harris proposed and Councillor Humphreys seconded:

“In July 2021, West Northamptonshire Council passed a motion recognising the climate emergency. In December 2021, a resolution was passed to sign up to the

UK100 net zero pledge, reaffirming the council's commitment to deliver a net zero position on its carbon emissions by 2030 and 2045 for the wider West Northants area.

Since that time the scale of the challenge has become greater, and the need for action more urgent. Climate change is driving extreme weather such as heatwaves that cost lives. Wildlife is under extreme pressure, and species loss is accelerating.

The surface temperature of the world's oceans has hit its highest ever level as climate breakdown from burning fossil fuels causes the oceans to heat.

Following the hottest June on record and a series of extreme weather events, including heatwaves in Europe, North America and Asia, and wildfires in Canada and Greece, data from the Copernicus Climate Change Service (C3S*) show that the first three weeks of July have broken several significant records.

This motion therefore offers members the opportunity to renew West Northamptonshire Council's commitment to taking action to tackle the climate and ecological emergency.

Motion

That this Council resolves to redeclare its recognition of the climate emergency, and calls on the executive to:

- a) Fully Integrate consideration of climate mitigation and adaptation, and nature recovery, into all council decision-making; ensuring that all decisions are compatible with the goal of a zero-carbon council by 2030.
- b) Formalise the procedures for this decision-making, with automatic decision referral being made to the Sustainability Manager/and or the Sustainability team for input and contribution to key decisions, in much the same way as finance and legal contribute to sign off of all major decisions.
- c) Commit to taking every opportunity to improve wildlife protection and better management of land for nature, including on council-owned land, therefore ensuring wider biodiversity net gain in line with the forthcoming legislation.
- d) Support and strengthen action with partners, i.e., NPH, towards the goal of a zero-carbon, nature-rich West Northamptonshire by 2045."

The Chairman notified Council that an amendment to the motion had been received and copies of it had been circulated to members.

Councillor Nunn proposed and Councillor D Smith seconded the amendment.

Amended motion to read:

"In July 2021, West Northamptonshire Council passed a motion recognising the climate emergency. In December 2021, a resolution was passed to sign up to the UK100 net zero pledge, reaffirming the council's commitment to deliver a net zero position on its carbon emissions by 2030 and 2045 for the wider West Northants area.

Since that time the scale of the challenge has become greater, and the need for action more urgent. Climate change is driving extreme weather such as heatwaves that cost lives. Wildlife is under extreme pressure, and species loss is accelerating.

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This motion therefore offers members the opportunity to renew West Northamptonshire Council's commitment to taking action to tackle the climate and ecological emergency.

That this Council therefore redeclares its recognition of the climate emergency, and calls on the executive to:

- a) Fully Integrate consideration of climate mitigation and adaptation, and nature recovery, into all council decision-making; ensuring that all decisions are compatible with the goal of a zero-carbon council by 2030.
- b) Formalise the procedures for Council and Cabinet decision-making, with automatic decision referral being made to the Sustainability Manager/and or the Sustainability team for input and contribution to key decisions, in much the same way as finance and legal contribute to sign off of all major decisions.
- c) Commit to wider biodiversity net gain in line with the forthcoming legislation.
- d) Support and strengthen action with partners, i.e., NPH, towards the goal of a zero-carbon, nature-rich West Northamptonshire by 2045."

Councillor Harris, as the proposer of the motion, accepted the amendment.

Council debated the amendment and made the following comments:

- The intention of the language used in the motion was unclear.
- Environmental and ecological considerations should be priorities when considering planning applications.
- It was vital that every decision be taken with climate crisis considerations in mind.
- The motion recommitted the Council to an end goal with no plan, no equality impact assessment and no budget.
- By passing the motion, the Council would be demonstrating that it was serious about its pledges and earn the respect of local residents and environmental groups.
- The Council already had several environmental policies in place, particularly in relation to planning, which were often watered down or discarded in favour of growth.

Upon requisition of a vote, the motion as amended was carried.

Motion 3

Councillor E Roberts proposed and Councillor Z Smith seconded:

“E-scooters have become an integral part of Northampton’s transport and play a valuable role in this council’s active travel and carbon-reducing schemes by providing cheap, clean and efficient travel for commuters and students.

But the ongoing trial is being repeatedly plagued with riders breaking vital and statutory safety regulations in the town. Residents are repeatedly complaining of underage children using the scooters, of two people on a scooter at one time (so-called double-riding), of scooters parked in dangerous places like verges, and users thinking riding on the pavement is acceptable.

These illegal activities pose a serious risk to the safety of riders, drivers, and pedestrians, especially in the elderly and disabled communities. Since the trial began in 2020, two deaths in Northampton have been linked to e-scooters, whilst a representative of the National Federation of the Blind of the UK said in March that “rider behaviour is not safe for the rider or for any pedestrian” and proposed the trial’s immediate termination.

The extension of the current trial until May 2024, agreed with the provider and North Northamptonshire Council in December, was on the condition that additional safety measures were introduced by the provider. Yet residents have also complained of repeat offenders who, despite being reported to the provider, are still seen later riding on pavements or double-riding. Last month, WNC and the provider announced the expansion of the scheme in Northampton to Moulton and Collingtree, despite ongoing concerns from residents over their safety.

This council acknowledges and welcomes the ‘We share the road’ campaign being run jointly with Northamptonshire Police to raise awareness of the rules of the road for e-scooters, but also recognises that better policing and evaluation of the trial is required. It therefore calls on the Cabinet to:

- Assure the Council it has enacted all of the additional e-scooter trial requirements the Department for Transport introduced in April 2022 to ensure the trials were as safe as possible
- Conduct a full evaluation into the safety measures of e-scooters, including consulting with Northamptonshire Police on better policing of underage and drink-driver users and the widespread problem of poor parking, and their complaints procedure
- Conduct an evaluation into the suitability of Northampton’s infrastructure to accommodate e-scooters and e-bikes and how this could be improved should they become legal
- Forward the results of these evaluations to the Members of Parliament for West Northamptonshire to take to Parliament as it continues to discuss and prepare legislation on e-scooters
- Agree to decline any further expansions or extensions of the trial in West Northamptonshire until the above evaluations have been taken place and the Cabinet, Police and communities are reassured that riders, drivers and pedestrians will be safe.”

Councillor Larratt proposed and Councillor Gonzalez de Savage seconded that the motion be referred to the Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Council debated the motion and made the following comments:

- It was suggested that profit, not environmental concern, was the main driver for the e-scooter trial.
- E-scooters were often abandoned on paths meaning that pedestrians were unable to use them.
- Leicester City Council had a clear vision for active travel which resulted in well-defined cycle lanes that were used by cyclists and e-scooter users. WNC was falling behind in comparison.
- E-scooters were popular among those who relied on the town's temperamental bus services.
- It was suggested that the Police were struggling to deal with people misusing e-scooters.

Upon requisition of a vote, the proposal to refer the motion to the Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee was carried.

151. **Urgent Business (previously agreed with the Chairman)**

None advised.

The meeting closed at Time Not Specified

Chair: _____

Date: _____

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Report of Councillor Jonathan Nunn Leader of the Council

30th November 2023

Since our last full council meeting, I have worked with the Cabinet, Members, the Chief Executive and Officers across all areas of the Council. Many of these activities and issues are referred to in more detail in Cabinet colleagues' reports.

Transformation

The Transformation Portfolio continues to focus on priority projects linked to significant savings or complex delivery. Highlights of each directorate's key developments are described below.

Place

In Planning, the new structure has been confirmed and the majority of internal appointments have been made. A major external recruitment drive is currently underway, and all vacancies are expected to be filled by Christmas. The successful delivery of a single DEF Mastergov IT system has enabled the project to focus on creating consistent single processes across WNC to support the outputs of the section 106/CIL review, which have been incorporated into the Planning Improvement Plan, to maintain pace in the improvement journey. The integration with the Corporate Customer Contact Centre has so far proven to be successful, resolving many enquiries quickly and efficiently, and the services are looking to expand this approach further.

Communities and Opportunities

Given Housing Solutions staff continue to be under pressure with winter approaching, a project seeking to reduce spend on Temporary Accommodation is currently being scoped with an emphasis on Prevention and Early Intervention. External support has been engaged to explore and implement more innovative options for housing, alongside the launch of the Landlord Incentive Scheme in West Northamptonshire, which provides incentives to landlords to offer a 12-month fixed-term tenancy at an affordable rent.

A project is being designed to deliver a single Rough Sleeper Pathway, across Housing, Adults, Health and Public Health. Emphasis will also be on working with local supported housing providers and the local voluntary sector. As part of this service specification, plans have been finalised for delivering services at Oasis house.

The Debt & Money Advice project has made progress, and is currently piloting integrating Welfare Benefit Officers into Adult Social Care to provide a multi-disciplined and more integrated response to residents. Training continues for new recruits to the team, and outcomes continue to be positive for residents. Currently the project is evaluating options around voluntary sector models of commissioning including considering a lead operator model.

People

The Optimisation of Single-Handed Care project continues to deliver results, and is now moving towards embedding a lasting improved practices to optimise the use of single-handed care across adult social care. This project has led to £638k in 2023/24 to date.

The delivery of a new framework for Homecare providers has concluded, and final contracts are being returned by the appointed providers, with relevant clients being transferred to their

new providers. Fortnightly provider forums are ensuring that all stakeholders are engaged, before more complex and/or urgent care packages in the coming month.

The Supported Living Outcomes project has completed 210 reviews, and includes the completion of 126 Care Act Assessments. To date this has achieved a saving of £743k in 2023/24.

A major IT project is also underway to replace the Adult Social Care System. Procurement commenced in October, with demonstrations and evaluations being completed throughout November before the contract is to be awarded by Christmas.

Children's Trust

The council's two most senior Transformation Officers - our Executive Director of Corporate Services, and our Head of Transformation Delivery – are currently embedded in the Children's Trust. The aim of their work, alongside the council's Director of Children's Services, is to bring additional capacity that can identify and deliver transformation and 'invest to save' projects. These projects will always continue to ensure that the needs of each child are met, but will also seek to ensure that value for money is achieved, without inhibiting the ongoing improvement of children's services.

To oversee this work, an NCT Transformation Board has been established.

Examples of transformation, including the established Circles of Success project which is aimed at getting better value from more costly placements, or the work now being undertaken on the high levels of referrals that NCT receive from other agencies, are already progressing towards the delivery of substantial budget savings.

Corporate

The Connected Customer programme continues at pace, with a focus in this period of maximising the value of each engagement we have with residents. In order to do this the project has assigned extra resources to the Adults website review which is following the principles set out in our Customer Experience Strategy. The programme is now focusing on the next area of work to bring into the customer contact centre, which is to be focused on triage and prevention for adults.

This programme will then focus on rolling out a communications campaign to promote the uptake of the WNC app, given residents the information they need at their finger tips.

The West Ways of Working programme continues to deliver our hybrid working model, with plans being developed for both Northampton and Towcester, following the work done at Daventry.

Sustainability

Our cross-party member working group continues to meet on a monthly basis to drive our sustainability programme activity and we are grateful to all members involved for their time and commitment.

Following on from this year's bronze Investors in the Environment Award the team are working towards Investors in the Environment silver accreditation. The Council is very proud to have been short-listed for the best newcomer award by the Investors in the Environment.

An emissions reduction plan is in development, following the publication of our baseline emissions data, to enable the delivery of our 2030 net zero target for West Northants Council and by 2045 for West Northamptonshire residents and businesses.

A joint project with the University of Northampton is underway, funded through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. The Towards a Net Zero West Northamptonshire project (TaNZ) will help local businesses decarbonise.

A joint sustainable period product project is underway with NPH, samples of sustainable products have been supplied by leading companies.

Work continues to promote sustainable warmth schemes to west Northants residents enabling them to access grants to support energy efficiency improvements in their homes. The Government Eco funding scheme, helping residents improve the energy efficiency of their home, has had over 120 submissions approved, whilst the Government's HUG 2 funding scheme is due to start shortly.

Civic

Colleagues were proud to accept the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme Gold Award in October, for our ongoing work to support our Armed Forces Community both within the council and externally. The council supported the Royal British Legion's Poppy Appeal in the lead up to Remembrance, selling poppies in all office locations. As in previous years, the council facilitated several road closures across West Northants to enable Remembrance parades, with representatives attending services across West Northants to lay wreaths on behalf of the authority. Efforts continue to encourage local businesses and organisations to sign the Armed Forces Covenant.

The WNC hosted Lord-Lieutenant's office has facilitated several events over the past few months including St Crispin and Crispinian's Day, the Lord-Lieutenant's Leader's Forum, and the investiture of the Lord-Lieutenant's cadets. We led a successful programme of Royal Visits at the beginning of November, with visits made by the Duke of Gloucester to Fulkrum Technologies, Corby Sixth Form, Adrenaline Alley, and the Cransley Hospice Trust. We will be gladly accepting a Coronation Oak Tree from the Lord-Lieutenant in the coming weeks, to be planted in Abington Park.

The Chairman's office is pressing ahead with plans for the upcoming sixth form debating competition to be held in the new year. In support of the Chairman's chosen theme of music for his term in office, musical performances will be continuing ahead of Full Council meetings leading up to the ChoirFest event in March 2024. Charitable efforts also continue in support of the Army Benevolent Fund and NMPAT.

Executive Support colleagues continue to provide a high-level support service to the leadership team, Cabinet, Chairman and Lord-Lieutenant as well as supporting organisational projects such as our 2024 Staff THRIVE Awards.

Support also continues for our Staff Networks, with a range of successful events having taken place in the past few months including a Black History Month talk and Early Careers networking event.

Plans are underway to introduce a Central Business Support team in the new year which is intended to supplement administrative resource across the organisation and deliver value for money through reducing our use of agency colleagues.

Communications

Alongside the recent launch of our the residents magazine, West Northants Life, we have also continued to extend our e-news offer to residents across West Northants, with over 15,300 subscribers to our latest updates including corporate news, arts and culture, museums and galleries, business and employment, SEND and community safety. Residents can subscribe through this link: [Multiple newsletters sign up form \(sibforms.com\)](https://www.sibforms.com)

Our comms team has secured dedicated resource working on behalf of all partners of the Northants Serious Violence Alliance to develop and deliver key promotional campaigns aimed at reducing serious violence countywide over the next 18 months, including a focus on youth crime and knife crime prevention.

Extensive promotion of this year's Heritage Opens Days has resulted in the most successful programme of events and activities across West Northants yet.

We have worked with partners within WNC and across health and community organisations to develop and launch the Winter Well campaign, a major communications focus on supporting our communities through the winter months, including a focus on cost of living, welcoming spaces, vaccinations, mental wellbeing and more.

We stepped up our work to raise awareness and information around the new co-produced SEND strategy and promoted key schemes progressing to provide additional places for SEND pupils across our area including the launch of the Chiltern/Hunsbury unit.

The ongoing regeneration of Northampton town centre has continued to be a key communication focus, providing residents with regular updates on schemes including the Market Square Abington and Fish Street preparatory works, and the STACK scheme for Market Walk. Two key projects have also triumphed at local business awards, with the Vulcan Works winning the Innovation Award, and 78 Derngate winning the Land and Development Award.

Preparations have been in full swing to promote Christmas waste and recycling arrangements, with residents set to receive information in the coming weeks, including bin hangers w/c 27 November.

Other key events, projects and activities promoted include Diwali, Stoptober, Customer Services Week, International Men's Day, Care Leavers Covenant, Young Citizens Scheme, Annual Canvass, Cleaner Communities, and Local Area Partnerships launch.

Business Intelligence, Policy and Performance

The newly created Business Intelligence & Population Insights Team (BIPI) has completed its transformation programme after the creation of WNC and the joining together of 4 legacy council Business Intelligence teams into a new single team structured around the needs of WNC, the services we provide, and the needs of the people we support in West Northamptonshire.

As part of the new team, new functions and departments are being supported, including Public Health, Children's Services and Communities and Opportunities, as well as the continuation of

support to Adult Social Care, Early Years and Education, Northamptonshire Children's Trust, Corporate and the Place directorate.

BIPI has been hard at work supporting and leading on many areas of insights and analytics across WNC including:

- SEND JSNA (Joint Strategic Needs Assessment) for example by scoping the process agreed and producing assessment templates
- Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) process established, and communicated across WNC to support the draft budget setting process for 2024/25
- Undertaking the handover of Public Health intelligence, previously undertaken by North Northants Council, including responsibility for Public Health statutory returns handover to WNC BIPI
- With a key element of BIPI's work being to maintain and submit statutory returns, this year has seen two significant new statutory returns, for Adult Social Care and for Early Years and Education being required, along with the introduction of many new scorecards, dashboards and assurance board reporting requirements now established and delivered
- BIPI has supported the SEND Improvement Board, through developing and delivering a data dashboard
- Supporting the first Performance Children's Directorate Management Team, resulting in valuable insight and discussion from the data provided
- BIPI are also supporting the procurement and implementation of the Adult Social Care Case Management System (the ARISE project), as well as the Education Case Management System and the Northamptonshire Children's Trust Case Management System
- Supporting the development of a performance framework in Temporary Accommodation
- Developing a performance framework around the 10 Live Your Best Lives ambitions across WNC and Public Health
- A key milestone for our BIPI Systems team was implementing the Electronic Medication Administration Record System (EMAR) for home care services in Adult Social Care
- BIPI Systems have also developed a suite of operational reporting from the new home care system in Adult Social Care, and are in the process of implementing a new data quality strategy.

Councillor Jonathan Nunn
Leader of the Council

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30th November 2023

HOUSING

Following the conclusion of a 10- week consultation with service users and stakeholders on the new Housing Allocations Scheme, the final scheme will be presented to Cabinet on the 14 November.

The consultation received a total of 732 responses analysed, consisting of 445 fully completed responses. 624 (85%) of respondents were from local residents of West Northamptonshire and 363 (57%) of respondents were already registered with a current housing allocation scheme within West Northants. There was positive support for the draft housing allocation scheme as 69% of respondents strongly agreed and/or agreed with the proposals within the consultation.

The scheme has been developed to provide an aligned and harmonised approach across West Northants which will help in meeting the housing needs of the most vulnerable residents. Work is ongoing to draft a new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy, with the first draft set to be presented to Cabinet on the 12 December to seek approval to consult.

The relationship with Northamptonshire Partnership Homes continues to improve as both organisations work together to develop the quality assurance framework and plan together for the introduction of the new regulatory regime next year.

Formation of the Housing Partnership Board progresses with discussions under way with key stakeholders about heading up the four Housing Strategy-aligned steering groups. One working group focussed on accelerating development undertook a successful roundtable exercise in early October to lay out an approach and identify barriers (and mitigations) and opportunities. Successful meeting of the Housing Partnership Board on 2 November covering progress updates on priority activities: development plan; allocations scheme; homelessness and rough sleeper strategy; early intervention, prevention and temporary accommodation, alignment of aims/outcomes between the board, the Health & Wellbeing Board and local area partnerships.

West Northamptonshire Council has funded a pilot initiative which will provide additional support for the homeless and rough sleepers in Northampton. The initiative, delivered by Midland Heart Housing Association, will provide intensive housing related and independent-living support for rough sleepers and those at risk of rough sleeping with the aim of increasing independence to move on to longer-term accommodation. The aims of the initiative include preventing people from sleeping rough for the first time, supporting people currently sleeping rough to move off the streets, reducing offending and re-offending, limiting social exclusion and isolation, promoting independence and the development of independent living skills.

CULTURE & LEISURE

The Library Service

The public consultation around the draft Library Service Strategy 2023-2027 ran from 4th September to October 29th and received 598 responses. The team are now working through these responses to pull together actions that can be taken from the feedback as well as any resulting changes to the draft before it is taken forward.

The Summer Reading challenge in our libraries was extremely successful this year with 5027 children in West Northants taking part in the challenge and 2967 completing the challenge and receiving a medal and certificate for their efforts. This was a 10% rise from those taking part in 2022.

179 sports and games themed events took place in libraries across the summer holidays to bring the challenge to life. 38 volunteers supported children, encouraging them to read and talk about the books they had been reading through a total of 469 volunteering hours.

Museum Service

New exhibitions were launched in the Northampton Museum and Art Gallery in September. Punk: Rage and Revolution launched with a sold-out talk by punk icon John Robb of the Membranes, Gold Blade and Louder than War. The exhibit features many artifacts illustrating Northampton's rich punk history and includes the original "Spinadisc Records" sign from the legendary Northampton retailer. "Fifteen" was an exciting and eclectic exhibition of the work of fifteen prominent Northamptonshire artists as part of the ever-expanding Northants Open Studios programme of events and this was followed by "Found in the Fields", an exhibition of images by Carry Akroyd incorporating words from the poet John Clare.

The Museums team won the Best Event category of the Northamptonshire Heritage Forum Awards for the Transport Day event held in 2022 at Abington Park. Some 3000 people attended and enjoyed the event in 2022 and this rose to 5000 for this year's event which was held in Abington Park on June 24th. 35 different organisations took part in the event.

The first element of the National Portfolio Organisation "Histories of Northamptonshire" project with the installation of high specification display cases in four library sites, Daventry, Weston Favell, Brackley and Towcester. The display cases will host a changing programme of exhibitions developed in partnership with different organisations and groups. Library cases have been installed at the four sites. The first exhibition Unearthed – finds from the Portable Antiquities Scheme is currently in design and due to open in first week of January 2024.

A working group of library and museum staff is being established to plan future activities, manage logistics, and plan events and associated activities.

Library Museum Ambassadors have visited the museum, met with staff, and been shown the museum collections and briefed on current and future activities. These ambassadors will connect with library visitors to promote museum exhibitions and events and signpost them to the other library sites, where they can see a wider range of displays.

Arts & Culture

The Arts & Culture newsletter continues to provide a useful source of local information. Steady growth continues and the newsletter has reached over 800 subscribers. The team are working alongside colleagues and sector experts to further improve the content and messaging. Planning continues for Collide the brand name for Choirfest 2024, a celebration of musical genres sung by local choirs hosted at the Royal & Derngate. The lead up to the main event will be promoted through up to eight 'mini' events across West Northants showcasing local choirs and reaching a wide audience through a range of venues.

Main Stage '24, the live music event being planned at Delapre Abbey for summer 2024. Procurement of an event promoter has completed with award going to a nationally recognisable promoter. Finer details are being agreed as part of the formal onboarding process. Once this has been completed more event information will be shared publicly.

Sport & Leisure

The team has submitted an application to the Sport England Swimming Pool Support Fund Phase 2. This phase focusses on capital project improvements to improve energy efficiency and help our leisure centres reduce their carbon footprint. The application includes Danes Camp, Moulton, Daventry, and Lings leisure centres totalling £690k. The council has already invested in excess of £1m towards capital improvements at Lings Forum, Danes Camp and Mounts Baths as well as running an £8m project to reduce the carbon footprint of our rural leisure centres.

Leisure Centre procurement for Danes Camp, Lings Forum, Mounts Baths, Daventry, Moulton leisure centres and Daventry Sports Park has reached the soft market testing stage. A series of questions have been made available to leisure operators to test the market and help shape the scope within tender documents that will be shared in 2024. As part of the process, Members have been invited to a workshop at the end of February.

Rugby World Cup 2025 planning continues through the early introduction phases. Mapping and partner engagement has started, exploring the RFU Impact Programme, part of the RFU ambition to raise the profile of rugby and increase participation of the women and girls game. An introductory meeting with World Rugby and the Local Operating Company (LOC) is being held in November.

Councillor Adam Brown

Deputy Leader & Cabinet Member for Housing, Culture & Leisure

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30th November 2023

Restructure and Recruitment

The Planning Service restructure has been completed and the internal recruitment process closed on Friday 15 September, this phase of the restructure has successfully resulted in several posts being filled internally across the different planning service teams.

A dedicated external recruitment campaign went live on 18th September to fill the remaining vacancies and to add capacity and resilience into the Service. There are currently interviews underway (at the time of writing several posts in Development Management, Specialist Services and Technical Support have been offered to external candidates and further offers are expected as the external interview process progresses). The timing of when new starters will arrive is very dependent on their respective notice periods (whether 1, 2 or 3 months), so it is already clear that where shorter notice periods apply, we will fill posts before Christmas, where longer notice periods apply, we will not see new starters arrive until the early months of next year.

Consultation with the legacy Northampton team will commence in October to finalise the move of the entire Planning Service to the Towcester office by the close of the year.

A submission to the Planning Skills Delivery Fund was submitted on Monday 11 September to secure £100,000 of funding for the appointment of temporary Development Management and Technical Support staff to support backlog clearance and upskilling, particularly in relation to ecology and the Council's future BNG (Biodiversity Net Gain) obligations. An outcome is awaited from central Government.

A presentation on progress with the actions arising from the PAS (Planning Advisory Service) Peer Review was provided to Members by the Assistant Director on 13 September. This highlighted what has been achieved to date during 2023 and those actions remaining alongside timescales for implementation. A link to a recording of the presentation can be found below for members who were not able to attend.

A similar session will be run for Parish Councils (vis NCALC (Northamptonshire County Association of Local Councils)) on 30 November. A separate session relating to progress on the S106/ CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy) workstreams will be provided to Members at a future date.

West Northamptonshire Local Plan

A Workshop for Members to consider the findings of the Housing and Economic Needs Assessment was held in The Forum on 19 October. A further workshop to consider strategic spatial options for the plan was held in the Forum on 14 November.

Neighbourhood Plans

The Nether Heyford Neighbourhood Plan has been made following a successful referendum on 07 September.

The Arthingworth Neighbourhood Plan has been examined and a report was considered at Planning Policy Committee on 22 November when it was agreed that the plan could proceed to a referendum.

Conservation Areas

Conservation Area appraisals have been prepared and consulted upon for Scaldwell and Holdenby. The responses to the consultation were reported to the September meeting of Planning Policy Committee. Members agreed to adopt the Conservation Area appraisals as Supplementary Planning Documents and endorsed the conservation area boundaries.

Planning Policy Committee

At the September meeting, in addition to the afore-mentioned Conservation Areas, Members debated the government's recent consultation on proposed changes to Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects regime and agreed a corporate response on behalf of West Northamptonshire Council. Members also debated the government's recent consultation on the proposed changes to Plan making system and agreed a corporate response on behalf of West Northamptonshire Council.

New Local Plan

Workshops are well underway and evolving as we look at existing plans, evidence base for new plans and options for spatial planning in the new Local Plan. The numbers attending the workshops is increasing, but I would be very pleased to see more engagement from a wider cohort! Please bear in mind that now is the opportunity to shape our plan and it is developing at pace now.

Development Management

Planning application caseloads continue to be high, however planning performance across West Northamptonshire has remained high with 100% of major applications and 72.8% of non-major applications being determined within agreed timescales during July to September 2023 against a target of 70%. Whilst a dip has occurred from the last quarter this figure still presents an overall improvement for the Authority for the year to date.

Following the major transformation project undertaken to integrate the DEF planning software across the former South Northamptonshire and Daventry areas in March and April, this has now been successfully extended to include the former Northampton area.

There is now one single WNC (West Northamptonshire Council) DEF system operating for the Planning Service.

The Major scale development planning appeals being determined by a public inquiry or hearings are listed below.

Hearings or Public Inquiries awaiting a decision:

- 1) Land South of Halse Road, Greatworth, Northamptonshire, Solar farm, Public Inquiry which took place Tuesday 6 June to Friday 9 June.

Called in by the Secretary of State for the final decision. Decision now received, appeal allowed. In Conclusion the Inspector agreed there was landscape harm, but then stated: 'I have identified very significant weight from renewable energy production and storage, significant biodiversity enhancements and other moderate to limited weights in favour of the scheme. Overall, it is my judgement that the benefits would outweigh the harm. The benefits of the scheme in combination also amount to material considerations sufficient to outweigh the conflict with the development plan.'

The rule 6 Parties/LPA were involved in a whole afternoon condition session with the Inspector – if there is one marginal positive it's that the Inspector has imposed lots of planning conditions the rule 6 parties wished imposed.

- 2) Land at Milton Road, Gayton, Northampton, Northamptonshire, Solar farm, Public Inquiry Public Inquiry took place Tuesday 23 May to Friday 26 May.

Called in by the Secretary of State for the final decision.

- 3) Land to the East of Brington Road, Flore Northamptonshire, Outline planning application of up to 45 dwellings, to include 40% affordable dwellings (7 one bed homes, 5 two bed homes and 6 three bed homes), infrastructure and open space. (All matters reserved other than access).

Forthcoming Inquiries:

Hearing in November (Starting 21st November 2023).

- 1) Land North of, Bedford Road, Northampton, Outline Planning Application (all matters reserved except access) for the development of up to 24,000 sqm (GEA) of employment land (Use Classes E(g), B2 and B8) with new vehicular access, associated parking, highway infrastructure and other ancillary works. Application accompanied by an Environmental Statement.

Councillor Rebecca Breese

Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning, Built Environment & Rural Affairs

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30th November 2023

ENVIRONMENT, COUNTRYSIDE AND OPEN SPACES

Update on play areas

Briar Hill, The Causeway - We have enhanced and extended the existing play area by adding four new pieces of play equipment, new safety surfacing and new safety fencing. We have supplied local volunteers with specialist paint, so they can repaint the existing pieces of play equipment to give them a new look.

Daventry Country Park – We have removed the old and broken items of gym equipment and replaced them with six new pieces of gym equipment, which now forms part of the fitness trail within the park. We have also added new play equipment to the existing play area and installed new safety surfacing and fencing.

Abington Vale Pocket Park (Milverton Crescent) – We have repaired the existing set of three swings, after one side had subsided. Working with the ‘friends of’ group, we are going to install a noticeboard and bench that they have purchased for the park and WNC are providing new welcome signs.

The Racecourse – We have removed the old broken Zip-Wire from the middle of the Racecourse and replaced it with a new one near the play equipment at the Leicester Street entrance.

Brixworth Country Park – We have installed a new wooden fence around the main play area to ensure the younger children can play in a safe and secure environment. We have also installed a new basket swing for the older children.

Cemetery Welcome Signs

Working with the Cemeteries Forum, we have installed the new style “Welcome” signs at Duston, Dallington, Towcester Road, Kingsthorpe, Billing Road, and Great Houghton.

Everdon Outdoor Learning Centre

The new outdoor classroom is well underway with the groundwork being completed mid-October. The prefabricated wooden classroom is expected to be delivered mid-November and will be erected by the qualified Park Rangers with the assistance of volunteers.

New security gates have also been installed at the front and to the side of the Centre that are in keeping with the character of (former school) building.

Each year the Centre organises a Christmas Event for the children from the local villages. So popular is this event, all the tickets have now been sold.

We've had some very positive feedback about our GCSE River Study Days. Two of the secondary schools we work with have already rebooked for next year and we have had enquiries from another two schools for those sessions. The Centre is proactively promoting the River Study Days to encourage other schools to participate.

The Centre will be looking to hold some special events in 2024, as this year will mark 50 years of the Centre offering its services to schools and groups.

Brixworth Country Park & the Brampton Valley Way

We were approached by Fermyn Woods Contemporary Art (FWCA) about providing space for an art installation, as part of a two-year project exploring “xylophobia” (an irrational fear of wooded areas). The exhibition called ‘Ways of Knowing’ developed following meetings with the FWCA director James Steventon and guest curator Yasmin Canvin. We agreed to host the artwork throughout the park as a temporary attraction that would elicit new responses from visitors about their experiences in open spaces, parks, and woodlands.

The exhibition ran 19 August 2023 – 31 October 2023. It had a varied response from new and returning visitors, all offering a unique perspective on art and the natural world they enjoy visiting. Without any cost to the Council (as an Arts Council England funded project), this has been an educational activity for the park’s team and showcases how our parks can interact with our residents in new ways.

With a large following on Instagram FWCA have showcased the park on their page with multiple photos and text that has resulted in many ‘likes’ of their posts, and an increase in followers of our social media accounts.

Swimcube is a privately run business within Brixworth Country Park that helps people improve their swimming techniques. This year they introduced open water swimming on Pitsford Reservoir, which has proven to be very successful. This additional activity managed by Swimcube has significantly raised the profile of the Country Park nationally on their social media. This in turn should increase the number of visitors to the Country Park.

Daventry Country Park & Borough Hill

At Borough Hill we have been working with a company called Cummins, which has a large plant in Daventry, to finish off a fully sponsored tree planting project. Together, we are developing a grounds maintenance plan that will also include the installation of park benches and picnic benches in areas where visitors can relax and enjoy the wonderful surroundings the park has to offer. Initial feedback has been positive, and many of the regular visitors are excited about the plans.

At Daventry Country Park, the WNC LIVE Team (adults with learning disabilities) now meet weekly, as they have taken on the maintenance of the sensory garden and are looking to plant more sensory focused plants that will have a variety of colours and scents. They also help with litter picking and other horticultural tasks around the park.

The Community Payback Team continue to be a valuable resource with the maintenance of such a large country park. This month, they have used their skills to help the Park Rangers to build a shelter at the rear of the Rainsborough Centre.

The Open water swimming and paddle boarding has finished for the 2023 season having been, again, very successful. Northamptonshire Sport will continue to operate the open water swimming sessions in 2024, and we are looking at further opportunities for non-powered water sports on the lake.

The Racecourse

Students from Bosworth College attend the Racecourse on a Thursday after college to carry out tasks within the Garden in the Park, as part of their Duke of Edinburgh Awards. Next year, some of the produce will be donated to St David’s Church Food Bank.

The Friends of the Racecourse have been busy over a number of Sundays planting daffodil bulbs near the newly refurbished dragon mound. These should look lovely come spring.

Bradlaugh Fields

October-November is the time of year that the Park Ranger and Idverde update the Green Flag Management Plan and Ranger Report in preparation for submission at the end of January 2024, ready for next year's full judging visit.

WNC's LIVE Team now run the Barn Cafe four days a week, Monday to Thursday and the Friends of Bradlaugh Barn run it from Friday to Sunday. This partnership works well and has been very much welcomed by members of the community. Bradlaugh Barn Café is being promoted as a Warm Space with its new opening hours in place.

WNC's LIVE Team also supports us with a gardening group once a week, which helps in coaching the clients with outdoor skills whilst at the same time having fun.

On Wednesday afternoons, the Eco Council, which is a group from Northampton School for Girls, helps us carry out tasks within the Orchard. This placement gives them outdoor experience and helps them with their own Green Flag Award (school status).

Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS)

DEFRA has appointed West Northamptonshire Council as the responsible authority to produce a Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) for West Northamptonshire.

Interviews have started for the post of Nature Recovery Strategy officer. We hope to have a positive outcome to this process and have an officer in post in the coming months.

Tree Strategy

The Tree Consultants that have been tasked with the development of a West Northamptonshire Council Tree Strategy are making good progress, as they continue to consult with numerous stakeholders. The Consultants have a target of producing a draft strategy for Cabinet by May 2024. Work on recruiting a permanent tree officer is also underway.

Climate Strategies

Three strategies are in various stages of progress to support the Council's achievement of net zero by 2030:

- ***Estate Climate Strategy:*** Work is completed, and the strategy was presented to Cabinet and approved on November 14th. It includes an understanding of emissions the Council is responsible for and a range of measures to address these.
In the light of the Council's financial challenges, assessment of potential for photovoltaic (solar cell) production of electricity is being accelerated. The Council is working with Clear Futures to prepare the business case for this.
- ***Construction & Maintenance Climate Strategy:*** Work is completed, and the strategy was presented to Cabinet and approved on November 14th. The net zero in construction strategy has been split into two main parts (a) the strategy itself and (b) practical operating procedures for staff to implement in concept, design, and delivery of construction projects.

- **Fleet Climate Strategy:** We have now secured the support of a Project manager from the Transformation team. They will work closely with the Fleet management and lead on the development of the strategy. To support this the project brief has been reviewed and approved.

All three Strategies seek to address scope 1, 2, and 3 emissions relevant to their functional scope.

The Estate Climate Strategy will be expected to resolve any emissions which cannot be mitigated within the other Strategies. Where possible such offsetting will also secure other benefits, such as enhanced biodiversity and flood risk mitigation. This work is thus complementary to work on the Tree Policy & Strategy and the Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

Flood & Water Service

The Council has recently appointed RSK Binnies as a 'turnkey' interim solution to support its response to statutory consultation as lead local flood authority, to provide additional capacity to deliver capital grant funded projects, and provide other technical services, whilst the Council recruits to its flood team.

LLFA consultations - we have reduced the backlog of statutory consultation responses and since Binnies appointment ensured that we meet the 21 days response deadline. The team are working with planning colleagues to ensure that all applications are dealt with promptly and key strategic applications are robustly assessed to ensure development does not increase the risk of flooding.

We have made an interim appointment of the Bedford Drainage Board to support the Council's assessment and consent of outfalls into ordinary watercourses. This arrangement comes to an end in April 2024. In the meantime, the team are developing policy which will come before Members for approval to introduce our own byelaws.

Proposals have been prepared for applications for national flood management funding available from DEFRA. There will be two applications (a) one relating to Deanshanger and (b) Far Cotton. The Far Cotton application will look to improve drainage and water run-off into natural solutions and working with local schools to reduce surface run off.

The team are addressing flood risks issues at Tanfield Lane by clearing watercourses neighbouring Bedford Road and ensuring culverts and headwalls are maintained and clear of obstructions.

Transport & Associate Facilities

West Northants Parking Places Order - Work has begun on creating a single order regulating all WNC car parks in a clear and consistent fashion.

Parking App – New fibre lines have been ordered for the ANPR car parks. Once in place this will allow us to launch a parking 'app' allowing customers to pre-register vehicles and payment methods so they can just enter and exit without having to stop to pay.

Pay by Phone – Another payment option to allow customers choice and flexibility when parking is the ability to pay by phone. Work is currently underway with colleagues managing the on-street parking to introduce pay by phone across the entire parking portfolio. Pay by phone would see a new cashless payment option for on-street parking which is currently restricted to coin only as well as offering an additional payment option for off-street parking alongside, coin, cash and contactless that are already in place. Pay by phone also offers a

degree of flexibility by sending reminders of a parking period that is due to expire and an option to extend a stay.

Northampton BID parking offer – The council recently launched a parking offer to support the lower paid employees from Town Centre BID member companies using parking spaces which otherwise are typically not used (the upper levels of St Michael's MSCP). The offer provides a 20% reduction in parking charges once a customer has signed up to the scheme.

Country parks ANPR parking – Work continues into providing the new ANPR parking solution at Brixworth and Daventry Country Parks. This will provide increased reliability and flexibility to users at the Country Park, allowing multiple payment options as well as allowing the Council to electronically offer parking concessions as it sees fit. Obtaining the necessary Internet connections has proved challenging, particularly at Daventry, where there is also a power supply issue.

EV changing infrastructure – The Council continues to work on a concession contract to deliver large-scale EV charging infrastructure on car parks and roads it controls, and car parks of any partners who wish to participate. £3.3m of Government funding received or provisionally allocated will increase the range of range points which can be provided. The Council, like many other Councils, is facing issues with recruitment for EV related roles; we have found a solution which has been approved by the funder and we are currently finalising the implementation with the support of HR.

Drone technology and innovation – The Council is looking into the use of drone technology to support several service areas in dealing with issues such as fly tipping, property maintenance, and event management. Drone technology has grown significantly over the last few years and can provide a natural extension to the fixed camera CCTV network already in place. Drone-mounted cameras can, for example, help detect roof faults where it would be expensive and potentially risky to use people.

Bus shelter advertising and maintenance contract – The Council will shortly be inviting tenders for a contract to provide bus shelter maintenance funded by advertising. It is intended that the new contract will include shelters across the whole of West Northants. It would provide some upgraded shelters whilst also looking to achieve and support the Council's green ambitions with features such as photovoltaic and living roofs ('buzz stops'). The arrangement would also be designed to secure an income for the Council if the tenderers judge advertising income is sufficient to offer this. The contract would allow the Council to require the provision of new shelters, at its cost.

Changing Places toilet provision – The Council has now entered into an agreement with Fernie Fields Sports Club supporting the creation of a new Changing Places toilet at the club. This facility will extend the club's offer to the most disabled and physically challenged. The Council secured £40,000 in grant funding for this purpose and looks forward to this scheme opening before 31st March 2024.

Transport facilities services restructure – New job descriptions with supporting additional detail forms have been sent through for review and we await the outcome. Once confirmed we will draft the business case for review by via the Consultative forum in readiness to commence with the restructure consultation.

TRANSPORT & HIGHWAYS

A New Local Transport Plan

Work on a new Local Transport Plan for West Northamptonshire continues. This will be our key transport strategy document setting out a vision for the future of transport in West

Northamptonshire and include an updated set of policies and proposals to deliver this. Members and other stakeholders will be engaged throughout the development process, and the draft plan will be subject to a public consultation next summer. A round of stakeholder engagement was completed in the Autumn and a further round will take place in January to guide the emerging vision and objectives.

North West Relief Road

With work starting on site in April 2022, we're now 68% through the programme and still on track to be completed during Summer 2024, with the project team continuing to work hard to explore all opportunities to mitigate risks, delays, cost increases along with considering potential scheme savings to ensure delivery remains in budget.

Activities on site are ramping up to fully complete the earthwork elements which will enable the new main road section to start to become a reality. The first 650m of carriageway surfacing has been completed.

Additionally, the causeway section which introduces two new roundabouts at the Sandy Lane / Northampton Road and Brampton Lane / Welford Road junctions and a realigned link of Northampton Road between them is developing well. Close work with the local stakeholders continues including a bespoke site discussion with members of Church and Chapel Brampton Parish Council regarding future traffic management phasing.

Good progress has been made with Dallington Grange developers; Persimmon continues to fully understand dependencies and opportunities between each of our schemes and how best to maximise these within the wider programme.

As previously reported, a briefing to all Moulton Ward and Kingsthorpe North Ward Councillors will soon take place with regards to the North West Relief Road mitigation schemes and in particular the recommendations for meeting the Planning Condition associated with Boughton.

Kier continues to develop three other Conditioned schemes, with detail designs planned for completion prior to Christmas:

- Mitigation Scheme 2 J3 Harborough Rd / Vyse Rd
- Mitigation Scheme 3 J7 Harlestone Road / York Way / Sandy Lane Roundabout
- Mitigation Scheme 4 Harborough Road / Holly Lodge Drive junction

Northampton Growth Management Scheme

Work continues to review funding arrangements for the delivery of both schemes at the Queen Eleanor and Brackmills junctions on the A45, which would ideally see implementation start in April 2024 and April 2025 respectively. With decisions needing to be made around funding sources, it is proposed a Cabinet report will be presented to outline the delivery approach early in 2024.

In parallel, myself and Officers continue to liaise with local Parish Councils to inform them of scheme progress, meeting representatives of both Wootton and Hardingstone Parish Councils along with the Brackmills BID in-person to better explain the scheme, its delivery and provide opportunity for feedback, particularly regarding the traffic management required for such complex schemes. This was well received and all involved are committed to continuing engagement in this manner.

Liaison with National Highways continues to secure Technical Approval for the Queen Eleanor element, with Submission 8 currently under review.

Upton Adoptions

Further progress has been made in the period, with the area around Webb Drive, Clickers Place and Lacing Lane now adopted. Further work onsite continues, with the next phases of work being identified prior to Christmas and undertaken prior to the end of the financial year.

As ever, we work closely with Homes England, the developers and all local stakeholders (including Ward Members and the local MP) to ensure consideration is given whilst implementing all remaining work as swiftly as is reasonably possible.

Farthinghoe Bypass

With a debriefing on the Business Case work for key stakeholders now completed and a bypass deemed to not have a viable Benefits to Cost Ratio (BCR), alternative options are being explored to mitigate the concerns raised. These are currently being developed to explore and provide further feedback in the Spring to the parish council, local members and the local MP.

Northampton Public Realm / Developments

Successful collaborative working between the Highways and Regeneration teams has enabled Kier to progress many elements of the Abington Street / Fish Street public realm scheme. The approach taken by Kier Highways has been particularly proactive to the benefit of the Regeneration team and sees enabling work commencing this month and the meaningful scheme delivery onsite in late January 2024.

Active Travel

The 'Abington Area Active Travel Scheme' consultation report is now finalised, and I was briefed on 14th September. A further briefing was given to the relevant Ward Councillors on 13th October. The one hundred and seventy four page consultation report is now on the Active Travel Page of WNC website as well as a two page summary version. The scheme is now going into detailed design stage with a view to starting construction in June 2024. Active Travel England have indicated there may be a possibility of some additional funding to address some of the issues highlighted by the consultation feedback process. A decision is expected to be made this month by Active Travel England's change control board.

Transport – Buses & Rail

The public consultation on the interim bus policy closed on 12 November. This has been informed by our Bus Network Review and we aim to adopt the interim policy early in the new year. This clarifies our approach to supporting the local bus network. The Enhanced Partnership has a key role in directing expenditure to best effect to support and grow bus provision and met for the first time in October. In addition to the BSIP Plus grant we have already been allocated for 23/24 and 24/25 (£684k for each year), we have just been allocated a further £2.4m in 24/25. A focus for the next Partnership meeting in January will be to agree how some of this funding is allocated.

The additional bus funding next year comes from the Government's decision to reduce the scope of HS2. As part of these same announcements there was also a commitment to retain the £2 bus fare cap until the end of 2024. Funding has also been allocated to the A43 Phase 3 which was already in the Major Road Network programme, and we are confident this will be delivered subject to the Department for Transport being satisfied with its business case which continues to be progressed.

Over the summer the council responded to a consultation by train operating companies on proposals for changes to how train tickets are sold at stations in future. In late October it was announced that these proposals have now been withdrawn by the train operators following a significant consultation response and concerns at the impact on passengers.

Traffic Enforcement

Over the summer we were successful in our application to extend our existing powers to enable us to enforce Moving Traffic Offences, work is now ongoing to implement the sites that were included in the consultation that ended earlier this year. Other sites for enforcement are also being considered.

Highway Maintenance

The contract with Kier continues its journey of continual improvement to ensure we continue to receive positive feedback from members and residents alike. The annual plan process for 24/25 continues and we expect to have our first draft of schemes in the next few weeks.

We have managed to catch up following a good summer and are now fulfilling our timescales for repair effectively. We are looking to have an audit on all policies carried over from previous authorities and refreshing these where necessary. We also continue to look at using more data and member input to effectively deliver proactive maintenance across the authority.

Both the JCB Pothole Pro and additional thermal road repair machine are actively operating on our network. This new machinery has allowed us to achieve beyond just fixing defects when they become unsafe by tackling defect hot spots proactively. Over the winter as the number of defects increase there is likely to be a reduction in the level of proactive work as Kier ensure that the network remains safe for road users, however in the spring they will return to the more proactive approach that has proved to be successful this year. We are also using the contractual investment fund to provide greater information for FixMyStreet and new materials that will reduce time spent finding and fixing each defect as well as providing more transparency to the residents of WNC.

Overall, our highway maintenance programme continues to deliver for residents, but we appreciate there is work still to do and we are working collaboratively with Kier to achieve this.

WASTE MANAGEMENT SERVICES

Waste Collections

The refuse and recycling collections continue to perform at a good level with few complaints.

Garden Waste Subscriptions for 23/24 have now reached over 86,000 which is slightly more than predicted.

Household Waste Recycling Centres continue to operate with no issues; however, the visitor numbers have reached unprecedented levels between June and August 2023, seeing an additional 36,300 site users over the three months compared to the same period in 2022.

Various communications campaigns have progressed as follows:

- The Northampton food waste campaign (fully funded by a Public Health grant) to increase the number of residents using the separate food waste collection service and reduce the amount of food being disposed of with residual waste is progressing and information will be going out to residents directly very soon. New "tri" stickers which

stage “No Batteries, No Food Waste and No Recyclables” have been placed on all domestic residual bins across West Northamptonshire.

- The contamination campaign to improve the quality of recyclables collected in the co-mingled kerbside bin continues. Veolia are progressing with taking action when they find the wrong materials in the recycling bin. The Council launched a series of videos on social media to help people to use the right bin and dispel myths about what can be recycled. Links to these videos are available on the Council’s website.

A Resources and Waste Strategy for West Northamptonshire has been produced and was considered and approved by Cabinet earlier in November. Now approved, the text of the document will be reformatted and turned into an interesting and easy to read document which will include locally taken photographs and infographics. It will then be published on our website.

The project to set up the “Report It” element of the West Northants app was launched on 25 October. This has been widely promoted to all residents and will replace the Northampton app.

Arrangements for waste and recycling collections over Christmas and New Year have been finalised. All households who will have a change to their collections will receive a tag on their bin and the changes will also be advertised in the West Northants Life magazine which is distributed to all households. There will also be press releases and a social media campaign to highlight the changes. The garden waste service is suspended over Christmas and New Year as usual.

Litter and Street Cleansing

Crews continue to cleanse the public spaces in around West Northants. We collaborated with National Highways to operate night-time litter picking of the A43 in the south area again during October when the road was closed and arranged for a separate closure to sweep the road and clear the central reservations.

Fly-tipping is still an issue in hotspots and colleagues continue to liaise with the Environmental Protection Team to reduce this anti-social behaviour. The Waste team, Regulatory Services and the Communities team are working together to develop local projects to help clean up local areas and encourage residents to take pride in their area and maintain the cleanliness. We are also applying to DEFRA for a grant to help support education and enforcement activity.

Using a grant received from Keep Britain Tidy and The Chewing Gum Task Force, the piece of gum and graffiti removal equipment which can be towed around West Northamptonshire has now been put into use. So far it has been used to remove graffiti in Brackley and Daventry and to remove gum in Daventry, with gum removal in Towcester and Brackley to be completed shortly. After the gum has been removed, preventative signage will be erected. Gold Street in Northampton has been cleaned of gum and the signs erected.

We continue to liaise with the Northants Litter Wombles to provide sacks and collect the waste from community litter picks. I attended a meeting with the Wombles and local MPs to discuss how to coordinate and support our cleansing activities in Westminster on 24th October 2023.

Grounds Maintenance

The warm and wet weather has created some lush grass growth throughout the summer months when we would have expected the grass to stop growing. Unfortunately, the wet summer has also hindered the application of weed treatment but continue to work where possible (i.e., dry days). Both operations will continue until the grass and weeds stop growing.

In the meantime, preparations for winter works such hedge, bush and tree maintenance are ongoing.

Grass cutting and grounds maintenance work has been taking place throughout the spring and summer months and will wind down as we head into autumn when winter maintenance will commence. In Daventry, the planted areas around the Arc Cinema have been attended to and replanted in some cases.

Councillor Phil Larratt

Cabinet Member for Environment, Transport, Highways and Waste Services

30th November 2023

COMMUNITY SAFETY & ENGAGEMENT

Safer Communities

Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB)

Our Anti-Social behaviour team continue to offer a comprehensive service to the residents of West Northants, together with our Police colleagues and external partners.

We are monitoring an individual on a Criminal Behaviour Order (CBO), as well as enforcing any breaches of the others now in place, we have two CBOs on persons under 18 which is testament to the hard work put in by the ASB case manager and is being used as an example of good practice by other interested parties.

Since June the ASB Team have issued 10 Community Protection Warning Letters, 3 Community Protection Notices.

The ASB team are leading the tasking meetings and multi-agency response to Op Fragment which is a targeted Police Operation on Southbrook in Daventry to reduce Anti-Social Behaviour and Crime.

Domestic Abuse (DA) and Sexual Violence

We continue to progress the delivery of our Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Strategy in response to the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, with formal commissioning of accommodation services commencing shortly. This process will be completed in partnership between the CSP and housing colleagues with the focus being on delivering our duties under the Act.

The Domestic Abuse Commissioners Office visited West Northants on 6th November. Our Regional Lead was able to meet with key partners to understand the local offer and structure. Feedback reported that there is a tremendous passion for domestic abuse locally and partners were clearly committed to achieving the best outcomes for victims in West Northamptonshire. West Northamptonshire has been selected as one of twenty Local Authorities taking part in a National Evaluation of domestic abuse support in safe accommodation. The evaluation is intended to provide insight for DLUHC and other stakeholders, including local authorities, and to provide evidence on what best meets the needs of victims.

We have awarded NDAS a one off grant to employ three term time children's domestic abuse workers and a team leader. This means that children's waiting lists can re-open after being closed for a year.

We continue to progress the working group to support domestic abuse victims with insecure immigration status, and we hope to bring a proposal to the domestic abuse and sexual violence board at an extraordinary meeting shortly. as well as exploring how best to seek the voice of the victim in shaping services and influencing strategy.

There is a significant focus on sexual violence with partnership work being carried out to link the domestic abuse and sexual violence strategy, with the statutory requirements under the Serious Violence Duty. We aim to work collaboratively to pool expertise and resources to agree and map interventions and programmes that will reduce sexual violence.

16 Days of Activism aimed at preventing Violence Against Women and Girls is upon us, starting with the Reclaim the Night march. This year, with the support of partners, we are reaching wider and further with stands in children's centres, libraries and community centres in both rural and urban settings. We are working with the University, Northampton College and the Daventry Teen clinic to name just a few, as well as a full and comprehensive social media campaign.

Serious Violence and Knife Crime

As part of the implementation of the serious violence duty a Partnership Communications and Marketing Officer has come into post, to join the Partnership Serious Violence Reduction Coordinator. Both roles are being hosted by West Northants Council.

The Schools Contextual Safeguarding Forum has now been taken over by the Serious Violence Reduction Co-ordinator. One meeting for the Northampton schools and another for the Daventry and South Northants locality schools, these meetings have seen good engagement from the schools.

The Youth Violence funding, £94,000 (jointly funded by West Northants Council and the OPFCC) has now been awarded to 11 organisations delivering 10 different projects across the West. The SVR Co-ordinator will be making contact and visiting each project, to monitor the delivery of the intended outcomes.

Support was given to the Police County Lines Development Officer during County Lines Intensification Week raising awareness about county lines and signs a child maybe being exploited and how to report. This was done in Northampton at the train station with staff and commuters, banks and independent mobile phone shops. In total over 600 leaflets and 600 cards were given out. In addition 10 banks, 15 mobile phone shops and the food concessions on the Market were visited to raise awareness and give information leaflets to staff. All were very receptive and welcomed the information. Arrangements are being made for a further Week of Action across the West later in the year.

Serious Violence Community & Partner Event was held at the Guildhall on 7 November.

Public Spaces Protection Orders

A number of PSPOs are due for renewal:

- Consultation has taken place on the Northampton town wide PSPO, with strong support for the amendments and renewal; the new Order will be considered by Cabinet in December.
- Consultation has also taken place for the renewal of the Daventry-wide PSPO.
- Consultation on the proposed Emporium Way PSPO ended in October with a majority positive response and the report was brought to cabinet for decision on 14 November.

- Additionally, three Northampton town centre based PSPO renewals are in progress: Marble Arch, Jeyes Jetty and Dunster Street. Decisions as to whether or not to renew each of the orders will also be made in November.

Neighbourhood Working

Safer Streets Bellinge & Blackthorn - Awaiting installation date for the upgraded LED lighting in 7 underpasses in and around Blackthorn. Awaiting BT to undertake the fibre upgrade works so 3 CCTV cameras can be installed in Bellinge and 3 in Blackthorn. Youth provision work in Bellinge has now finished. There were some excellent successes. Due to the slow start and mainly outreach sessions to start, the funding saved on venue hire was used to 'reward' the young people by giving an afternoon out to eat and watch a basketball match in which Andre Arisol, who they had already met at a youth event, was playing. This has resulted in some highly motivated young people.

Safer Streets – Town Centre; Final projects under Safer Streets 4 are now complete. This includes installation of 2 new CCTV cameras in hotspot crime and ASB areas, one camera upgrade to support late night surveillance, improvements to taxi rank lighting and repositioning of a streetlamp, lighting enhancements through Becket's Park on the Safer Route and the installation of a series of bollard covers promoting safety campaigns and services such as the Safer Nights Out Van.

Safer Streets Kings Heath- New CCTV Camera has now been installed with two others being upgraded in the area. All cameras are now connected to the CCTV control room in the town centre. The new camera covers the flats facing the park on the North Oval. This area has been a long-term hot spot for crime and anti-social behaviour over the years and didn't have CCTV coverage.

Purple Flag submission completed following a small working group set up and review and input from the wider Town Centre Task Group. The Purple Flag overnight assessment takes place on 10 November, including a tour of the centre and presentations on the work done to make Northampton's town centre a safe and vibrant place.

In September, the Castle community First multi agency group agreed to submit an application for funding to improve planters off the Wellingborough Rd which attract street drinking and other ASB and Crime. The funding was granted in November and quotes are being sought for the works.

In Daventry we have been working with Northants Police, Futures Housing and Daventry Town Council to improve the look and feel of the Southbrook area, with a community clean-up recently completed. Funding has been agreed for improvements to lighting of subways linking the Southbrook to the town centre and for the installation of an additional CCTV camera on Hood Road. Plans are being drawn up for bike barriers to address concerns around use of electric cycles on the footpath which runs past the school.

Stronger Communities

Southbrook Community Centre, Daventry - West Northamptonshire Council continues to support the trustee board with advice and guidance in carrying out their aims and objectives. Their Community Food Larder has just celebrated its first birthday and every week continues to see over 70 residents. West Northants Customer Services also attend regularly along with welfare and debt advice advisors.

The VCSE lead has approached the Chief Officer at Daventry Town Council to help secure funding for the community centre in its role in improving community connection and cohesion and in pursuit of the anti-poverty strategy on Southbrook. The board are also exploring the possibility of running 4 community events a year where all the VCSE organisations can show case what they are doing and look at better ways to work together. This is in support of the LAP priorities within this area. Southbrook is also running a youth club. A Community Garden Club has started and operates every Sunday at 12pm, this is open to all residents who can plant flowers, get involved with craft activities, all ages and experience are welcome. At present they are also running a community campaign to help provide a better environment for all users by sponsoring a chair to either dedicate to a person, a business or community organisation to refurbish the centre's assets.

Welcoming Spaces

Following the much-used warm spaces initiative that launched in West Northamptonshire last winter, West Northamptonshire Council are looking to partner with community and voluntary organisations to launch them again as part of a partnership approach to offer welcoming spaces in communities.

The welcoming spaces aim to tackle loneliness and social isolation by providing residents with a local place to go where they can meet new people, socialise, and access support services whilst being in the warm, and all within reach of where they live. Each of the spaces will choose what they wish to offer, from cups of tea to knit and natters or board game activities for example. The last programme saw 96 community and voluntary partners sign up to be a warm space, which saw over 52,932 attendees visit between January to March 2023 putting a spotlight on how important this support is for residents.

Since the call out went to partners we have had 76 re-register for the Welcoming Spaces Online Directory, all of which has received the comms toolkit for promotional purposes.

The launch of the Welcoming Spaces Grant Funding has received 17 applications and 11 approved so far.

Towcester Library in the Rural East pilot of prevention and wellbeing has a 6-month pilot of WNC Employment Service & Community Law drop-in sessions and will be reviewed March 2024.

The Community Training Partnership courses are continually promoted to Staff and Volunteers across all Welcoming Spaces. Also, Mental Health First Aid courses / Suicide Prevention courses promoted to Staff and Volunteers across Welcoming Spaces.

WNC Steering Group up and running with 34 partners to drive wrap around support provision. There will also be further WNC communications on Welcoming Spaces Online Directory/Grant Funding alongside the Winter Wellbeing Campaign in November 2023.

Outreach engagement - in conversations with WNC Adult Social Care Team, WNC Customer Services, WNC Public Health Checks/Flu & Covid Vaccinations, GP Social Prescribers, Northants Fire & Rescue, Northamptonshire MIND, Northants Police, NHFT IAPT Talking Therapies, Northants ACRE, Northants Age UK.

Extension of Chatty Cafe Scheme to reduce isolation and loneliness - 25 out of 50 have been registered so far, in partnership with Action for Happiness.

30,000 Cost of Living Support Cards to be purchased and distributed to frontline organisations as per last year, to include NHFT's 24-hour mental health number due to the high amount of referrals of mental health last year.

The Community Development Team will also support the roll out of the WS programme across all LAPS.

Well Northants

Work continues as planned in the well communities, Community Development workers are active in Kings Heath, St David's (Kingsthorpe), Blackthorn and Southbrook in Daventry. And also with inclusion groups (sex workers and Gypsy Romany Travellers).

We have also successfully recruited a new Community Development worker who will join us in mid-November to work in Semilong and Briar Hill.

Following on from the additional engagement that we reported last quarter all locality areas have now got a detailed action plan in place, based on needs and opportunities identified by the local community.

Our work is moving towards delivery and some examples are below, a successful partnership with colleagues in adult learning has enabled us to deliver creative wellbeing sessions, building on and strengthening community assets:

Kings Heath - together with the wellbeing walk group. The group collected items from nature as they walked and used then to create collage. The group meet for coffee after their walk this provides the ideal opportunity for being creative and developing strong friendships that will sustain the group in the longer term.



St Davids - creative craft session have been held in Bradlaugh barn on Friday term times since September. Attendance was slow to start but is growing weekly and is drawing people together and becoming the purpose for the visit to Bradlaugh barn.

Community development workers have been attending LAP meetings in their areas to ensure community insight.

School Engagement

Young Citizens 2023/24 is underway and the first events took place on 18th and 19th October 2023, with 320 pupils from schools across the rural parts of West Northants attending workshops at Yardley Chase Cadet Centre; the second series of events will take place on the 6th and 7th February 2024 at the Deco Theatre in Northampton. The Northampton event has

now been able to expand its capacity to double the number of students that can attend. The event in Northampton will now be hosting over 700 students across two days. The scheme promotes healthy, safe and strong individuals and communities. Participants become better citizens, are safer in their schools and communities, online and on the roads; are better equipped to make choices and understand the consequences of their actions; better informed of how to react in an emergency and have a better understanding of and relationship with the range of agencies which operate in West Northants. The events have been set to support both the Hate Crime Awareness Week and the Internet safety week; with both subjects playing a key part in the events.

Not all schools are able to attend Young Citizens, so we commissioned Amplitude Media to produce a series of animations which cover this range of subjects. The project has been launched to schools, youth groups and professionals working with young people. Feedback from partners has resulted in additional modules being added, with further ones being considered: Violence Against Women & Girls (VAWG) has been added as a subject, following the work commissioned by the county school's challenge.

Working with WNC Youth Forum, projects to support school engagement have been developed in partnership with both NGAGE and Re-solve. The aim is to develop a new, adaptable and interactive workshop for both primary and secondary schools. We are currently working with some schools including Weston Favell and Sponne to test the new workshops so far. The long-term aim is to not only develop an effective workshop, but to also add substance misuse as a workshop to the animation programme.

University Student Safety Talks

Through September and October The Community Safety Team supported four University Safety talk events. Each event hosted several sessions for new residential students to teach them about safety on and off campus. The team hosted a stand at the events offering free personal safety items and advice.

Community Forums

The Diverse Forum - has been working to support the police and local partners to further raise awareness around issues relating to hate crime; the communication and planning helped support the work the police delivered during the awareness week. Support around employment continues through projects being driven by Diversiti UK; they have a new project that looks to help diverse community groups work on their skills regarding job applications and interviews. The forum also helps to continue to support flag raising events, along with providing connections between new and existing groups across the west, as they look to branch out and grow.

Youth Forum – On Sunday 17 September, the youth forum took part in Heritage Open Days by providing short tours at the Guildhall. Once again, they received excellent feedback from visitors who took their tours.

Youth Summit – took place on 10th of November, the forum members took part in Youth summit and delivered a workshop to other young people who attended the event. The workshop theme was around substance misuse and supporting development work that has been mentioned previously with NGAGE and Re-Solve. Feedback of the event will be provided during the December Forum

The annual UK Parliament Week activity led by our Youth Forum took place on 23 November this year. The 'Cake and Debate' event saw local MP, Police representative and Youth Work expert join in a panel Q&A on the topic of Serious Violence. Young people from across Northamptonshire were invited to attend the event and submit their questions.

The Women's Forum – arrangements are already underway for next year's International Women's Day and Kier are keen to be involved and sponsor one of the Inspirational Women awards again. The first Women's Business Networking meeting, held jointly with the Business and IP Centre Northamptonshire was well attended with 25 attendees either in person or on Teams.

The Daventry & Disabled & Proud Support Group continue to meet monthly with 40+ people attending the Saxon Suite at Daventry Leisure Centre. Partnering with Daventry Leisure Centre who has provided the room hire for free in the first 6 months. Christmas event happening on the 20 December in the sports hall with a wide variety of promotional stand holders.

The Disabled Peoples Forum took place on the 27 October and included discussions on the Interim Bus Policy/Disabled People's Bus Pass, International Day of People with Disabilities (IDPWD) event, Julia Smith talked about the revised WNC Local Offer website, a service for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities. EKFB, the principal contractor for HS2 collaboration prospects was represented by Victoria Hingley offering support for community engagement, especially in schools.

The LGBTQ & Allies Forum have joined up with the North Northants LGBTQ forum for a joint social meeting in November, ahead of Xmas, giving members a chance to network and make new connections. The forum are also busy planning the annual World AIDs Day civic event on 1 December, taking place in the Guildhall Courtyard. The event will see the return of Northampton Integrated Sexual Health Clinic offering free testing services, and the option to pick up a Red ribbon from National AIDs Trust for a small donation.

Community Events

International Men's Day (IMD)-Male Role Model Awards took place on 17th of November, at the museum WNC hosted its annual Male Role Model Awards as part of IMD.

World AIDS Day 1 December, the civic event will take place in the Guildhall Courtyard followed by refreshments and free testing service by Northampton Integrated Sexual Health team.

International Day of People with Disabilities (IDPWD) event on Friday 1st December 1-3pm at Fernie Fields Sport & Social Club, Fernie Field, Moulton will include Adapt Ability – Ava Loughton presenting the Omeo wheelchair including videos of day to day activities, Born 2 Perform performances and speeches about living with a disability, organisation promo stands by Sport4Fitness, Northamptonshire Mind, and Moulton Leisure Centre's Hydrotherapy session. There will be refreshments, representation from Paul Meadows of SEND 4 Dad and Gary Spratt living with a disability. In the lead up to the event we will be promoting WNC Disability Forum, making a pledge/awareness campaigns and promotion of Derrigate accessibility programmes/events.

Resettlement Schemes

Homes for Ukraine

There are currently around 450 people living in a mix of hosted and independent living accommodation across West Northamptonshire.

We are paying a £200 uplift per month to the thank you payment from November to March inclusive, to help with increased energy payments over the winter, following the success of last year's additional payments to support sponsors.

Afghan Resettlement

We have several families in temporary accommodation while we get properties ready for them and help them to secure settled accommodation. The resettlement team continues to support these families during the next step of their lives in the UK and West Northants. As of w/c 8th Nov, we have assistance from a former resident of one of our hotels, acting as part of the government's national *Afghan Taskforce*, to speak with some of the families where we are seeing some resistance, and we need more cooperation.

Asylum

We have seen one contingency hotel (Westone Manor) close recently and the government has announced a closure programme over the coming months, to include a second contingency hotel in our area by the end of November. We have asked our Strategic Migration Partnership (SMP) to stand up a multi-agency partner meeting prior to the closing and we are liaising with the Parish Council to make sure that those people working in the hotel have the latest updates. We are expecting those eligible to have their claims assessed under the streamlined process to start coming through now on a more regular basis, so we are looking at planning how we manage this – this is a national priority.

Voluntary and Community Sector and Grants

Two community funding grant schemes have recently closed:

- **Youth Violence & Knife Crime Grants:** in partnership with the Northamptonshire Office of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (OPFCC) we have awarded over £94K to mitigate violence and knife crime in West Northants; and
- **Creation Of New Volunteering Opportunities Through Social Action Projects:** funded via the UKSPF, we have awarded over £10K in the first round to increase the numbers of volunteers in community or voluntary organisations within West Northants. A second funding round is planned later in the year.

The project to commission Welfare and Information Advice Services, linking with the work being undertaken by the Debt and Money Advice Transformation Project, is ongoing. An options appraisal has been drafted and discussed with key internal stakeholders and a timeline has been established with the Procurement Team. Ahead of commencing any procurement process we are engaging with current service providers to discuss current provision, any gaps in delivery and the future outlook of the service.

In addition to the above there are also two other workstreams to mention one being Community Transport provision across West Northamptonshire and the other looking at Local Infrastructure Contract commissioning. Both projects are progressing well with some very useful internal and external stakeholder engagement events have taken place in recent months. We are aiming and proactively working towards an April 2024 implementation date for these workstreams. As you will see from the above-mentioned community grants scheme our focus has now turned towards community transport inclusive of UKSPF and Rural England Fund monies. In the

coming weeks, we will be revisiting our Local infrastructure partners to update them on the progress we have made in regard to our internal stakeholder scoping sessions around understanding our priority areas and how we would like our Local Infrastructure Organisations to operate/priorities moving forwards. At this session we will also be looking to gain some first thought feedback from partners as to whether our suggestions we are proposing are viable and/or realistic for them to achieve. Of course, further engagement sessions will take place with our local infrastructure partners over the coming months.

REGULATORY SERVICES

Building Control

The two Assistant Building Control Officers in the team have now commenced their professional training and have begun carrying out site visits. The team are also working through the implications of recent changes in legislation. These changes, which bring forward the recommendations of the Hackett report, include the creation of a central Building Safety Regulator who will deal with building control in higher –risk buildings. In addition there are changes to processes and the introduction of some new enforcement tools.

Health Protection

The team are working hard to carry out food hygiene inspections of businesses in the area. They have held some focus days when the whole team have come together to carry out coordinated visits in different parts of the area.

Environmental Protection

The team are working hard to make progress with in dealing with air quality. The air quality sensors which were funded by the DEFRA grant have been deployed. The integration with the traffic management system is now live and the team are reviewing the air quality measurements to establish at what criteria traffic management changes will be made. We have also agreed the use of the existing highways variable message signs (VMS) network that can be used to give messages to vehicle users and the wider public and are discussing what messages will be used and when.

Environmental Crime

MSc Students from the University of Northampton have worked with the team to consider some of the key challenges caused by fly-tipping. The students undertook research into attitudes and cultural influences on fly-tipping and produced some useful findings which will be used to inform future communications from the team.

Consultation is taking place on proposals for a policy to restrict the times that waste bins and bags can be presented for collection in Northampton town centre. This consultation will inform the development of the policy which will be brought to Cabinet in Spring 2024.

The monitored CCTV cameras are starting to yield some useful information and the team are also working with colleagues to examine how permanent town centre CCTV can be used to assist in evidence gathering.

Trading Standards

Colleagues from the trading standards team have been working closely with public health, education, waste and communications colleagues to progress a number of work streams on vapes.

A joint response has been submitted to the Government consultation creating a smokefree generation. The consultation closes 6th December, we would encourage all elected members to take part in consultation by providing a response.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/creating-a-smokefree-generation-and-tackling-youth-vaping>

Vaping Summit - a multi-agency vaping summit will take place on 5 February, further details will be communicated closer to the time.

The team continue to carry out test purchasing which is providing useful insights into the extent of underage sales of vapes across the area. They have also completed a number of seizures of illegal vapes in joint operations with the police.

Work continues to deal with a number of farm animal welfare cases.

Great work instigated by one of our Trading Standards apprentices resulted in the national recall of unsafe Halloween ghost characters.

Licensing

The licensing committee will meet again in January 2024 to consider the plans for the new West Northants Taxi Policy.

Councillor David Smith

Cabinet Member for Community Safety & Engagement and Regulatory Services

30th November 2023

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Hosting the South East Midlands Local Enterprise Partnership (SEMLEP) Activities

We were successful in our expression of interest to take on hosting the SEMLEP Activities on behalf of the other Local Authorities in the South East Midlands, with services including the Growth Hub and the Careers Hub. This is a great opportunity and puts West Northamptonshire Council in the role of hosting regional activities and will deliver closer working relationships with the Hubs, as well as stronger liaison with the 5 neighbouring authorities.

We were extremely keen to secure this role, as the largest unitary authority in the area with the highest number of residents and employers. It was of particular importance to safeguard the SEMLEP functions and maintain their momentum in terms of delivering impactful initiatives benefiting the regional economy.

We are also involved with the wider Oxford-Cambridge Pan-Regional Partnership activities and the Central Area Growth Board. Hosting the SEMLEP activities showcases our dedication to driving economic growth in this area ..

UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) and Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF)

We have £5.4M of UKSPF and £1.3M of REPF Funding for building pride place and increasing life chances. Projects continue to progress, such as:

- The launch and award of numerous VCSE grants to West Northants organisations
- The appointment of a Community Developer leading on our partnership with British Cycling Ltd
- Dedicated business support through the “Build Your Business” scheme delivered by the BIPC
- Decarbonisation support through the “Towards a Net Zero West Northants” project delivered by the Sustainability Team
- Support for employers to offer apprenticeships, work experience and grow their workforce delivered by the South East Midlands Careers Hub
- Launch of the Vulcan Creatives scheme to enable potential entrepreneurs to establish dynamic, creative businesses in West Northants

Full details of live and upcoming initiatives can be found on our website – www.westnorthants.gov.uk/funding

External stakeholders and partners were engaged to hear about the progress to date and to input into future activities UKSPF can be utilised to deliver. This included input into two upcoming tender opportunities to manage and deliver funding for businesses across two important areas – a £325,000 Decarbonisation tender and a £325,000 Business Growth tender.

Both projects will include expert business advice as well as match-funded grants (£300,000 of grants additional to the tender values).

Ongoing work has taken place to inform the People & Skills funding of £1.5m for 2024/25 to upskill the local labour market, address economic inactivity and address the barrier that poor health can impact on employment. In partnership with Public Health, a workshop explored this funding and potentially future funding to consider how the funds can have valuable impact in line with existing resources in the area, Local Area Partnerships and the work of the Welcome Spaces and Customer Services hubs. It is intended that once a definitive list of needs and desired outcomes is compiled, a call out for projects to address these will be launched.

It is anticipated that capital grants through the REPF will be soon be launched to address two specific remits within eligible rural areas – Transportation & Rural Business Growth.

Working in partnership with colleagues in Community Safety, Engagement & Resettlement and Highways, the project is being finalised to align with the wider community grants framework and alignment with the Local Transport Plan. It is intended that grants will be offered to VCSE organisations, along with UKSPF funding, enabling organisations to offer transport options to address specific needs within South Northamptonshire and Daventry.

For the Rural Business Growth funding, the scheme will mirror the former LEADER funding to provide rural businesses with capital funding to realise their growth potential. The grants will be match-funded and businesses will be able to work with an external delivery partner to understand the process to secure the funding and utilise it to have the greatest level of benefit for their organisation.

Place Vision

The Vision has been presented at numerous internal and external stakeholder forums and meetings to date. It has been received extremely well and continues to be amended as more input is provided. Working closely with the Communications Team, the Economic Growth and Inward Investment Team are intending to deliver innovative engagement to source input and development of the Place Vision. This will include utilising different approaches to reach different audiences and will be implemented over the coming months. The Team are also exploring a variety of options to secure internal input from staff and Councillors which will be delivered in a phased approach to ensure the Place Vision is updated as input is provided and is a true reflection of a united vision for all.

As the Economic Growth & Inward Investment service continue to build upon this important document, it will become part of the strategy to attract inward investment into the area, as well as part of the story local people will tell when selling West Northamptonshire as a destination for all.

Supporting Local Businesses

The EGII Team partnered with SEMLEP's Growth Hub and the Careers Hub on Thursday, 7 September at the Northamptonshire Business Exhibition. They were inundated with businesses wanting to find out about the vast business support on offer as well as taking the opportunity to enter into a raffle to win a luxury hamper of local produce kindly donated by businesses in West Northamptonshire. The team received fantastic engagement from businesses wanting to donate items for their hamper allowing them to promote local suppliers, raise awareness of the local offer and create a marketing opportunity to shine a light on local shops and the area.

The winner of the hamper was Odette Mould, CEO of Harry's Rainbow (based in MK), they support children and young people in the Milton Keynes and surrounding areas, who have been bereaved of a parent or sibling. This event also provided the opportunity for Cllr Lister to speak to the businesses ahead of the Expo, informing them of our regeneration activities and upcoming funding opportunities.

The finalists for the Northamptonshire Chamber Business Awards were judged to select the winners, including for our two categories of "*West Northants Business of the Year*" and "*West Northants Sustainable Business of the Year*". Winners will be announced at an awards ceremony on 23 November, showcasing the best of Northamptonshire and providing an opportunity for the EGII Team to network and promote their free business support and upcoming funding.

Colleagues were invited to attend the exclusive 10 year celebration of MEPC running Silverstone Park at the Silverstone Museum. The event was a fantastic opportunity to network with stakeholders, partners and the occupiers of Silverstone Park. As a key partner, the EGII Team will continue to work with MEPC and promote Silverstone Park as a perfect location to invest and locate.

The EGII Team have made strong progress in building High Street revitalisation partnerships for Brackley and Towcester, between the town centre manager, High Street businesses, town councils and community organisations. Utilising S106 funding, this has meant that regular meetings are now being held to fully discuss and understand the key areas for improvements and how to raise awareness of all that our two market towns of Towcester and Brackley have to offer. Work will now focus on short-term actions and longer-term proposals for marketing the towns and providing focus on the town centres through events, activities and promotions. All with the aim of increasing footfall to support the many independent businesses and provide a vibrant town heart for the benefit of the wider communities.

The EGIIIT Team attended the WNSET (West Northamptonshire Social Enterprise Towns) Networking Event on 10th October at Delapre Abbey. The event provided an opportunity for local social enterprises to find out how to access the Northampton Social Enterprise Development Fund and to hear from the first grant recipients. The investment fund offers 2 types of investments – Start-Up and Build-it Up of between £1,000 - £5,000. The Social Investment Fund is funded by Northampton Forward as part of the Town's Fund and supported by West Northamptonshire Council as a community-driven initiative that aims to provide funding and support for local social entrepreneurs to maximise the impact of Northampton's diverse social enterprise sector.

The EGII Team continue to deliver activities to nurture business survival and realise business growth for all West Northants employers. The Team have been working closely with partners delivering initiatives such as the Federation of Small Businesses, the Universities of Northampton, Bedfordshire and Cranfield, BIPC, the Chamber of Commerce, Oxford Innovation and SEMLEP's Growth Hub. By working collaboratively, the ecosystem to enable employers to overcome barriers and develop sustainably within this area can be achieved. As the team continues to expand, working collaboratively to deliver impactful interventions to benefit local employers will be a priority.

Inward Investment

Attracting inward investment and supporting employers to expand and grow locally is a top priority for the EGII Team.

Tailored responses are provided for every inward investment enquiry, ensuring West Northamptonshire is showcased as the top investable opportunity. Recently the EGII Team have liaised with numerous employers looked to expand their existing presence within West Northamptonshire, as well as employers looking to relocate; this has included companies leading on decarbonisation, engineering and manufacturing.

Colleagues attended the “Future of the OxCam Region” Conference to ensure West Northamptonshire was recognised as an essential part of the Oxford-Cambridge Pan-Regional Partnership and network with local contacts involved with realising the vast potential of this region.

As part of showcasing West Northamptonshire on a global map, the Team are strengthening relationships with international bodies and working particularly close with the Department for Business and Trade. Recently, the team engaged with a Director from Hauts-de-France to explore inward investment missions for West Northamptonshire and opportunities to collaborate, as well as import/export with the hauts-de-france region.

Supporting Local Employment

The EGII Team continue to deliver the multi-agency support service to enable residents to secure local, sustainable employment. Most recently, this has included expanding the West Northants Employment Support Service (WNESS) by hosting in-person sessions in Towcester Library every 2nd Wednesday of the month. This is a 6 month trial with sessions running until 14th February. The drop-in sessions are to help all local residents to access support, guidance and information to become employment ready, upskill and apply for local roles. This service is completely free and is being received extremely positively by the community. The in-person sessions are being led by the team alongside numerous employment support partners with an aim to help as many people as possible become employment ready and find the best job for them. Support includes job searching, updating CV's and cover letters, any training needs, volunteering, money advice and more.

As well as supporting the existing local labour market, the EGII Team are keen to deliver initiatives which support the future workforce. Working with the South East Midlands Careers Hub, EGII colleagues recently attended a Year 11 Mock Interview Morning at Wootton Park School. This was a valuable opportunity for learners to experience the interview process, ask questions and be inspired. The team are really keen to support the next generation and will continue to get involved in activities which inspire and inform the future workforce and the local career pathways.

Supporting the Local Visitor Economy

The Team led on managing Heritage Open Days, an annual showcase of local heritage and culture, celebrating our unique strengths in West Northants and inviting visitors to learn all. Feedback from local HOD surveys revealed that 74% of people felt the event made them feel prouder and more part of their local community while 87% said they learned something new about their local area from attending a Heritage Open Days event.

The next initiative to be championed to attract visitors and increase local footfall and spend will be Small Business Saturday on 2 December, in conjunction with Black Friday and Cyber Monday. Plans are being developed to inform local businesses of the support and opportunities presented by Small Business Saturday, such as free webinars, interviews and an interactive map for residents to find them.

The Team will also be working on marketing and engagement to promote for everyone to think and shop locally all year round and particularly in the run up to Christmas; this work is being supported by the Communications Team to achieve a dynamic and attractive campaign, utilising numerous social media platforms, video content and more.

Campaigns funded between West Northamptonshire Council and North Northamptonshire Council for Summer, Autumn and Winter with a clear call to action of “Visit Northamptonshire” continue to showcase this area. The digital campaign showcases local attractions promoting family fun days out and great experiences to have every Season across Northamptonshire. This activity is part of the plans for the future of working in partnership with North Northamptonshire Council to establish a public-private Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP) that will lead on Tourism and the Visitor Economy for the County. This is a Visit England initiative and is being carefully explored to nurture the visitor economy, support local attractions and showcase the entire County as a destination to visit time and time again.

The final draft of the new Tourism Strategy is being worked on currently, having had extensive input from local stakeholders, attractions and businesses to inform over the last few months. With Visit England’s support, an Expression of Interest has been submitted for a Northamptonshire LVEP, setting out our intentions to explore this further once the strategy is live. The Team have been discussing the potential of this new LVEP with Visit England on a regular basis as well as meeting with existing LVEPs around the country as examples of best practice. It is intended the Tourism Strategy will be adopted in the new year.

BIPC

The Business and IP Centre Northamptonshire “Build Your Business” programme was officially launched at Brixworth Library on Wednesday 27th September. Councillor Daniel Lister, Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Town Centre Regeneration and Growth spoke about the wealth of opportunities and funding available in West Northamptonshire. James Elliott of BIPC Northamptonshire introduced the programme of support and Kate Coulson of local small business, Ena HR & Training spoke about her business journey and the support she’d received from BIPC Northamptonshire setting up her business. A key component of Build Your Business is the opportunity for aspiring local businesses under one year old to apply for a start-up grant of £2,000 to help towards business-associated costs. Businesses are invited to apply online for this financial boost, and successful applicants will not only receive this important funding, but also ongoing support from the experienced BIPC Northamptonshire team.

TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION & GROWTH

Market Walk

Plans for the conversion of the vacant former Market Walk shopping centre into a new leisure and foodhall destination continue to be progressed. Once complete, the space will host a series of independent food and drink traders, all with their own unique offer and feel, as well as a dedicated space for interactive games, and communal seating focused on a main stage for live music performances and entertainment.

Stack are preparing to submit the planning application at the end of November for its change of use with further design development and engagement with the councils planning and licensing departments taking place in recent weeks.

Greyfriars

Studio Egret West has been appointed by West Northamptonshire Council, via an open public tender process, to shape a bold and catalytic vision for 'Greyfriars' in Northampton's town centre.

This 14-acre site is the largest brownfield opportunity in West Northamptonshire. Since the demolition of the bus station, it has lain empty and derelict, severed from the heart of the town and Market Square by infrastructure, challenging level changes, and daunting passageways.

Studio Egret West will be lead architect, urban designer and landscape architect for the project with a wider team composed of Civic Engineers, Etude, Start Advisory and Craig White & Co.

Studio Egret West have led on large scale sustainable regeneration projects such as Mayfield in Manchester and Preston Barracks in Brighton.

The project is in its initial stages, as WNC seeks to work with experts to develop a masterplan and vision for the area which will outline how this can meet the needs of the local community and businesses. It is proposed that the initial outline plan will deliver a new high-quality homes, commercial uses, a new park, leisure facilities and a new coach interchange. A core element of the proposals is to improve connectivity within the surrounding area and provided enhanced walking, cycling and vehicle routes.

Engagement is planned with the public in November and December with a full consultation and showcase event planned for the Spring.

Abington Street Public Realm

West Northamptonshire Council is working in partnership with Kier Transportation to regenerate Abington Street and Fish Street in Northampton Town Centre.

As part of the project, Kier will carry out vital works to enhance and improve the appearance and paving of Abington Street and Fish Street through delivering new paving and seating, additional tree planting, enhanced landscaping, and the introduction of new lighting.

With investigatory works starting in September, and preparatory works set for November, once complete the project will positively revitalise one of the busiest commercial and pedestrian routes through the town's main shopping street.

Kier and WNC are liaising directly with businesses in the area to keep them up to date on the progress of works. As part of this, there will be a dedicated single point of contact for businesses throughout the project.

Vulcan Works Creative Hub

A £14 million hub for startup businesses in the creative industries and digital sectors has reached the final for two prestigious local business awards.

[Vulcan Works](#), which opened in Northampton in February, has been announced as a finalist in two categories at the [Northamptonshire Business Excellence Awards](#) – Land and Development Award and Innovation Award.

The awards are recognition of the efforts of the Vulcan Works team and West Northamptonshire Council, who not only part-funded the project but was instrumental in facilitating the development and appointed Oxford Innovation to manage the space.

The Land and Development Award acknowledges a construction project that has had a significant impact on the Northamptonshire community or economy. The Innovation Award recognises a business that has demonstrated originality and creativity through an innovation or idea, making significant contributions to an industry and society.

Vulcan works, a collaborative flexible working space, and Barclays have partnered to launch an Eagle Lab in Northampton.

The Barclays Eagle Lab aims to drive growth in the local economy by boosting the Northamptonshire eco system for start-up and young businesses, signposting them to a network of industry experts and mentors as well as growth programmes, events and workshops, and investors and funding streams.

The Lab will look to complement existing services offered by Vulcan Works' own Business Growth Manager, Darren Smith.

Barclays Eagle Labs' Eco System Manager, Owen Moran, will be based at Vulcan Works as part of a contract between the High Street bank and Oxford Innovation Space, which was appointed to manage Vulcan Works by West Northamptonshire Council.

Northampton Market Square

Works on the Market Square continue to progress at pace with the new paving now installed along part of the northern and eastern sections with work continuing in a clockwise fashion. Excavations and preparations in the central area have also been continuing with tree works and extensive ducting and housing for new electrical services taking place. Works for the water feature has commenced with the water holding tank being installed.

The manufacture of the market stalls is now 50% complete with these due to be finalised and delivered this winter with the lighting columns also due to be installed at a similar time.

35-45 Abington Street (Former BHS and M&S)

Essential work to remove asbestos in 35-39 Abington Street and 20-28 Wood Street and demolish the site ready for the development partner to come on board will move forward following cabinet approval.

WNC have been awarded a further £750k of external funding for the project from the brownfield land release fund to contribute towards the asbestos removal and the demolition of the buildings. This adds to the £9.7 million of government funding that has been secured through the Town Fund scheme towards the project which has funded the acquisition of the building, and the necessary preparation works.

Work to secure a development partner for the site is underway with the Expression of Interest stage now complete and the next stage of the procurement process commencing in November ahead of being able to announce our new development partner in the new year.

Daventry Masterplan

Architects and commercial agents have been appointed to develop a town centre masterplan for Daventry looking at projects that increase the vitality and improve footfall into the town, including improvements to public realm and greenery, links to the country park as well as the repurposing of vacant units and car parks.

There is early engagement planned in November with Members, businesses and the public to gain thoughts and feedback, a full consultation event will be planned for the New year.

Brackley Skatepark

Plans to deliver a new skatepark in Brackley are underway with contractors being engaged and site preparation and survey works taking place to finalise the designs.

24 Guildhall Road

Enabling works which focused on external areas were completed in September, this included with roof repairs and works to repair and paint the windows. The same principal contractor has been appointed to undertake the main works with mobilisation taking place and works commencing on this in October.

Works will now focus on the contemporary art gallery and the artist studios on the lower ground floors to allow NN Contemporary to move into the new space with the further areas on the upper floors concluding after this. The project is due to be complete in summer next year.

Four Waterside and Marefair

National regeneration developer, Cityheart has been announced as the preferred development partner to bring forward the Four Waterside and Marefair sites. Working in a joint venture partnership with West Northamptonshire Council (WNC) they'll deliver a transformational and ambitious scheme for the town centre.

Situated at the entrance of the town from Northampton's railway station, the Four Waterside and Marefair scheme is one of the largest brownfield developments in the county with two sites totaling five acres. Work is anticipated to start in 2025 to unlock this space, providing a new hotel, grade A office space for new and existing businesses, high-quality homes and improved paving and planting to elevate the area.

With nearly 20 years of experience, Cityheart has worked in partnership with councils across the country to rejuvenate towns and cities, including the £135 million Galleries town centre redevelopment in Wigan. This eight acre, highly sustainable mixed-use regeneration site will provide a new market and hotel, high-quality homes, leisure venues, co-working space and events space.

WNC has secured £1.5 million from the Towns Fund and £7 million from the Northampton Waterside Enterprise Zone to help deliver the project which will contribute to the wider transformation across the town. This funding will enable the development to be brought forward and have a significant impact on the local economy with a projected £135 million gross development value.

The Towns Fund is part of the Government's plan for Levelling Up the UK economy and the Council has secured £24.9 million to invest into transforming Northampton's Town Centre.

ADULT EDUCATION

This quarter saw the end of the Academic Year 22/23. The service recorded a total of 7,589 deliveries across both North and West Northamptonshire with a total retention rate of 93%, higher than target and the national average. Achievement so far is currently sitting at 74% however we are still awaiting outcomes for 18% of learners so this is expected to increase to above target and above national average.

Over the course of the financial year to date (April-August) we have recorded 1294 learners, up from 1140 the previous year. 60% of these learners have been based within West Northamptonshire.

Our Funding and Accountability Statement was approved by board this quarter, submitted to the DfE (Department for Education) and was accepted by the ESFA (Education and Skills Funding Agency). This document is a formal document that is a new mandatory requirement for all ESFA funded providers with an allocation in excess of £1m, our allocation is circa £2.5m. The document links closely with the LSIP (Local Skills Improvement Plan) and details the approach to the curriculum offer for the Adult Learning Service in 23/24.

The Adult Learning Service has requested a voluntary Health Check from the FE Commissioner team and this has been granted. This is a new support offer for the Adult and Community Education Sector from the FE Commissioner team who have previously only been involved in General Further Education Colleges. The FE Commissioner is a highly regarded agency that sits directly under the DfE and work alongside Ofsted and the ESFA. They have specific powers to act on behalf of the Education Minister and can apply intervention or support where required. The purpose of this 'Health Check' is to seek external, high level, scrutiny over the Service's current position and seek guidance that our newly produced four-year strategy is in line with national expectation, local need and fit for purpose. This is a high-level visit which will include input from members of Corporate Leadership, Elected Members, ALS staff, external stakeholders and board members. It is hoped that this will offer a very good platform for the Adult Learning Service to continue its rapid strategic development.

We are pleased to announce that the service has been successful in gaining accreditation from the nationally recognised awarding body NCFE/CACHE to offer accredited qualifications in Childcare/Education and Health/Social Care, as well as a range of professional updating short courses. This has been the culmination of an intensive four month approval process with an awarding body that is widely regarded as the gold standard of qualifications in Care and Education. We are now undergoing a recruitment process for suitably qualified staff, and we hope to have provision up and running by the end of October 2023. These courses are to be offered in direct response to the LSIP and the national priorities for skills.

The service is currently undergoing its end of academic year financial closedown with full details to be presented in due course. We are expecting to show a loss for the academic year 22/23 however this was planned and is fully covered by the Adult Learning Service reserve fund. The reasons for the recorded loss are largely related to accommodation costs, removal of some central subsidiaries and investment in strategic development to meet the skills agenda. As noted, this loss was planned for and expected. Along with reviewed strategies to staffing and accommodation in exploration, we have clear financial and curriculum planning in place for academic 23/24 to reverse this and show a positive contribution back to the reserve fund.

Multiply

Further work on has taken place to build momentum of the Multiply scheme, providing training and qualifications for West Northants adults aged 19+ in numeracy. A dedicated marketing company has been appointed to increase awareness and engagement of the full offer of Multiply, ensuring that the full community benefits. This will improve the programme's targeting of hard to reach learners and includes numerous activities including dedicated social media platforms for WNC Multiply. Adult Learning continue to be one of the key providers delivering courses for this programme and we expect to have additional providers appointed in quarters 3 and 4 to enhance and extend the offer.

Councillor Dan Lister

Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Town Centre Regeneration and Growth



30th November 2023

ADULT SOCIAL CARE

Safeguarding & Wellbeing Services

The Safeguarding team continues to experience a high level of alerts; during this quarter the annual release of national safeguarding data showed that the increase in demand within West Northants was significantly higher than the national average. In response to this work is being undertaken both internally and with partners to understand the reasons behind the increased demand being seen and implement actions to address this. The same release of data also showed that when section 42 safeguarding enquiries are undertaken West Northants performance for reducing the risk a vulnerable person is exposed to is above the national average.

Within our in-house care homes Boniface House in Brixworth closed its doors early in November. All residents were supported to find alternative accommodation within our care homes at either Southfields House or Obelisk House and formal consultation was successfully completed with the staff group on the options of either redeployment or redundancy. We have now commenced consultation on the future of Ridgway House in Towcester, which is experiencing similar challenges to those faced by Boniface House: significant under occupation, limitations to the care that can be provided due to the design and layout of the building, and challenges recruiting and retaining staff. Consultation closes at the end of November and feedback will be considered as part of any future decision-making process.

Our Occupational Therapy team continue to make positive progress implementing a programme of single-handed care, which provides equipment to people receiving care in their home so that they can be cared for by one carer rather than two, which is supporting the overall directorate respond to the budget pressures it is currently experiencing. The Assistive Technology Team has also entered the final phases of preparation for disaggregation with North Northants Council, this programme of work is on track and the team is due to disaggregate at the end of March 2024.

Adult Services

The teams remain very busy and continue to see increased demand at the front door. Work is continuing to look at the referral processes to ensure they are efficient and responsive and support staff to triage contacts easily. This includes working with the Customer Service Centre to explore what they can do to support and the most effective systems to use. In addition to improved processes this work links with a new waiting list prioritisation tool which is soon to be implemented.

A prevention project is in place to look at how the Community hubs and Supporting Independence Team can be aligned to enable us to enhance the prevention offer in each LAP area. This will ensure that people requesting Adult Social Care Support are supported to be as

independent as possible and access preventative and community services when they first make contact with the service.

The Community teams moved to align with the Local Area Partnership footprints. This means there are now 5 teams who cover the following areas:

Northampton Central Community Team
Northampton North and East Community Team
Northampton South and West Community Team
Rural North and West Community Team
Rural South and East Community Team

Work continues with corporate colleagues to look at the most appropriate bases for the new teams, within their new areas.

The Adults Learning and Development team is being recruited to and work is taking place to review our L and D offer to ensure staff are equipped with the knowledge they need to do their roles and have opportunities to develop. This work links with the wider project to review staff roles and progression pathways that is also taking place.

We continue to work with system partners to progress the ambitions of the Mental Health, Learning Disability and Autism collaborative. With particular focus on our LD inpatients, the Dynamic risk register and community LD teams.

We are in the process of reviewing transport options across Adult Services to ensure that we are accessing the most cost effective and sustainable options to meet peoples needs.

Commissioning and Performance

The Home Care Recommissioning project is still progressing and we are moving packages of care from legacy contracted providers to our new 15 providers who are allocated work in line with Local Area Partnerships. The project has had significant barriers due to delays imposed by exiting providers. We are expecting for our new Home Care contract to be fully implemented by 31st March 2024.

In addition, we are currently reviewing our Extra Care contracted offer with a desire to enter into new contracts with providers from 1st April 2024. Extra Care is an important service for people who need a bit of extra support in a supported environment and often delays or prevents the need for more formal care home services.

We have undertaken a significant engagement exercise with our unpaid carers to ask them what we do that works well for them and what doesn't work so well. This engagement period has now ended which unfortunately, resulted in much less feedback then we would have liked. However, of the feedback we have received there is a lot for us to work on and we will be setting up a co-production group shortly to start designing the West Northamptonshire Carers Strategy.

Our integrated Brokerage Team is now in full swing, not only brokering packages of care for those eligible for Adult Social Care, but also picking up pathway 3 hospital discharges on behalf of Health. The implementation has been successful so far and is generating efficiencies for both Adult Social Care and our NHS colleagues.

We are currently setting out the Adult Social Care and Public Health approach to coproduction and we have engaged with the People's Advisory Group who have set out some really good principles that they want us to follow. Further updates will be provided in later briefs.

Lastly, we have started a Direct Payment working group to look at how we manage Direct Payments, how we fund them and how we support unpaid carers using Direct Payments. This will result in a new Policy which sets out our intentions for Direct Payments and how we use them to best meet peoples outcomes.

Discharge to Assess Services Update

Reablement West

RW have seen a successful recruitment drive over the last 2 months. RSO roles Appointed has reached 91% which enables the services to accept more referrals and deliver additional hours. They are also looking to re-open to community referrals.

Enhancing social care capacity - RW has been working with commissioning to draw up a reablement specifications to go out to the care market in Jan 24 to explore a mixed blend to our reablement offer.

RIBU

We continue to monitor our partnership working relationship with NHFT. We are in the process of reviewing allocation of funds to establish our funding sources for 23/24. We have seen a slight increase in length of stay which is being closely monitored by Emma Service Manager.

Flow & Capacity Team

The team continue to support NGH in relation to patient flow and reduction of length of stay. WNC currently have 3 people in the top 20 patient list. We are working with NGH to redesign our Pathway 1 to create additional efficiency.

Case Management Replacement

The project remains at procurement stage. All requirements have been evaluated and we are close to completing moderation. Demonstrations are planned for suppliers over the next 2 weeks.

PUBLIC HEALTH

People & Wellbeing

Suicide Prevention

The refreshed all-age county-wide Suicide Prevention Strategy and corresponding action plan was launched in September 2021. Following a year of delivery by the Northamptonshire Suicide Prevention Steering Group, the first annual review was completed on the action plan. This is

to ensure the action plan remains aligned to national guidance and local need. The updated action plan has been consulted with a range of partners and those with lived experience.

Family Hubs

Significant progress in developing a Family Hub and Start for Life Offer, with a phased launch of the Towcester Family Hub starting in January 2024. It is anticipated that the other two hubs in Northampton and Daventry will be launched by June 2024.

Children and Young People

Continuing with the 0-19 Service Improvement Programme, with a focus on the mandated health reviews carried out by health visitors. Significant progress in performance, in particular the 2-2.5-year checks which focus on developmental milestones and identifies children below evidence-based thresholds including personal and social, language and communication, movement and brain development. The plan will inform work to recommission a new service model from April 2025.

A six-month North and West project to translate the learning from the Pause programme (that worked with women who'd had children removed into care to break the cycle) has begun working with Care Leavers and Children in Care (through NCT) to pilot preventative ways of working with a younger age group. The name The Wave was chosen by previous care-experienced Pause participants.

Healthy Ageing

The "Healthy Ageing" Public Health workstream is gathering momentum, as key strand of work to enable local people to stay fit, well and independent. In the same month that Professor Chris Whitty, England's Chief Medical Officer (CMO), published his annual report with a focus on "Health in an Ageing Society", work was already well under way to implement a "healthy ageing" initiative across West Northants.

The aim is for this approach to be localised through our Local Area Partnerships, using a positive narrative to promote independence and autonomy, (instead of avoidance of "frailty"), and will link local people to a range of potential supports, based on the concept of 'productive healthy ageing'.

This will be a key strand of our approach to fulfilling the local strategic ambition of supporting "opportunities to be fit, well and independent", in the Live Your Best Life Strategy. A key aim will be to change the way people think about ageing, and for older adults to achieve a longer, healthier life with meaning, purpose, and a sense of belonging.

Partnership working with colleagues in the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector and also with Parish Councils is underway, with an initial focus on rural areas, working closely with Connect Northamptonshire and rural LAPs to start shaping this in practice.

Further information will be shared over the next month, as part of the existing Winter Comms programme, with the intention of having a launch event focused on "healthy ageing" in early 2024 with local and national keynote speakers.

Health Improvement & Communities

Stop Smoking Service

The government have announced a plan to create a smokefree generation, which includes a package of interventions. These include additional funding over the next five years (2024/25-2028/29) to expand locally delivered stop smoking services to increase the number of people who stop smoking. There will be some flexibility for the funding to support wider tobacco and youth vaping control efforts, such as local awareness raising campaigns, to provide more flexibility at the local level. However, the majority of the funding should be focused on stop smoking cessation.

WNC have been given an indicative additional allocation of £478,000. This is on the condition that we do not reduce our stop smoking service budget below its current level. WNC are currently developing service transformation proposal to ensure that this funding is used effectively and will work with stakeholders to develop this model.

West Northamptonshire Council drafted and submitted a response to Stopping the Start consultation and sent out comms to encourage both the public and partners to also respond.

The refreshed Northamptonshire Tobacco Control Alliance met in October and starting to discuss the objectives of the new Tobacco Control Strategy. As part of a regional tobacco control group, chaired by Sally Burns, we are working with colleagues across the West Midlands to develop a joined-up approach to this agenda. A regional vaping position statement has been finalised, and we are working on comms to promote this. Vaping in children and young people is a priority for West Northamptonshire at the moment, and we are currently planning a Vaping Summit on 5th February to bring together national experts and local stakeholders to discuss the challenges and develop an action plan to reduce vaping in children and young people.

Weight Management

The current Northamptonshire tier 2 weight management service contracts are due to end in March 2024. Following a review of local needs and the current offer, West Northamptonshire Public Health have identified the need for three different types of services to meet the needs of residents. These are:

- A face to face tier 2 weight management service – the tender for which was published on November 15th 2023
- A digital tier 2 weight management service – which is to be tendered in the coming weeks
- Community services targeting those parts of the West Northamptonshire communities that don't traditionally access such services – this programme is being designed and more details will be available in the New Year. We anticipate a range of different offers to be generated out of this exercise that will build on and develop the work done by Public Health in 2021.
- The Council will be seeking through all of these services to increase accessibility and take up of weight management service from those people living in the top 50% most deprived areas, men, people from minoritized communities, people with mental health conditions and people with learning disabilities.

Food for Life

The Food for Life programme in schools has engaged with 18 out of 35 target schools.

- Those enrolled are: Spring Lane Primary; Vernon Terrace; Kings Heath and Billing Brook.

- Those showing positive signs of engaging: Kings Meadow; Greenfield; Hunsbury; St James CofE; St Mary's Catholic Primary School; The Good Shepherd; Standens Barn Primary School.

This is in line with plans projected at the start of the agreement earlier this year. Training is being delivered this month for enrolled and interested schools to give an overview of the project and to begin the journey to accreditation.

10 Early Years providers have also been identified in Northampton and Daventry for the project.

The West Northants Sustainable Food Network has met and is developing the plans to employ a project manager so we can drive forward on the development and implementation of our joint action plan.

The 'Grow, Cook, Eat' project has delivered further training and grants to community organisations and partners to develop local activity. To date 38 local champions have been trained and grants awarded to 15 organisations and projects. The project had recent great coverage on BBC Look East which has led to partners in Milton Keynes asking for advice on how to develop something similar. A first phase celebration event is being held in December for the champions by the provider.

Workplace Wellbeing

The service proposals regarding the developments for 'Making Every Contact Count' are being finalised. This will enable the service to make forward plans regarding supporting frontline workers in delivering health and wellbeing messages and signposting in their day job and so make more of every contact they have with the general public and service users.

The WNC Workplace Wellbeing toolkit is nearing completion which will enable workplaces to review and plan for health and wellbeing needs.

Breathlessness Project

The breathlessness project in Northampton Central LAP continues to develop, and we are currently reviewing engagement reports submitted by VCSE partners who have engaged with residents to understand their experiences of managing long-term conditions. A funding offer is currently available to local partners to establish a Community Champions programme, with funding available to a local organisation to recruit a volunteer coordinator who will recruit, train and support community champions who will provide links into communities and provide health and wellbeing information. As part of this project Public Health have funded two health coaches who have started working for GPA, their roles will be to support people with COPD who are currently not accessing services to support them to better manage their condition and to access the support available. Alongside this we are working with digital colleagues to offer support to people to access digital devices and training so that they are able to access the myCOPD self-management app that is being rolled out by the NHS. A stop smoking advisor is also delivering targeted support in the LAP, working with local organisations. Another element of this project will be to focus on air quality (indoor and out) and to support children and young people with asthma. These elements of the project are currently in development.

Wider Determinants

Anti-Poverty

- HSF4 continues to be delivered across various support pillars.
- Our VCSE partners are providing food aid using HSF monies. This includes expanded wrap around support services such as money management and cooking skills. For those already engaged with these services this may also include the provision of supermarket vouchers. The second agreed tranche of these vouchers are due to be released imminently.
- HSF is also funding targeted support for vulnerable groups such as Gypsy Roma Traveller community where we are working with trusted referrers and colleagues to ensure funding reaches those most in need.
- We are preparing for school parent vouchers release over the Christmas holidays.
- The online applications for those on low incomes and who did not already receive the cost-of-living payment have been issued.
- Food banks have received their HSF4 funding and continue to deliver support.
- We carried out an outreach food bank pilot at two locations on the canal to reach people who are living on a boat to understand their needs.
- Re-registration of Welcoming Spaces Online Directory is taking place – 88 submitted so far and comms toolkit sent to organisations for promotional purposes
- Launch of Welcoming Spaces Grant Funding – 21 applications received, 18 approved so far
- Towcester Library – 6-month pilot of WNC Employment Service & Community Law drop-in sessions has started and will be reviewed March 2024
- Current conversations for outreach sessions include Adult Social Care Team, NHFT IAPT Talking Therapies and WNC Armed Forces Covenant
- Winter Wellbeing Campaign promotions including online briefing session from Community Law/Care & Repair regarding winter offer for vulnerable residents

Substance Misuse

Drugs and Alcohol

There are currently 3 drug and alcohol services which are now out for tender. These are Family Support Services, Children and Young People (including Youth Offending provision) and Detoxification Provision. These are all countywide provisions which will start 1st April 2024. Contracts will be for a period of 2 years to align with the re-commissioning of all drug and alcohol services 2026.

The drug and alcohol grants continue to be successful and a commitment from the Office of Health Improvement & Disparities (OHID) have committed funding until March 2025. There is an opportunity to bid for the Individual Placement Support (IPS) via OHID which aims to support those people in treatment into employment. This will be a 2-year commitment until March 2025. Public Health colleagues are working together across the two councils to secure this additional funding.

A Combating Drugs Partnership (CDP) held a countywide event on the 15th November which was very successful with over 50 stakeholders present. Guest speakers included OHID, Job Centre Plus, Probation, Police and clients (Change, Grow, Live). Group work was facilitated to capture stakeholders feedback into the delivery of the CDP Strategic Plan. The chair for the

CDP has now moved from Sally Burns, Director of Public Health for West Northants Council to Jane Bethea, Director of Public Health for North Northants for the next financial year.

Employment

- The work well partnership programme funding bid is due to be released early December which is aimed at developing interventions to support people in work or getting people back into work who have a Long-Term Health Condition. We are working with Economic Development Team, and health and other delivery partners to prepare for this bid and also how we link other funding sources such as the UKSPF.

Town and Parish Councils

- We have allocated 2.5 of our Public Health Officer role to work with Town and Parish Councils on harnessing their impact on health and wellbeing by developing template, guidance and insights to inform strategy development.

Other

- We have 5 members of the team due to start their Public Health Apprenticeship in January, this will lead to an undergraduate degree in Public Health and Public Health Practitioner formal registration with the Faculty of Public Health.

Health Protection

Infection Prevention and Control (IPC)

The care homes compliance work programme is well underway and to date 20 care homes have been supported by the team. The work is focusing on good IPC practice and empowering care home staff to prevent outbreaks of infectious diseases. The IPC Champion programme has been launched alongside, and the interest received from care home staff has been encouraging. The programme aims to ensure each care home has at least one IPC Champion who will embed good IPC in all activities undertaken in care homes.

Mobile Programme Flu and COVID-19 programmes

Our Mobile Outreach Programme recommenced during September, providing Flu and COVID-19 vaccinations across the West Northants area as part of the national programmes. We have also started to provide NHS health checks during some of the clinics. We are continuing to focus on delivery in areas and to groups experiencing inequalities via community locations and events, including increasingly the Welcoming Spaces. Between September and 22 November 2023, this programme has so far delivered over 4,300 COVID-19 vaccinations, more than 1,150 Flu vaccinations and 115 Health checks at the 62 clinics scheduled. We are continuing delivery of this programme up to the end of March 2024 and will commence planning early in 2024 for the programme post April.

Events for Homeless and Rough Sleepers

The Health Protection Team have successfully organised two health and wellbeing events for homeless and rough sleepers in the Northampton area at partner agency venues. We arranged for a range of services to attend offering vaccination, screening, health checks, sexual health, stop smoking, optical and oral health services and advice at both days. The events were a success, being attended by 87 people who are homeless, rough sleepers, sofa surfers or in temporary accommodation. We are planning similar events in the South Northants and Daventry areas in the new year and will be working with partners to organise Spring/Summer and Autumn/Winter health days next year.

Vaccination clinics for eligible WNC staff have been taking place during October and November at local authority locations in Northampton, Daventry and Towcester. Whilst social care and health staff have been prioritised, due to the vulnerable service users they work with, all eligible staff have been invited to attend. 4 clinics have taken place with 154 COVID-19 vaccinations and 157 Flu vaccinations administered. A further vaccination clinic is scheduled in December.

WNC staff health check clinics have been regularly taking place at locations across WNC. 34 health checks have been delivered to eligible staff in the authority. The clinics will be continuing on a monthly basis into the new year.

We are continuing with our health protection communications campaign plan. Recent activity has included:

- Return to education reminder for parents to get their children vaccinated
- Organ donation (promotion to WNC staff)
- Breast cancer awareness
- Cervical cancer awareness
- Flu vaccination – by December all cohorts will be targeted
- We are also supporting the campaigns for COVID-19 (ICB led) and MMR (NNC led)
- Updating winter wellness information, as part of WNC campaign
- Expanding online health protection information

We have also been working with system partners to prepare for the forthcoming winter months, by planning and preparing for outbreaks, incidents and surges of winter infections.

Commissioning

Children and young people, Sexual Health, Oral Health

In addition to the 0-19 service improvement plan referenced above, we are also working jointly with NNC Public Health on service improvement plans for Strong Start Universal Early Years Service (provided by WNC Libraries), the Intergrated Sexual Health Service (provided by NHFT), and the Oral Health Promotion (provided by NHFT). Discussions with Strong Start are focused on aligning delivery with Family Hubs. All services are showing improvement on the identified areas. A paper recommending the separate North and West commissioning of these services from April 2025 will be going to Shared Services Joint Committee in January 2024 and has been to People SLT and ELT and preparations are being made for the redesign and recommissioning of these services in WNC.

Councillor Matt Golby

Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care & Public Health

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30th November 2023

FINANCE

Financial Monitoring 2023-24 – Period 6

The current year financial position at period 6 (September) showed that we were forecasting to be overspent by £2.2m at year end with financial pressures being experienced in:

- Children's Social Services
- Adults' social services; and
- Temporary accommodation

It appears that these particular services are causing cost pressures up and down the Country and therefore we are not alone in this respect. However, we continue to work hard to seek to manage this overspend down by the end of the financial year.

Offsetting these pressures are the contingency set aside in the budget and increased investment returns as a result of interest rates being higher than anticipated when we set the budget.

We are currently pulling the period 7 position together and that will be reported to Cabinet on 12 December 2023.

Draft Budget 2024-25

All efforts in Finance and across many services are currently focussed on bringing together the budget plans for 2024-25.

Cabinet colleagues met informally in mid-November to finalise the proposals which will feature as part of the budget for next year and officers are preparing the draft budget report that will be considered by Cabinet at their meeting on the 12 December and will then kick off the budget consultation process.

The Executive Director of Finance has organised group meetings with all the groups to walk Councillors through the budget proposals.

ASSETS & ENVIRONMENT

Property Strategy and Estates

Sites

- **Photovoltaics (solar panels)** – The Council continues to work with partners to scope out large scale photovoltaics on buildings and land it owns or controls, with a view to

reducing its net carbon emissions and reduce its energy bills. The initial results appear promising.

- **Lodge Road disposal** – Agents are instructed to market the property. Various surveys have been now completed and are currently under review by WNC. Proposals to relocate DWP from ground floor of Lodge Road to Daventry Leisure Centre are progressing. It has been agreed with DWP that they can remain at Lodge Road in the interim subject to covering the running costs for the property. Options for freehold or leasehold disposal are being explored.
- **Future of County Hall** – Carter Jonas has completed their initial report (in draft) which is currently under review. An engagement session with key stakeholders will refine future options before a report comes to Cabinet.
- **Dallington Grange development** – This land is subject to (separate) option agreements WNC and its fellow landowner, the Althorp Estate. Althorp has reached a provisional agreement with the developer. WNC is currently reviewing this in line with its own option, and a conclusion on the price appears to be in view. Discussions are also underway on the land proposed to be retained for WNC to deliver affordable housing.
- **Watering Lane, Collingtree development** – work continues to identify the best means of disposing this allocated housing site. A draft report from the consultants has been received and is currently under review. It is likely that the land is likely to be taken to the market in 2024/25. A Cabinet report is being prepared.
- **Daventry SE employment allocation** – Following some challenging late-stage negotiations, the hybrid promotion agreement has been entered into. The major issue with the site appears to be power supply for Daventry. The Council is therefore assisting the developer address this with National Grid.
- **Evelyn Wright EPH (former)** – Discussions on possible service interest in the site continues to be explored. Work on demolition is progressing given that it is target for anti-social behaviour and has been broken into in the past.
- **Former tram/bus depot, Northampton** – This site was acquired in order to secure it for future regeneration of the area focused on housing but which will also assist in sustaining local businesses with other opportunities considered. It is hoped that alongside funding that this site will be an exemplar in regard to sustainable development as well as ensuring the history of the site is celebrated.
- **Recruitment** – Very promising steps have been taken towards completing the Property Strategy & Estates team, although it will generally be some months before staff are actually in post. This will significantly help to reduce on going costs for the use of agency staff which has been necessary in the past to retain a level of service.

Systems and strategies

- **Asset management database procurement** – Work continues on the implementation of the Concerto system which will be a significant advancement in the Council's ability to manage its new portfolio effectively, supporting functions across Assets & Environment. The project remains on schedule to enable the Estates and Property Response functions to go live on 1st April 2024. We have an ongoing project to refine understanding of lease responsibilities, as well as obtaining CAD plans for all properties.
- **Asset valuations** – The 2022/23 draft valuations have been received and are being reviewed by Estates and colleagues in Finance. Work has started on the construction of the 2023/24 programme.

- **Aged debt** – Working closely with the aged debt team in Finance to recover debt and implement payment plans where possible. Aged debt remains a key area of focus and we are prioritising the larger aged debtors in the short term. In recent months the aged debt has been reduced by approximately 40% (£750k).
- **EPC assessments** – In light of the changes to Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards (MEES) which came into force on 1st April and future expected changes, we have an ongoing project to review the energy performance certificates (EPCs) on the Council's estate. An invitation to tender was issued recently and we expect to have a consultant in place to support the project by the end of November.
- **Improving estates data** – The team is making process in resolving outstanding lease renewals and rent reviews. As this work progresses, we are identifying issues with the use and condition of some of the properties which has taken priority. These are being addressed with colleagues.

Facilities Management

Facilities, Public Realm & Heritage Structure

The Facilities, Public Realm and Heritage structure continues to develop. The priority for the service is to ensure structures are robust, effective, and efficient.

Current projects

The Facilities, Public Realm and Heritage team continues to lead or collaborate on many projects, developing the corporate landlord function. Of particular note:

- **Contracts** – Reviewing our current arrangements, which are generally disaggregated across WNC with a view to aggregating them into single WNC contracts. Our approach is to undertake this review by priority. So far, we have awarded contracts for WNC cleaning services and for fleet management services. Our current focus is on the following contracts:
 - **Security services.** We are creating a framework of services that will enable other public bodies to access and generate an income for WNC. This is a large project and is being assisted by a project manager and business analyst from the Transformation team. The tender is expected to go live in January 2024.
 - **Window cleaning.** We have commenced the procurement process for a contract which provides cyclical cleaning at key accommodation i.e., HQ's and will enable services to call off against the contract for ad hoc cleaning requirements. Our aim is a go live date of April 2024.
 - **Pest control.** We have completed the spend review and discussed with Regulatory services with a view to them bringing the services inhouse. This matter continues with a view that future commercial opportunities may also exist.
 - **CCTV maintenance.** The current maintenance contract expires in March 2024, and we are currently progressing with the procurement of a new service contract.
- **In-house compliance** – We are working with the Works team to review the contract spend on minor compliance works such as weekly flushing for Legionella. This is with a view to analysing the cost benefit of bringing this service inhouse. Data analysis is underway. This is an ongoing project.
- **Centralised event hire and room bookings within WNC buildings** – We have engaged with the Place Shaping service to review the current activity across WNC with a view to

centralising all our room bookings requirements, both internal and external, into one structure. External room booking enquires will then have access to all external facilities across WNC and will be able to choose which better suit their needs, which should increase usage and income.

- **Decommissioning of Lodge Road and establishment of the Abbey Hub** – The Abbey Centre is now fully open with some minor snagging works to complete. Lodge Road is now restricted to key personnel and team are in the process of cataloguing items such as furniture for relocation or disposal.
- **Integrating the Property Response service across WNC** – The requirement is currently managed slightly differently across WNC. With the expected outcome to have one integrated Property Response Service for WNC. Towcester and Daventry are now fully integrated. The former NBC properties are expected to come online with the introduction of the new asset management database. A rebranding exercise has taken place for the former Property Helpdesk team to the Property Response team and communications have been shared to this effect. This process will be fully implemented in line with the commencement of the Concerto asset management software.
- **Access control integration** – We are waiting for IT confirm the date that the new cloud server will be built. Once this has been completed, we will be able to commence with the project to integrate all access control requirements onto one server.

Works

Property Maintenance & Assurance

Alongside the implementation of the new asset management system, Concerto in April 2024, the Council will be adopting SFG20, which is the recognised industry standard for building compliance. This will enable the Council to produce a planned servicing, inspection, and testing regime which will enable it to ensure that its properties are safe, legally compliant, and fit for purpose.

A wide range of maintenance and assurance work is underway. Some highlights are listed below.

RAAC: Work is continuing to establish which WNC buildings contain RAAC using external resource for inspection and structural assessment.

Beckets Park Pavilion: External works complete, new roof covering, rain water goods fascia and soffits renewed.

Bellinge Depot: Project to uplift buildings and bring EPC to standard for letting now complete, with just new EPC required.

Commercial properties: Fire risk assessments and works proceeding, condition surveys to be rolled out across the portfolio to establish the overall condition and high-level cost implications.

Children's Trust. Supporting children's trust with compliance works and repairs to properties.

St Giles Terrace, Northampton: Project to replace roof and refurbish shops is underway

Brackely leisure centre: Replacement roof and PV panels project to start. This will provide a safe and dry environment for users and make full use of the PV panels

Abington Park Bandstand: Decoration and repair works commissioned.

Evelyn Wright Daventry: Demolition costs have been established to support business case for demolition.

Construction

The team is working on a wide range of projects from feasibility to construction. Highlights among the construction projects include:

St John's Tiffield: The detailed design work and associated costs of the new 250 place all through SEND school continues. Following pre-planning application meetings with key partners, the planning application was submitted. It is hoped that this will be determined in mid-December 2023 so that the enabling works to demolish some of the existing buildings and site clearance can take place. There are some on site ecological issues to resolve with badgers, but mitigation measures have been implemented and are being monitored.

Tiffield Gateway School Extension: Design work is close to nearing completion on the proposed Gateway School extension, which will use the former secure unit buildings. CIL funding has been approved for the refurbishment of the swimming pool and sports hall complex which will provide valuable on-site services for both Gateway and the new SEND school plus, if practical, the local community. The next step will be to procure the construction contractor to deliver the works.

Overstone Leys Primary School: Design and negotiations continue to provide the new school for September 2025. This includes discussions with the developer over the available land for the school. The DfE presumption process to obtain the operator is proceeding. The planning application has been submitted.

Northampton Leisure Centres: The contracted works to improve energy efficiency and operation of the Danes Camp Leisure Centre and further work to Mounts Baths have been completed. However, some further works have been identified at Danes Camp which are required to ensure fire safety compliance and these will be undertaken at Christmas during a temporary shut-down period.

County Hall: A budget of £948k was previously approved for roof, boiler and intruder alarm works, but further investigations have revealed that the whole roof needs major investment to protect the building in the future and cost inflation continues to be a challenge. Therefore, addition capital budget is being sought for these works.

Royal & Derngate Theatre: Scaffold being placed within the areas found to have RAAC these scaffold columns will be floor through to roof and will spread the load enabling the theatre to operate (although at reduced capacity due to fire evacuation procedures).

Construction & Maintenance Climate Strategy: The strategy has been completed and was submitted to Cabinet for approval. Once approved, it will provide clear objectives in respect of the Council's approach to the new built environment and provide a framework for those managing development to facilitate net zero in operation.

Recruitment: There were a large number of candidates for the three vacant Construction Project Manager roles, now they are on the new WNC grading. It seems likely we will be able to fill the roles, which will greatly help with team capacity.

Energy

In addition to the photovoltaics item mentioned above, the *Estate Climate Strategy* has been drafted and will be presented to Cabinet on November 14th for approval.

Sustainable heat network(s): The study is proceeding well and suggesting there are options for delivering sustainable heat, initially focused on central Northampton but with opportunities for further growth. Heat sources may include large river, canal, reservoir, or air source heat pumps, and commercial waste heat. The Council is currently preparing an application to the HNDU round 13 to secure funding for the next stage of this project (the Detailed Project Development, DPD, phase).

Councillor Malcolm Longley
Cabinet Member for Finance

30th November 2023

Cllr Baker sends her apologies and is unable to be at Full Council, she has been selected to attend a conference. In Cllr Bakers absence, any questions arising from this report, please direct your queries to Fiona.Baker@westnorthants.gov.uk for an immediate response.

NORTHAMPTONSHIRE CHILDREN'S TRUST

Our Trust continues on their Improvement Journey.

Ofsted Inspection ILACS (Inspection of Local Authority Children Services) – Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services), was completed at the end of last year and the report was [published](#) in November 2022.

In October 2023, we had a Focused Visit by Ofsted, this was a 2-day inspection and focused on our front door, multi-agency safeguarding hub and assessment team. The report was published on 22nd November 2023 and whilst there are some areas for further improvement, which we knew, the focus visit clearly outlines that there is evidence of continued improvement since the ILACs, there is evidence from this inspection activity that our children's services continue to make progress on our improvement journey.

We have also had our Youth Offending Inspection, this inspection is carried out by HMIP and judged the service Good, this is a fantastic achievement for Northamptonshire. Our Youth Offending Service ensure a child first response and are evidencing good impact and improved outcomes for young people.

We continue as a Council to work with and support the Trust around practice, performance, and finances. We have just developed a Transformation and Efficiency Board which is being supported by WNC colleagues but working closely with both North and NCT colleagues. We believe together we can continue to make a difference, continue to improve outcomes for children and ensure we are doing this with transformation and efficiency in mind.,

The Trust continues to see high demand coming into their front door, a high number of referrals that do not meet their Threshold, and this diverts the front door from other work. This continues to be explored with partners to address the demand and the recent focused visit by Ofsted will further support any changes needed.

In the last quarter, the Trust continues to improve service, we know ourselves well and aware of the areas which still require further support to embed and achieve further improvement.

Children Services

West Northants Council have recently signed up to the Care Leaver Covenant. As a Council we are passionate about our corporate parenting duties and want to ensure our Care Leavers have the best start possible as they transition into adulthood.

The aim of the Care Leaver Covenant is to provide additional support for those leaving care; making available a different type of support and expertise from that statutorily provided.

The 'Whole Council Approach' created for Local Authorities by the Care Leaver Covenant is the strategic idea that responsibility for being a corporate parent sits across the whole council and not only with those people and departments that have 'care leaver' in their job descriptions. As such, West Northants Council have committed to supporting care experienced individuals across the five key areas of the Covenant which are:

01. Raising Awareness of the Covenant
02. Council Tax Exemption or Reduction
03. Training and Employment Opportunities
04. Social Value Policy
05. Economic Development

We are committed to supporting better outcomes for care experienced people in our community and support the Care Leaver Covenant outcomes which are:

- Care leavers are better prepared and supported to live independently.
- Care leavers have improved access to employment, education and training.
- Care leavers experience stability in their lives and feel safe and secure.
- Care leavers have improved access to health and emotional support.
- Care leavers achieve financial stability.

We are extremely proud to be part of the Care Leavers Covenant.

We have also agreed to change the process around council tax for care leavers, to make sure this is more accessible to ensure our care leavers are further supported as they transition to adulthood. The changes will take effect from 01st April 2024.

Early Help / Family Hub Development

One area which continues to be developed is the Early Help Offer, the Trust have built an early help offer at a Targeted level (level 3) and is working with many families which without this would potentially be open to Statutory services.

There is a gap in early help around level 2 level which focuses on vulnerable children with additional needs, who require intervention, and it is this area we are looking to develop further, to support vulnerable children, young people and families to prevent escalation of needs and risks.

We are working together to explore the development of Family Hubs to support this area further. Family hubs will be locality based and will enable more support at Level 2 (based on the threshold document) giving families the right help, at the right time, by the right service.

We are looking at our first hub to be in Towcester, with a venue in Northampton to be next. As we develop Towcester, there will a focus on 0-5s and 1001 days to ensure families have the

right start and then explore services and support for children, young people and families 6yrs-19yrs.

Family Hub development is aligned with our Public Health 0-19 Services to enable services to be further integrated, which will support families in getting the help and support they need.

Our Family Hub proposals are still in the developmental stage, but we are very pleased to be exploring and developing this, as we know this is where we can have the most impact on supporting children, young people, and their families.

EDUCATION

You will be aware that the DfE and School Trustees at Southfields Primary school have made the decision to close the school from August 2024 due to a significant shortfall of pupil numbers which has made the school financially and educationally unviable. This decision comes with deep frustration and disappointment, despite many efforts to prevent this. As an academy, the responsibility for the leadership and management of Southfield Primary School is for the school trustees and the DfE.

The Council continues to support all families who will need to move schools before September 2024, and to develop plans to explore the use of the Southfield site to meet local needs.

Our Schools Forum met on 18 October to review and agree how funding is allocated to all schools and early years providers. The group focussed on the financial pressures facing all schools, especially around meeting vulnerable children's needs. This group recognised the significant pressure on Council and school budgets and will write to the Department for Education and Secretary of State to share the impact of a lack of funding for education in West Northants.

Earlier this month, the Council ran two training sessions for school leaders to promote Therapeutic Thinking – an evidence-based model of supporting children to promote inclusion in schools and reduce suspensions and exclusions. This is the start of an exciting journey that will help provide a consistent approach to supporting children and improving outcomes.

The local SEND Improvement Board has reviewed the feedback from the SEND Strategy launch in September and has developed further plans to co-produce with local parents and young people with SEND to address the ongoing concerns about the timeliness and quality of provision. The Council has commissioned additional support to accelerate improvements in this area, including commissioning expert advice from a current SEND OFSTED inspector and by securing additional DfE support.

Priorities for the SEND Improvement Board include the development of the new Local Offer; the website that contains information, advice and guidance for parents and partners; commissioning additional Education Psychologists; and the creation of new specialist education places to meet the needs of children with additional needs locally, with the formal opening of the Hunsbury Park unit at Chiltern school which took place in October. This programme continues with another 205 places across 7 schools to be created before the end of 2024.

Councillor Fiona Baker
(Cabinet Member for Children, Families & Education)

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CORPORATE SERVICES

1. Customer Services and Emergency Planning

The department are entering one of the busiest period of the year and are in the process of rolling out a number of improvements across all areas. Working closely with the Director of People, we are also aligning our work with the Access Strategy being developed by the DASS which shows our commitment to take the ambitions of the Customer Experience Strategy even further.

First Contact Resolution and Front Door

The Planning Service front door has now moved into Customer Services at the start of Oct, with a very successful first month during which 86% of the almost 500 calls handled were resolved without the need for escalation.

Whilst we are continuing to work with colleagues in Revenues and Benefits to expand the range of transactions which can be resolve in full by Customer Service Advisors without the need to pass onto colleagues in the back office, we are also scoping out a triage offer for Adults and Children's Services, which would allow us to offer information and advice and signpost whenever appropriate, to reduce inappropriate referrals to the MASH or Adults Social Care.

This work is starting out as a pilot on a small scale, to allow us to understand the nature of demand, and build sustainably towards a front door offer which improves the customer experience and allows our colleagues to focus on complex and high risk cases.

Locality Model

There are now 21 venues where we run outreach surgeries, with very good attendance and interest levels. We have collaborated with colleagues at Age UK to enhance the offer in certain areas (Northampton West, and also trialling Northampton Briar Hill) to include assistance with applications for Attendance Allowance.

A new process is being piloted with St Luke's Medical Centre to offer health professionals the option of referring a patient to Customer Services when they need support but there are no safeguarding concerns. This will make better use of resources, provide support to people whose

cases would otherwise been deemed inappropriate referrals, and build our relationships with partner agencies.

The West Northamptonshire app has seen further development which is making it now a great tool for reporting issues in the community and receiving notifications about local services. A communications campaign is underway to raise awareness of its functionality and encourage residents to download it and make use of it.

Contact Centre Infrastructure

All our hubs are now on the same Customer Records Management solution, which is allowing us to capture better information about customers, produce reports standardise our offer to residents.

The department are also currently in the process of restructuring management layers, with consultation currently underway to standardise ways of working at Manager and Team Leader levels and reduce the numbers of supervisors whilst re-investing into front line provision.

Accessibility and Inclusivity

We have invested additional resources into the review and improvement of the website content, so that more residents can find the information they need, understand the information shared and complete transactions online if that is their preference. A great example of this work is the development of the Adults and Public Health website pages with colleagues in the Communications team, making the content easier to navigate, user friendly and presented in ways which match people's life events and experiences.

The next area of focus is the development of Easy Read materials, for residents with learning difficulties or disability, where a more simplified presentation would improve engagement and independence.

24/7/365

Following a mystery shopping exercise which assessed the quality of provision at various times and days of the week against a number of services, it has become apparent that the way we support residents outside of office hours could be improved.

As a result, work has started to map the processes in place with out of hours teams, identify opportunities for improvement and standardisation, with a view that the first line at night carries out a triage function to similar depth to day-time services. This will mean that people find the support they need more easily, and stretched out of hours resources (Adults and Children's Social Workers, Homelessness Officers, Approved Mental Health Practitioners etc) are protected to focus on the most vulnerable and at risk residents.

Telephony Project

The project is now in implementation, with training and User Acceptance Testing well underway. The next couple of weeks will be critical to the success of the rollout, as more and more colleagues, including our Contact Centres, will start to benefit from the new technology. Communications are being issued to ensure that colleagues and Members are aware of the changes. The project will continue throughout the first half of next year to deploy full functionality such as web chat. We are hoping to have all benefits in place, not just the new ways of communicating via Teams, by summer. Communications will continue to be issued at critical points.

Emergency Planning and Business Continuity

The team have now produced a Manual of Tactical and Operational Responsibilities (MOTOR) clearly outlining our response as an organisation in case of emergency, what support would be available from each department, and how officers and Members could be notified. This is an excellent tool for internal and external colleagues, as it clearly lays out capabilities and response activities in case of incident.

2. Human Resources

Pay and Grading

Activity has continued on this project as we have been reviewing legal advice on how we can lawfully move TUPE protected colleagues over to the new WNC local pay structure, terms and conditions. There has been a considerable number of discussions with Trade Union colleagues who are pushing for teams within Provider Services, Adults, to be assimilated over. We now have an agreed approach and during November and December will be offering voluntary assimilation across Provider Services, to be implemented in January pay run.

A timetable for WNC's local pay bargaining activity for 2024-25 has been established, several options have been developed for discussion with ELT and the recognised Trade Unions have been invited to submit their pay claim by 5th January 2024.

Health, Safety & Wellbeing

There has been continuing support across the school's estate with advice to the Buckton Fields Primary school closure and the RAAC concrete in schools concerns. The team have also been reviewing the Service Level Agreements for Schools to provide greater clarity on service provision as well as working closely with PLACE colleagues on several key policies. Wellbeing have been raising awareness around Menopause in the Workplace, with training for managers and colleagues and Menopause Cafe events were hosted on World Menopause day.

Learning & Development

The team have been working on a solution for Adults to keep supervision records on iLearn (WNC's learning management system) following a request from DTI to help solve Adults problem of how to keep electronic records. We have also been trialling LinkedIN learning and onboarding new training suppliers and we have gone out to all managers in the last month to gather information on future training needs to help inform the 2024/25 delivery programme.

In late October we received approval to disaggregate the final phase of L&D from the NNC, and focus is now on disaggregating the apprenticeship service by 1st April 2024. At present we will receive just 2 FTE of resource back from NNC, which is not adequate to be able to deliver a quality service to WNC, therefore we are also focussing on creating job descriptions and will be going out to recruit to the team in early January.

We have also just concluded a restructuring the L&D team that transferred to us from NNC earlier this year. We have moved to a mixed model (part direct delivery, part external delivery) and as a result there have been two redundancies within the existing team (admin roles), and we are currently recruiting for L&D and Advisor and an Apprentice.

HR Advisory & Business Partnering

The activity in this team remains high, key activities include

- Supporting the closure of Boniface House for Adults and resulting redundancies and redeployment.
- Supporting Adults and Public Health with a Prevention and Early Intervention Project where WNC will have a tiered approach with prevention and early intervention services delivered by Public Health and Adult colleagues.
- Restructure of the Adults Community Teams to align them with the LAP's
- Delivering the planning service and enterprise applications restructures
- Supporting Communities and Opportunities to plan the Housing restructure, and deliver the Sport, Leisure and Culture and Economic Growth & Inward Investment restructures.
- Early activity regarding the transfer of SEMLEP.
- DTI voluntary redundancy programme
- Legal Services restructure and recruitment
- Pilot of DEI face to face training with Waste depot
- Revision of Line Manager Induction training
- Direct training for managers on ERP and absence by service within Place Directorate

Temporary structure changes

In order to release Sarah Reed to work with NCT on their Transformation & Efficiency programme, Alison Golding, AD HR will be taking on additional responsibilities by managing the Corporate & Finance Transformation Service for the next few months. HR & Transformation will report into the Executive Director, Finance.

Transformation

Over the last quarter, the Corporate & Finance Transformation team have been providing programme and project management expertise, business analysis and project support on various large scale initiatives to DTI, Customer Services, HR and corporately:

- Implementation of a single telephony solution to harmonise legacy provision and contracts.
- Office optimisation programme.
- Decommissioning of unsupported SharePoint sites (2007/2013).
- Customer experience management, four CXM platforms into one, to harmonise the way we capture customer interactions to be bring consistency in approach and reporting.

- Pay and grading project – Conclusion of phase two (to introduce a single set of pay, terms and conditions for employees on WNC interim terms and mitigate corporate equal pay risks).
- Hardware refresh, replacing all workforce hardware over a 4-year delivery window, leading procurement, hardware build, roll out model and transition to business as usual service delivery within DTI.
- Continued co-ordination and management of DTI Strategy Board, Transformation Board and Joint Office Board.

3. Legal and Democratic Services

Legal Services

It is a significant credit to the Deputy Director and the whole team that we now have an all singing and dancing in house legal service. The amount of legal work has, as expected, gone up as clients have greater confidence in the service and lower cost advice. Sound legal advice helps to avoid challenge and ensures we do what we are required to for the benefit of our residents. For example significant steps forward are being made in relation to our prosecution work, due to the expertise that we are able to offer to Regulatory and other Services carrying out prosecution work. The SEND team continue to benefit from the specific expertise the in-house legal team are offering. We now have permanent employees supporting our planning committees, to replace the locums and provide consistency of advice.

All three heads of legal services for Corporate, Place and People are in post and are working with our Practice Manager and Deputy Director to develop the culture and operational model for their new services. An official launch day for the new service was held in October at Vulcan Works and I attended along with other members of Cabinet and Senior Officers. We had the opportunity to meet the new team. Further events are planned to help introduce the team to all members and officers. The team is not yet complete as our legal assistants are only just joining us and we are still to carry out the final wave of recruitment for our Trainees and Apprentices. They will enable us to grow the lawyers of the future and provide support to the team. Across all posts a very successful response was received to the advertisements for the roles.

The Council has now withdrawn its shareholding in Pathfinder Legal Services and is working towards developing a service that other councils are already expressing an interest in instructing which will enable the service to generate additional income. We have been contacted by a neighbouring local authority about taking on their housing disrepair work and are exploring this further with them. We have also had initial discussions with Northampton Partnership Homes about increasing our support to them to help them to reduce costs. The team is also supporting the Children's Trust with procurement of external legal services.

A new project is underway for the Council's legal team at West Northants to deliver the service for the Children's Trust. This will enable the Council, and the Children's Trust (and as a result North Northants Council) to achieve savings too. All of which means resources can be redirected to prevent cuts to vital services to residents.

The new cloud-based case management system is now up and supports the financial charging model which will help to ensure that the £500k savings this year and the further proposed savings for next year are delivered.

Information Governance

The update to the teams case management system 'CycFreedom' took place over the weekend of 13-16 of October. The whole West team can now access the cloud based version of the system known as Cyc3 rather than just the staff using the Guildhall servers. This will increase efficiency as all request officers can now access their own cases in real time with inbuilt redaction tools removing the need for additional software. It will also enable a suite of management reports based on the current structure to be developed over the coming months.

Democratic and Electoral Services

At the last meeting of Council, the terms of reference for our Community Governance Review were approved. Since then, Democratic and Electoral Services have been working with colleagues from our Communications and Engagement Service to design a consultation which will launch later this month. The consultation will invite electors and other interested individuals and organisations to contribute views about parish arrangements in West Northamptonshire. Members whose wards are affected will also be asked to contribute their views. The Community Governance Review is due to conclude in September 2024.

The service has also been focussing on delivering the member development programme for 2023-24. Sessions on Overview and Scrutiny, Planning and Licensing are being delivered, alongside the usual briefings to ensure members are being kept informed. Overview and Scrutiny Committees continue to deliver against their work programmes, with the Adult Social Care and Health committee reporting the findings from its recent review of Integrated Care Across Northamptonshire (ICAN) to Cabinet on 14 November.

The Election team is now approaching the end of our canvass, which will conclude a busy but successful period. Our response rate has increased, with 1,334 more properties responding compared to last year. A very successful student registration drive also saw the number of students registered increase compared to last year. Work is now underway to prepare for the scheduled Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner elections in May next year.

Coroner's

Last year the service was heavily involved in the creation of the county Mass Fatalities plan, and we hosted a regional training day in collaboration with Northants Police. This year West Northants hosted the regional Mass Fatalities event, which was a success and very well received by regional colleagues. The aspiration is Northants has set the tone for annual CPD training, and next year Notts have offered to host the event.

The service is continuing to focus on clearing a backlog of over 12 months inquest cases and have had to employ interim staff to clear the backlog. This has resulted in an improved situation, however, there remains a continuing backlog.

We are working together with our partners in health, police and fire etc regarding preparation for winter months and if necessary, the activation of the Leys body storage facility in North Northants.

Both Registration and Coroners will be open between Christmas and New Year, due to deaths over the bank holiday periods to support the bereaved families.

Registration

For ceremonies we have now finished the busy summer period and are set to deliver a Ceremony Officer debrief session during November, to look back at what went well, and what learning we need to factor into our summer planning for next year. This is an in-person event for Ceremony Officer staff.

The service is leading on partnership engagement with NGH in relation to the statutory ME service which is due from April 2024. A spreadsheet to review deaths has been devised and a data sharing agreement is awaiting signoff, to ensure the process is correct for West Northants, to meet registrations key performance targets, and enable a smooth customer experience journey through the new statutory service. The ME has been within hospital trusts as a non-statutory service since the end of 2019, but from April 2024, will encapsulate all GP deaths.

4. Digital, Technology and Innovation

Fixed Telephone Line Project

We are entering the final stages of the full replacement of all fixed-line telephony within WNC: a project that will result in a single phone system spanning all of our sites and allow staff to be located anywhere whilst receiving calls or working in our call centres. This new tool enables our hybrid working policies, gives us flexibility with our property strategy and ensure more efficient and configurable routing of calls, giving our staff the tools, they need to do the job well. The project is expected to be completed next month.

Hardware refresh

A full refresh of all staff personal computing hardware (laptops, etc.) and in-office docking stations to allow staff to move and work seamlessly between our sites is underway and will continue through to 2025. Having kitted all former Daventry District Council staff to support their move to the Abbey Centre, rollouts of new equipment are now occurring every three weeks across the council, according to an order determined by the directors. This new arrangement reduces the lead time from weeks and months to five working days and gives staff the option to have it delivered to their home address as part of the setup.

Unified Digital Network

The service has been working with industry experts to devise a new digital network – the wires and digital routes between all of our main offices and satellite sites. This single network replaces all of the existing legacy networks inherited at Vesting day; ensures that we have the capacity and speed to meet the ever-growing needs for computer traffic between sites; and tailors the digital network to meet our new planned property setup.

A Cabinet paper is due in January to secure member approval and funding. If agreed, it will be implemented during 2024.

Laying the ground for future success

When we became West Northamptonshire, we inherited the separate systems of four predecessor councils, all in various states of maturity and age. One of the least visible programmes of work that nonetheless has the most impact on our productivity as a council is

merging and replacing these systems so that staff do not have to move between the four, saving time and money. This then often becomes an excellent opportunity, as we merge them, to identify more efficient ways of doing things.

Our teams are currently:

- Preparing to bring a case for replacement of all our meeting room AV equipment during calendar Q1 of 2024, to raise the standard of meetings and broadcast events.
- Looking at major replacements for the case management software of both our adults team and the Children's Trust, to work more efficiently and release valuable frontline worker time.
- Devising replacements for our main data storage and disaster recovery tools, to improve reliability and streamline our tools.
- A gradual programme of system mergers – taking four sets of tools in each of our service areas and merging them into a single set, allowing staff to work more efficiently and interchangeably.
- Developing a single "identity management" tool. This system will connect all of the various systems our staff use, allowing them to increasingly use a single login to access things over time, and also for our support teams to remove access to all systems instantaneously upon staff departure (thus improving our security).
- Preparing to replace our primary Housing system, as part of a drive to modernise our housing back office processes.
- Supporting the implementation of a single Revenues & Benefits system, to help deliver improved working and efficiencies in this area.
- Developing a single document management tool, to ensure that all council documents are accessible to the right people internally, backed up, shareable with people with appropriate permissions and protected from inappropriate access.
- Working on an extensive restructure of the service to save nearly £600,000 of staffing costs as part of our efforts to ensure the Council meets its budget and continues delivering vital frontline services.
- Evaluating all contracts to identify further savings to support our financial position.

Councillor Mike Hallam

Cabinet Member for HR & Corporate Services

**Summary of the decisions taken at the meeting of the
Cabinet held on Tuesday 10 October 2023**

1. Date of publication of this summary: 10 October 2023
2. Deadline for requests for call-in (detailing reasons for doing so): 17 October 2023
3. Earliest date for implementation of decisions: 18 October 2023
4. Urgent decisions taken and not subject to the call-in procedure: N/A

Agenda Item and Recommendations	Decision
<p>Agenda Item 5 Minutes</p> <p>To confirm the minutes of the meeting of Cabinet held on 19th September 2023.</p>	<p>RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting on 19 September were agreed as an accurate record.</p>
<p>Agenda Item 8 Northamptonshire Youth Justice Plan</p>	<p>RESOLVED: Cabinet agreed the content of the Youth Justice Plan for 2023/24 and recommend the Plan to Council for approval.</p> <p>REASONS RESOLVED:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complied with the Constitution of the Council where the Youth Justice Plan forms part of the Policy Framework that is approved by Full Council. • Provided strategic direction to the Youth Offending Service that would be delivered by Northamptonshire Children's Trust <p>ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS: Statute requires the production of an annual Youth Justice Plan.</p>
<p>Agenda Item 9 The Establishment of a West Northamptonshire Standing Advisory</p>	<p>RESOLVED: That Cabinet;</p> <p>a) Approved the establishment of a West Northamptonshire SACRE.</p>

<p>Council for Religious Education (SACRE)</p>	<p>b) Approved the SACRE Constitution as detailed in Appendix A</p> <p>REASONS RESOLVED:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ensured the best outcomes for all children in West Northamptonshire for Religious Education (RE) and collective worship, and access to a high quality RE curriculum. 2. Ensured that the following SACRE duties are met for West Northamptonshire Council: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The provision of advice to the local authority (LA) on all aspects of its provision for RE and collective worship in its schools; • The publishing of an annual report on its work and on actions taken by its representative groups; • The monitoring and review of the provision and quality of Agreed Syllabus RE and of collective worship in order to provide targeted advice and support on teaching Agreed Syllabus RE; • Consideration of whether changes need to be made to the Agreed Syllabus, in partnership with the LA; • The provision of advice to the LA on the provision of training of teachers in RE and Collective Worship; • The consideration of complaints about RE and collective worship referred to them by the LA; • The provision of advice to the LA in respect of the Agreed Syllabus and its implementation; • The consideration of any requests from headteachers to hold Collective Worship that is not of a broadly Christian character <p>ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS: There are no alternative options as legally each local education authority must have its own SACRE according to Section 390 of the Education Act 1996.</p>
<p>Agenda Item 10 West Northants Council nightly purchased temporary accommodation procurement via Dynamic Purchasing</p>	<p>RESOLVED: Cabinet approved;</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) The commencement of the procurement process and delegated authority to the Head of Private

System

Sector Housing, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing, Culture & Leisure; Procurement Governance Group and Chief Financial Officer (s151) to manage the process throughout its lifespan, including procuring, awarding, maintaining and cooling off (if needed) the DPS.

- b) The introduction of a new Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS) for the booking of nightly purchased temporary accommodation for homeless households from the 1st June 2024
- c) That the duration of the DPS be for an initial 5-year period beginning from the notified contract award commencement date and with the option to extend on an annual basis whilst the DPS remains fit for purpose and depending upon the Council's ongoing need for this type of temporary accommodation.

REASONS RESOLVED:

- Enabled West Northamptonshire Council to meet its statutory requirements in providing households in priority need with temporary accommodation as set out in the Housing Act 1996
- Ensured that the provision of temporary accommodation is both cost-effective and legally compliant. More so than the alternative of using expensive bed and breakfast/hotel booking

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS:

Option two (Not recommended) – not procuring a new DPS

1. The current DPS contract will expire on 1st June 2024. Should this occur, the Council would seek to secure an alternate supply of temporary accommodation, most likely utilising various Bed and Breakfast accommodation.
2. While these options can be used to secure accommodation, this

	<p>approach can increase susceptibility to variable pricing and is not the most effective way of managing cost and supply</p> <p>3. Furthermore, the likelihood of being able to decant the high volume of households currently in nightly-purchased temporary accommodation procured via the DPS into Bed and Breakfast and Hotels would be very low, if not impossible. The Council would also be at the mercy of Bed and Breakfast and Hotel's availability and pricing; most likely meaning this would not be a long-term solution, and households could face the upheaval of having to move multiple times.</p> <p>4. WNC could find itself unable to provide suitable accommodation for homeless households, meaning it cannot fulfil its statutory duties.</p>
<p>Agenda Item 11 Procurement of Key Waste Contracts</p>	<p>RESOLVED: That Cabinet;</p> <p>a) Approved the commencement of procurement for a new contract(s) for the treatment of residual waste.</p> <p>b) Approved the commencement of procurement for new contracts for the provision of Household Waste Recycling Centre services.</p> <p>c) Approved the commencement of procurement of a contract for a waste transfer facility to enable bulking of dry mixed recyclables collected from the South area.</p> <p>d) Delegated authority to the Executive Director for Place, Economy and Environment in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Environment, Transport, Highways and Waste Services, and the Executive Director for Finance to:</p> <p>i) Finalise the specification for the contracts;</p> <p>ii) Take decisions relating to the procurement processes, to enable them to progress as</p>

- planned; and
- iii) Award the contracts, providing the procurement exercises reach a satisfactory conclusion.

REASONS RESOLVED:

1. Ensured the Council has secure outlets for the treatment and disposal of residual waste which is collected at the kerbside and the Household Waste Recycling Centres, which will enable the Council to fulfil its statutory duties.
2. Ensured the Council fulfils its statutory duty to provide Household Waste Recycling Centre services.
3. Ensured the Council has a suitable waste transfer facility for the delivery and bulking of dry mixed recyclables collected in the South of the West Northamptonshire area.
4. Ensured compliant procurement processes commence, with new contracts being awarded once the processes are completed to enable seamless continued service delivery.
5. Ensured value for money for these arrangements, by following a competitive procurement process.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS:

1. The option of the Council developing its own residual waste treatment facility has been considered. The information gathered in the market engagement exercise and also research undertaken by independent consultants as part of developing the Resources and Waste Strategy indicates that there is sufficient residual waste treatment capacity available at facilities which are not far from West Northamptonshire. If the Council were to be inclined to develop its own facility there would be a minimum 7 year lead in time during which the Council would need to develop a business case, secure land and planning permission, build and commission a

	<p>facility. Therefore, the proposed contracts are required to replace the existing arrangements to ensure residual waste can be treated and disposed of from April 2025.</p> <p>2. The option of one contract for the whole of West Northamptonshire's waste or two contracts or (Lots) has been considered. Currently there are two contracts for West Northamptonshire's waste and this enables flexibility, business continuity and the costs of managing residual waste to be minimised because waste can be transferred from one lot to another at the Council's discretion. It is proposed that the benefits of procuring two contracts are compared with the potential economies of scale if one contract is procured as part of developing the specification.</p>
<p>Agenda Item 12 Transfer of Dedicated School Grant Funding for Forensic Services from the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) to West Northants Council</p>	<p>RESOLVED: That Cabinet;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Accepted the additional funding and commissioning responsibilities for St Andrew's Healthcare forensic services. b) Approved the award of a contract to St Andrews Healthcare for the provision of education and training for young people up the age of 18 detained in the unit. <p>REASONS RESOLVED:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. West Northants currently sits outside of the national arrangements in place for all similar provision whereby contract responsibilities for Forensic Services sit with the host local authority. The ESFA have asked the Council to take on commissioning responsibilities and funding management so that we are in line with the model adopted by the ESFA and other local authorities. 2. Initial discussions with St Andrews suggest that they are willing to

provide specialist mental health support (training and advice) to other schools so that the broad education offer and support to children and young people's mental health is improved within West Northants.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS:

- a) To take on the arrangements as proposed by the ESFA. This is preferred option as it will give the council the ability to control the quality of provision and will maintain our relationship with the ESFA.
- b) To decline to take on the additional funding and commissioning responsibilities for St Andrew's Healthcare forensic services. This is not the recommended option as it will mean the council has no control over the provision at the unit, and less ability to ensure that there is adequate provision for our children and young people.

**Agenda Item 13
Purchase of a dwelling in Northampton for NCT (General Exception Rule has been applied)**

RESOLVED: That Cabinet: Authorised the Assistant Director Assets & Environment to purchase the property in question, or if that should prove impractical, another property which delivers similar outcomes, in each case within the approved budget.

REASONS RESOLVED:

- To increase sufficiency of placements for children in line with the NCT Sufficiency Strategy.
- To help control the costs of providing suitable places for children.
- To help prevent the use of unregulated provision for children.
- To ensure the Council can act swiftly if required to secure the desired benefits.

ALTERNATIVE ACTIONS:

Option 1: Do nothing. The Council could leave the current situation as is. This would mean that the children in Arnold House

stay where they are, and more complex children may have to be accommodated in unregistered accommodation if no other provision was available. This option would not help control costs.

Option 2: Care provider purchases alternative property. The Council could work with a care provider, and they could provide the property. As shown in Table 1, this is typically a much more expensive solution. It has also been concluded that developing a service that belongs to NCT is the best way to ensure more responsive and cost-effective provision and will lead to better outcomes for children. It allows NCT to change provider without having to change property as well.

Option 3: Leasing alternative property. The Council could lease a property from the open market from a private landlord. There are currently not many larger properties available for rent. Additionally, the property would need to be adapted to allow children with high support needs to live there safely. This may be difficult to achieve with a limited term lease. It would be achievable under a long lease, but a long lease would restrict the Council's options if the property was no longer required for this purpose.

Option 4: Purchase the identified property. This would enable better provision for children, help avoid risk of the use of unregistered accommodation, and reduce overall costs as detailed in this report. Additionally, over time, growth in the capital value of the property would accrue to the benefit of the Council (and NNC).

Option 5: Look for an alternative property to purchase. There is no obvious reason to do this. Suitable properties are relatively rare and accordingly, it is likely to take some time for one to come to the market. It is unlikely a materially cheaper property would perform the intended function.

It is suggested that Option 4 is clearly the preferable option. It delivers identified savings, provides better options for children, and helps avoid use of unregistered accommodation.

West Northants Housing Allocations Function

house team manage the housing allocations service and deliver the Council's single housing allocations scheme for West Northamptonshire.

REASONS RESOLVED:

- A single, comprehensive triage and assessment process could be created within the council for customers/residents in housing need.
- Having a single allocations function should deliver a clear customer journey regardless of what part of West Northants you live in/have a local connection to. An in-house allocations function sat alongside the homelessness service should create an improved customer journey for customers who need support from both services as they will be in the same organisation/team.
- There should be fewer opportunities for customers to 'fall between the gaps' of the allocations & homelessness services.
- The council will have increased control of a service provided in-house.
- The skills, expertise and knowledge relating to Part 6 of the Housing Act 1996 and housing allocations are retained within the council.
- The housing allocations would be co-located with related functions: homelessness; disabled adaptations; community safety especially Domestic Abuse & Sexual Violence work; Adult Social Care; Children's Trust.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS:

Option 1: Continue existing arrangements

- Under this option NPH would continue to provide the housing allocations service in the Northampton locality and WNC provide the service in rural West Northants.

	<p><u>Option 2: NPH manage housing allocations for the whole of West Northants</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Under this option NPH would manage the housing allocations for the whole of West Northants administrative area. <p><u>Option 3: Bring the housing allocations function in-house within West Northamptonshire Council</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Under this option WNC would manage the housing allocations for the whole of West Northants administrative area.
<p>Agenda Item 15 Acquisition of Broadmead Court</p>	<p>RESOLVED: That Cabinet;</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Approved the proposal to acquire Broadmead Court as outlined within exempt Appendix A subject to a red book valuation, satisfactory due diligence having been undertaken and approval by the S151 Officer of a fully costed business case to develop the property using either SHAP or Housing Revenue Account funding. b) Delegated authority to the Assistant Director of Assets and Environment in consultation with the S151 Officer, the Portfolio Holder for Housing, Culture and Leisure and the Portfolio Holder for Finance to negotiate and acquire Broadmead Court including completion of the legal requirements. c) Delegated authority to the Director of Communities and Opportunities to undertake a compliant procurement process and to enter into construction contracts, and any related bonds to develop Broadmead Court into self-contained flats to accommodate people with immediate housing and support needs <p>REASONS RESOLVED:</p>

1. Broadmead Court will offer the Council an opportunity to increase the supply of affordable supported housing for individuals with additional support needs, as identified in the West Northamptonshire Council Housing Strategy.
2. The Council has identified need for an additional 66 units to support the Single Homeless Pathway and has been named as a target authority for the SHAP, a three year programme to support single homeless households. Should the SHAP bid be unsuccessful Broadmead Court could alternatively be used to provide temporary accommodation, as required under Part VII Housing Act 1996. Currently, there are over 600 households placed into temporary accommodation, only 151 of which are properties owned by the Council. The acquisition of Broadmead Court would reduce the reliance on nightly purchase temporary accommodation, which incurs higher costs than Council owned accommodation.
3. The acquisition of Broadmead Court would provide positive community impact and help the Council meet its strategic aims by reducing the number of potential rough sleepers by increasing the provision of accommodation available through the single homeless pathway, or by providing more suitable temporary accommodation to support those who are currently homeless.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS:

Three options have been considered in terms of the Issues and Choices. The options are summarised as:-

- Option 1 - Acquire the property with vacant possession upon completion.
- Option 2 - Acquire the Property subject to the occupation of a third-party provider;
- Option 3 – Do not acquire the

<p>Agenda Item 16 Four Waterside and Marefair - Appointment of Preferred Development Partner</p>	<p>property.</p> <p>RESOLVED: that Cabinet:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Subject to robust financial and other due diligence having been carried out in respect of Bidder 1 approved the selection of Bidder 1 as the preferred development partner for Four Waterside and Marefair having considered the detail set out within this report and exempt Appendix A. b) Noted the use of £1.5m of Towns Fund and £7m of Enterprise Zone grant funding that will be used for the delivery of this scheme. c) Delegated authority to the Director of Communities and Opportunities in consultation with the Executive Director for Finance, Director of Legal and Democratic and Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Town Centre Regeneration and Growth and Cabinet Member for Finance to negotiate and conclude the terms of and enter into, the Development Agreement and associated documents with the preferred bidder, in accordance with the Final Tender. This includes engaging with the preferred bidder to confirm financial commitments and other commercial terms through the finalisation of the Development Agreement and associated documents in accordance with the Final Tender and detailed Heads of Terms contained within it. d) Approved the recommendations set out in the Exempt Appendix A. <p>REASONS RESOLVED:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The recommendations are being made so the regeneration of Four Waterside and Marefair can progress. The delivery of Four Waterside and Marefair will have significant placemaking benefits and act as a catalyst project through establishing new values. The development will provide a new high-quality mixed-use neighbourhood on a key strategic site within Northampton town centre. The site is currently a vacant brownfield site which is an
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eyesore within the town centre, and given its key strategic location, the development has the potential to have a transformational impact upon Northampton town centre and beyond.

- Four Waterside and Marefair aligns strongly with the objectives of the West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy, Northampton Local Plan Part 2, and the Council's Corporate Priorities to secure the delivery of a range of housing in sustainable locations to ensure all residents have access to a home that they can afford and that meets their needs. 4.3 The recommendations are being made following a compliant procurement process via the Pagabo Framework and the subsequent evaluation of final tenders by both bidders. The submissions were evaluated and approved by the evaluation panel which was made up of the Head of Major Projects and Regeneration (moderator), Regeneration Manager (evaluator), Principal Regeneration Programmes Officer (evaluator), Partner at Cushman and Wakefield (evaluator) and Partner at Faulkner Brown Architects (evaluator) with support from West Northamptonshire's Procurement Team and appointed Legal Advisors Trowers and Hamlins.

ALTERNATIVE ACTIONS:

Cabinet could decide not to approve the recommendation, but this would lead to the Council having to cease the current procurement process and either commence a new procurement process or opt not to proceed with this form of regeneration scheme. These routes are not recommended as they would undermine the Council's ability to deliver the objectives of the regeneration of Northampton town centre.

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**Summary of the decisions taken at the meeting of the
Cabinet held on Tuesday 14 November 2023**

1. Date of publication of this summary: 14/11/2023
2. Deadline for requests for call-in (detailing reasons for doing so): 21/11/2023
3. Earliest date for implementation of decisions: 22/11/2023
4. Urgent decisions taken and not subject to the call-in procedure: N/A

Agenda Item and Recommendations	Decision
<p>Agenda Item 2 Minutes</p> <p>To confirm the minutes of the meeting of Cabinet held on 10 October 2023.</p>	<p>RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting on 10 October 2023 were agreed as an accurate record.</p>
<p>Agenda Item 5 Report of the Adult Social Care and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee - Integrated Care across Northamptonshire (iCAN) Scrutiny Review</p>	<p>RESOLVED: that Cabinet noted the recommendations, thanked the task and finish group and resolved to consider a report setting out a response to the recommendations at a future meeting.</p> <p>REASONS RESOLVED: The recommendations resulting from the scrutiny review are intended to contribute to the development of effective services supporting independent living for frail older people in West Northamptonshire. This reflects the Overview and Scrutiny function's role for the development and review of policy.</p> <p>ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS: The recommendations will be the subject of consideration and a further report to a future meeting.</p>
<p>Agenda Item 6 Commissioning of the National NHS Health Check Programme for West</p>	<p>RESOLVED: that Cabinet:</p> <p>a) Adopted and agreed the recommended model of care for redesigning our</p>

Northamptonshire.

service, improving access to NHS Health Checks for early detection of CVD diseases and preventing premature mortality due to CVD and its complications.

- b) Agreed to initiate the commissioning process of the recommended service delivery model for the NHS Health Check programme in West Northamptonshire for its implementation for five-years (2+2+1).

REASONS RESOLVED:

- The existing NHS Health Check programme does not meet national expectations. The CVD prevalence across West Northamptonshire has risen and continues to rise, and CVD related mortality in the area is higher than the national average.
- The recommended model of service delivery will:
 - provide capacity to deliver a tailored service aimed at improving CVD related health outcomes.
 - focus on targeting inequalities in accessing the NHS Health Check service, supporting improvements to the quality of life in groups experiencing inequalities and inequity.
 - improve service delivery by aligning community providers with General Practices and increasing resident's opportunities of receiving Health Checks and thereby uptake.
 - better aligned service delivery with the prevention strategy, helping to reduce delays in treatment and increase referrals to community behavioural interventions that will reduce the risks of developing CVD diseases. This will result in a reduced demand on primary healthcare systems and have a reduction in the number of CVD complications, and CVD related admissions to the hospitals.
 - offer providers an enhanced

- payment package, which supports process improvements and performance outcomes.
- provide an improved training package for providers that enhances the quality of Health Check delivery and incorporates Basic Life Support, Mental Health First Aid and Making Every Contact Count (MECC). Community providers will also be offered condensed IPC (Infection Prevention and Control) training.
 - enable enhanced collaboration in primary care between General Practices, community providers and independent providers.
 - provide a model that is financially and clinically effective at achieving health benefits of the NHS Health Check screening programme.
 - provide a service that aligns to:
 - statutory requirement under the Local Authorities Regulation Act 13.
 - NHS Ambition Core 20PLUS5 to support in reducing healthcare inequalities by increasing hypertension case finding.
 - the 'All our Health' framework, ensuring the NHS Health Check programme reaches high-risk and vulnerable communities.
 - the objectives of the West Northamptonshire Local Area Partnerships (LAP) who aim to make a difference of those who live in the area through tailored and targeted support.
 - to the West Northamptonshire Health and Wellbeing Strategy ambitions three (opportunities to be fit, well and independent) and nine (access to health and social care).
 - the Integrated Care Network's Live your Best Life Strategy ambitions three (opportunities to be fit, well and independent) and nine (access to health and social care).

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ the three levels of the recommended preventative approach (primary, secondary, and tertiary). <p>ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS:</p> <p>The recommended model is detailed in section 5.4.3 of the report, as one of the most cost and clinically effective model of care in achieving health benefits of the NHS Health Check screening programme.</p> <p>There is an option of adopting either of the other two proposed models. However, the analysis did not find them to be feasible, considering the current CVD health needs of the West Northamptonshire population and the system requirement of service provision.</p> <p>The equality impact assessment identified that the recommended option meets the need of all layers of demography and is equitable to all by applying a proportionate universalism approach to improve the health of the entire population, whilst signposting most disadvantaged faster.</p> <p>One of the tests of implementing this model of NHS Health Check, is to manage two separate commissioning models that include payment by activity and block contract to best fit the need of our population</p>
<p>Agenda Item 7 West Northamptonshire Housing Allocation Scheme</p>	<p>RESOLVED: that Cabinet:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Approved the final West Northants Housing Allocation Scheme for West Northamptonshire contained in Appendix A to this report b) Approved delegated authority to Portfolio Holder for any minor amendments to the Scheme prior to operational commencement on the 1 April 2024 <p>REASONS RESOLVED:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To accord with legislation and which requires a harmonised Housing Allocations Scheme to be published by 1 April 2024.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aligning three existing housing allocation schemes into one Scheme, which will create equality of opportunity to access social rented housing across West Northamptonshire. <p>ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS: It is a legal requirement under Part 6 of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended) that Local Authorities have a Housing Allocation Scheme.</p> <p>West Northamptonshire Council is required to have a harmonised housing allocation scheme by 1 April 2024 as set in the Local Government (Structural Changes) Transitional Arrangements) (No.2) Regulation 2008, (regulation 12) (as amended coronavirus amendment regulation).</p> <p>It is recommended that the final draft West Northants Housing Allocation Scheme is approved and adopted for publication.</p> <p>The Council may be at risk of legal challenge if we do not have an adopted Housing Allocation Scheme within the timescales set out.</p>
<p>Agenda Item 8 Northamptonshire Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report 2022-23</p>	<p>RESOLVED: that Cabinet:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Noted the content of the Northamptonshire Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report that gives an overview of the Corporate Parenting Board and its oversight, challenges and activities. Noted that The NCT Corporate Parenting Strategy 2021-25 sets out four key priorities including updates on each area's progress. Recommended that the report was taken to the Councils' Full Council meetings for consideration. <p>REASONS RESOLVED:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To promote and monitor the Trust's corporate parenting strategy. To encourage all members and employees to recognise their role as corporate parents.

	<p>ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS: NCT produce an Annual Report and an Annual Review which gives an overview of the whole service including Corporate Parenting. The Annual Report will give further overview of any issues.</p>
<p>Agenda Item 9 Resources and Waste Strategy for West Northamptonshire</p>	<p>RESOLVED: that Cabinet approved the Resources and Waste Strategy.</p> <p>REASONS RESOLVED:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is essential for the Council to have a 'vision for waste services' which will ensure that as existing arrangements for West Northamptonshire's waste and street cleansing expire, the new arrangements are consistent with the vision. The Strategy will provide a set of principles to guide decisions regarding replacement arrangements which will help facilitate sustainable and efficient waste services. <p>ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS: The Council could have decided not to develop a Resources and Waste Strategy at this time, especially given the continued uncertainty about national requirements for waste services. However, without the Strategy, the Council may not have been able to take consistent decisions about replacement arrangements as current contracts expire.</p> <p>The Council may have decided to take a different approach to developing the Resources and Waste Strategy, and attempted to include solutions for all waste related issues within the document. For example, whether the waste fleet of vehicles should switch to an alternate fuel, or whether 3 weekly collections should be implemented across West Northamptonshire. However, taking this approach would have taken much longer to develop the Strategy, which is required as soon as possible to inform decisions about replacement arrangements.</p> <p>The approach that has been taken, to develop a vision for waste services and a set of 10 principles allows the Council to</p>

	<p>make service decisions about, which will help implement the vision in a gradual way as existing arrangements end. As noted earlier, where significant changes are proposed, these will be the subject of a separate Cabinet paper.</p>
<p>Agenda Item 10 Estate and Construction & Maintenance Climate Strategies</p>	<p>RESOLVED: that Cabinet:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Approved the Estate Climate Strategy, as set out at Appendix A. b) Approved the Construction & Maintenance Climate Strategy, as set out at Appendix B. <p>REASONS RESOLVED:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To enable the Council to deliver on its policy of achieving net zero carbon by 2030, in respect of the operation of its estate and construction and maintenance activities. • To provide clear direction for the Council's staff and supply chain. • To maximise benefits, including financial benefits, and minimise costs. <p>ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS:</p> <p>The Council could choose to adopt the strategies, or one of them, or neither of them. It could also pursue different approaches to various aspects; for example, it could focus on technological solutions for carbon removal.</p> <p>Each strategy has been designed to maximise the benefits, including financial benefits, and minimise costs. They are therefore suggested to be pragmatic ways of meeting the Council's policy goals.</p> <p>Other options, such as the Council investing in technological solutions for carbon removal from the atmosphere, appear unlikely to be viable at scale by 2030, and in any event to be costly and offer little in the way of collateral benefits.</p> <p>Alternatively, the Council could focus on buying 'carbon credits' from suitable sources. However, whilst these do exist the supply is finite and, as with technological solutions, represents a pure cost rather than an opportunity for</p>

	<p>collateral benefits.</p> <p>It is therefore recommended that the two strategies are adopted.</p>
<p>Agenda Item 11 Council Tax Care Leavers Discount</p>	<p>RESOLVED: that Cabinet:</p> <p>a) Noted the contents of this report.</p> <p>b) Recommended to Council the implementation of the proposed Care Leavers discount for 2024/25 and the policy shown at Appendix A of this report.</p> <p>REASONS RESOLVED:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • West Northamptonshire Council recognises the vulnerability of people leaving care and its role as the corporate parent. The recommended approach ensures that all eligible care leavers receive the support they are entitled to. <p>ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS:</p> <p>The proposal is to award a local discount directly to the Council Tax account of Care Leavers aged 18-21 after any other discounts and exemptions have been applied and proportionate to the number of residents liable for Council Tax in the property. For example, a Care leaver sharing with 3 other people would receive a 25% discount. The discount will apply until the Care Leaver turns 21. From this date no discount will apply but the Care Leaver can apply for Council Tax Reduction so preventing that 'cliff edge' at 21.</p> <p>Under the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme West Northamptonshire Council's Care Leavers can receive help with up to 100% of their Council Tax liability. However, the scheme is means tested based on the income of the household and the current scheme also relies on care leavers making an application and providing all the required verification to support the claim, this doesn't always happen, and Care Leavers do not get the support they are therefore potentially entitled to.</p>

<p>Agenda Item 12 Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2024-2025</p>	<p>RESOLVED: that Cabinet:</p> <p>a) Noted the contents of the report b) Approved the proposed LCTRS for 2024-2025 as outlined in the report c) Recommended to Council a no change LCTRS for 2024-2025</p> <p>REASONS RESOLVED:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To enable a Council Tax Reduction Scheme to be agreed for West Northants Council for the financial year 2024-25 to be in place by 31 January 2024. <p>ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS:</p> <p>1 As of June 2022, the total number of people in receipt of LCTRS was 19,294, 11,531 of which are of working age. As of September 2023, the total number of people in receipt of LCTRS is 18,584 with 10,8991 being of working age. The estimated cost of the scheme for 2023-2024 is £19.8m.</p> <p>Council Tax collection rate for West Northants for 2022-2023 is 96.97% which is an improvement on 2021-2022 collection rate of 96.48%. It also compares well to the national average collection rate of 96.02% and a national average for unitary councils of 96.20%. We continue to monitor the collection rates each month and as of September 2023 the profiled collection rates are 56.92% against a target of 57.74%.</p>
<p>Agenda Item 13 Public Spaces Protection Order - Emporium Way</p>	<p>RESOLVED: that Cabinet:</p> <p>a) Authorised the Executive Director Place and Economy to make a PSPO to restrict public access to the walkway known as Emporium Way in accordance with the results of the consultation as detailed in Appendix 3 and to carry out any outstanding legal requirements prior to it coming into force.</p> <p>b) Approved that the PSPO is brought into force once the gates and hoardings restricting access to Emporium Way have been installed, which cannot be arranged until the decision whether to</p>

	<p>make the Order has been made.</p> <p>REASONS RESOLVED: A decision to approve the proposal will support the priorities of the Community Safety Partnership. The recommendation is the preferred option of both partners and majority of members of the public responding to the consultation.</p> <p>ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS: Crime Data provided by Northants Police shows 20 recorded crimes from September 2021 to August 2023, increasing from 4 crimes between Sept. 2021 – Aug 2022 to 16 crimes in the same period the following year.</p> <p>In addition, during the same two-year period 19 incidents were also recorded. Again, there has been an increase from 6 incidents between Sept 2021 – Aug 2022 to 13 incidents for the same period.</p> <p>Northants Police Solar Team have reported 3 recent serious sexual offences in the alleyway; one guilty plea for an offence taking place in 2021 and two crimes currently under investigation from 2022 and 2023.</p> <p>Issues witnessed by CCTV operators on a regular basis include; groups of young people causing criminal damage and Anti-Social behaviour, people buying, selling and using drugs and as a cut through for shoplifters, street drinkers and addicts to go from the town over to Oasis House and the Mounts area. In addition, the area is regularly used as a toilet, attracts vermin has been the location of numerous assaults</p>
<p>Agenda Item 14 Active Travel Fund 4 - Connecting the Active Quarter - Access for All, Northampton</p>	<p>RESOLVED: that Cabinet:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Noted and accepted the ATF4 funding to deliver the Connecting the Active Quarter – Access for All scheme, Northampton b) Delegated authority to the Executive Director of Place, Economy and the Environment in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Environment,

Transport, Highways and Waste to take all operational decisions necessary to implement the active travel scheme at Delapre Abbey as outlined in 1.6 above.

REASONS RESOLVED:

- To ensure the ATF4 grant award is spent within the award timescales and for the permitted purposes.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS:

6.1 A key requirement for ATF4 was that the funding be used to construct schemes that were at detailed design stage and 'shovel ready' with a requirement that funding must be committed by March 2024 (either construction by this date or contract in place with construction following as soon as possible).

The Council had previously been successful in securing funding for feasibility design for the Connecting the Active Quarter - Access for All scheme, and so design work was well advanced.

There were no alternative schemes that were considered to be at a sufficient level of design to meet the funding criteria.

The cost estimates for the Connecting the Active Quarter – Access for All scheme closely aligned with the indicative allocation from Active Travel England.

An Equality Screening Assessment has been completed. No negative impacts on protected groups were identified, so there is no requirement to complete a full Equality Impacts Assessment.

**Agenda Item 15
Decision Taken Under Special Urgency Powers: Acquisition of Former Bus Depot, St James, Northampton**

RESOLVED: that Cabinet noted the decisions taken by the Deputy Leader of the Council set out at Appendix A and Appendix B.

REASONS RESOLVED:

Where decisions that would otherwise be taken by the Leader and Cabinet have been taken by the Leader alone, in the

interests of transparency, the decision is reported to the next available meeting of the Council.

The decision taken provided the authority for the Council to:

a) establish a capital budget of £3.3m for the purchase of the Former Bus Depot land and buildings at St James, Northampton

b) approve the acquisition of the Former Bus Depot for the delivery of a regeneration scheme.

Full reasons for the decision taken are set out in the decision records appended to this report.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS:

Alternative decision to not proceed with the acquisition would mean that the site would be likely sold to a developer who could land bank the site or could bring forward low-grade uses. Given the challenges of the site, it is also possible that the site could continue to sit vacant adding to the negative perception of the town centre and beyond.

WEST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNCIL COUNCIL

30 NOVEMBER 2023

Cabinet Member for Children, Families & Education: Cllr Fiona Baker

Report Title	Northamptonshire Youth Justice Plan
Report Author	Claire O’Keeffe, Head of Northamptonshire Youth Offending Service -Northamptonshire Children’s Trust. Claire.o’keeffe@nctrust.co.uk

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List of Appendices

Appendix A –Youth Justice plan 2022

1. Purpose of Report

1.1. Under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 there is a statutory requirement to publish an annual Youth Justice Plan which must provide specified information about the local provision of youth justice services. The Youth Justice Board provides guidance about what must be included in the plan and recommends a structure for the plan. The draft Youth Justice Plan for the Northamptonshire Youth Justice Service is attached at Appendix One.

2. Executive Summary

2.1. Youth Offending Teams are statutory partnerships, established under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, with the principal aim of preventing offending by children and young

people. Local authorities are responsible for establishing a Youth Offending Team. Police, the Probation Service and Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) are statutorily required to assist in their funding and operation.

- 2.2. This current plan covers performance for the period 2022/23 and provides service budgets, operational and strategic developments within the service and partnership, service structure and the Service Improvement Plan for 2023 – 2024.
- 2.3. The Youth Justice Plan must be submitted to the Youth Justice Board for England and Wales (YJB) and published in accordance with the directions of the Secretary of State. After submission to the YJB, Youth Justice Plans are sent to Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (HMIP - lead for YOS inspections) and are placed in the House of Commons library.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1. It is recommended that the Council agree the content of the Youth Justice Plan for 2023/24

4. Reason for Recommendations

- To comply with the Constitution of the Council where the Youth Justice Plan forms part of the Policy Framework that is approved by Full Council.
- To provide strategic direction to the Youth Offending Service that is delivered by Northamptonshire Children's Trust.

5. Report Background

- 5.1. The Youth Offending Service (YOS) is a statutory multi agency service, which has a responsibility to prevent offending and reoffending by those aged under 18 years who are resident in Northamptonshire. Northamptonshire YOS is well respected nationally as an innovative service achieving good outcomes for children and young people.
- 5.2. There is a statutory requirement to produce and submit to the Youth Justice Board a Youth Justice Plan (Plan) as set out in the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 section 40. The Plan should set out how youth justice services are to be provided and funded, how the Youth Offending Service will be composed and funded, how it will operate and what functions it will carry out. The Plan must be submitted for approval to the Youth Justice Board (YJB) and published in accordance with the directions of the Secretary of State. The submission of the Plan is also a condition for receipt by the service of the second instalment of the Youth Justice Board Good Practice Grant.
- 5.3. The areas of work for the YOS are laid out in legislation, government policy and national guidance. The detail of local operational priorities and delivery are developed in agreement and with reference to key local strategic boards including Community Safety Executive; Children Trust Board; Local Safeguarding Children's Board and Northamptonshire's North and East Criminal Justice Board.

6. Issues and Choices

- 6.1. Statute requires the production of an annual Youth Justice Plan, the YJB also welcomes plans that cover more than one year. Plans must cover both strategic and operational elements. The wider strategic picture should be captured, whilst also outlining the key business activities that will be undertaken by services to achieve wider strategic aims.
- 6.2. The Plan should set out the direction and strategy of youth justice services, describing how quality services will be provided to ensure positive outcomes for children and improvements in performance indicators, in particular:
- reducing first time entrants to the youth justice system
 - reducing the use of custody
 - reducing reoffending rates
 - locally agreed performance indicators that evidence positive outcomes for children
- 6.3. The Plan must describe how leadership and governance is set up to monitor the quality and effectiveness of youth justice services across your area.
- 6.4. The Northamptonshire Youth Justice Plan has identified the following priorities:
- Strategic Priority 1 –Early Help & Prevention.
 - Strategic Priority 2- Recognising and responding to child exploitation and serious youth violence.
 - Strategic Priority 3 – Tackling disproportionality in the criminal justice system.
- 6.5. Due to the restrictions of the YJB prescriptive approach, the YOS is prevented from innovating and ensuring the document is child friendly and accessible to all. The YJB has a long list of key headings and directives the YOS must follow which as a result restricts some of the community.

7. Implications (including financial implications)

7.1. Resources and Financial

- 7.1.1. The Youth Offending Service is partly funded by the Youth Justice Grant which is distributed by the Youth Justice Board. Receipt of this grant is dependent on submission of a Youth Justice Plan to the Youth Justice Board.

7.2. Legal

- 7.2.1. It is a legal requirement under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 section 40 to produce a Plan and submit this to the YJB for approval.

7.3. Risk

7.3.1. There are no significant risks arising from the proposed recommendations in this report.

7.4. Consultation and Communications

7.4.1. In accordance with statutory requirements, the Plan was placed before Northamptonshire YOS Management Board on which statutory partners sit (Police, Probation, Health) and was approved in May 2023.

7.4.2. The YOS intends to prepare a child friendly version of the Plan once the Plan has been agreed. The Plan at present is not child friendly due to the prescriptive nature of the YJB requirements, Northamptonshire YOS are committed to ensuring that young people have a full understanding of the YOS Plan for 2023. The Northampton Children's Trust Youth Engagement Team have been identified to contribute to this.

7.5. Consideration by Overview and Scrutiny

7.5.1. The Overview and Scrutiny have not requested to comment in relation to this report and recommendations.

7.6. Climate Impact

7.6.1. There is no specific climate impact arising from this report.

7.7. Community Impact

7.7.1. There is no distinct community impact arising from this report.

8. Background Papers

Youth Justice Plan in appendix A

Northamptonshire Youth Offending

Service Youth Justice Plan

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Service Northamptonshire Youth Offending Service (YOS)

Service Manager/ Lead Claire O'Keeffe

Chair of YJS Board AnnMarie Dodds



Introduction, vision and strategy

Welcome to the Northamptonshire Youth Justice Plan 2023/2024,

This plan builds on our achievements in 2022/23 and sets out our strong partnership commitment to early help, prevention, and diversion. The plan has been developed collaboratively with our Northamptonshire Youth Offending Service Management Board members to ensure we are confident of the priorities set and assurance that the child first principle is fully embedded.

We are proud to have continued to drive and deliver improvements in our performance, which includes the reduction in first-time entrants into the criminal justice system and reducing re-offending. However, while there are fewer young people in the criminal justice system, those who remain, present a higher level of complexity, and require intensive support. It is a testament to the effectiveness of our prevention and intervention collaborative efforts with schools, families, and partner agencies, that we have successfully diverted many young people from the path of criminality, offering them opportunities for positive personal growth and development.

We know ourselves and our practice well and whilst we recognise the progress we have made we are committed to moving forwards our priorities for 2023/2024 demonstrates our commitment to addressing the rising concerns of serious youth violence, often gang-related, with children and young people the victims of gun and knife crime, resulting, on too many occasions, in the tragic loss of life. We are further seeing the detrimental impact this has on our communities, particularly with the exploitation of young people, in many cases by organised criminal groups running 'County Lines'. We are committed to supporting the Serious Violence Duty arrangements in Northamptonshire to ensure that our young people are our priority as this developing strategy will lead to increased resources, coordinated efforts, and the implementation of evidence-based strategies.

Furthermore, reducing disproportionality is a priority in our plan. We acknowledge the disproportionate representation of certain communities, particularly young people from Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic backgrounds, within the criminal justice system. We are dedicated to dismantling systemic barriers and biases, fostering equal access to opportunities, and promoting fairness and justice for all young people.

In conclusion, we understand that no one agency can achieve our vision and priorities. We recognise the importance of collaborating with education establishments, health services, voluntary sector community organisations, and other stakeholders who play a vital role in supporting young people. By working together, sharing expertise, and pooling resources, we can collectively create a safer and more inclusive environment for our young people, empowering them to lead successful and fulfilling lives.

We extend our deepest gratitude to our workforce and young people who support us. They have worked tirelessly, side by side, to improve the youth offending service and above all make a positive difference to the lives of young people in Northamptonshire.

Child First

In line with the Youth Justice Boards Strategic Plan 2021-24 NYOS is committed to:

- See children first, offenders second and champion the needs of children throughout our work.
- Listening to children and their families/carers.
- Ensure that the services and interventions that are provided are inclusive, through challenging discrimination and promoting equality.
- Ensuring that children are offered every opportunity to achieve their potential and make positive changes.
- Building positive and trusted relationships with children.

We are on the journey to promote and embed the “Child First” principles within the service. This will be embedded across all areas of service delivery in collaboration with other services and all partners.

NYOS (Northamptonshire Youth Offending Service) supports these principles and promotes them in its own work and in its interactions with local partners in children's services and the youth justice system. The NYOS Youth Justice Plan for 2021/22 set out strategic priorities which were aligned with the YJB's Child First principles, reflecting work to improve both the local youth justice and children's services systems and the quality of practice within NYOS. The headline priorities were to:

- Enhance and expand the prevention and diversion offer for young people
- Ensure all assessments and intervention plans are young person led.
- Child first principles are evident in day to day practice and embedded in all policies and procedures
- Develop joint work with other local services to improve outcomes for children in the justice system
- All children experience an individual tailored approach that will help them address their offending behaviour, this could include restorative conferencing, family mediation, direct reparation, and trauma informed approaches where necessary
- Strengthen intervention delivery through young peoples experience of the YJS and use their voice to identify child focused solutions.
- Evidence of the Partnership's commitment to Child First principles is embedded throughout this document.

all the occurrences took place within those 20% most deprived areas.

Voice of the child

A key tenet of Child First is the voice of the child, this is embedded in all operational and strategic elements of NYOS work.

Children's views are obtained via a range of intervention tools to inform assessment and plans. We have benefited this year by having a young person attending our partnership board to give a first-hand experience of their time in the Youth Justice System.

The speech and language worker has adapted intervention plans and assessments tools to enable greater young person participation in their plan along with the ability to capture feedback throughout the intervention to enable changes if necessary. Child First in everything we say, do and write.

We have focused on the development of our communication approaches with children and have a young person focused website to develop a social media footprint.

The Service seeks feedback from children, young people, and their families on a formal and informal basis, whether this be verbally, written (emails, letters) or through surveys). Formal feedback in the form of praise or complaints can be sent via the Children's Trust complaints and praise process. We record feedback on practitioners and the service from children and families at the end of interventions.

The service uses the end of order feedback forms to gain regular feedback from children and young people regarding their experiences of their intervention. This is analysed on a quarterly and rolling 12-month basis by the performance team. Feedback to the YOS (Youth Offending Service) is positive with the latest 12 month rolling data showing that of those who responded 89.47% felt that the service quality was very good and the remaining 10.53% feeling it was good most of the time. When asked what could be improved, young people felt that there was little that could be improved.

NYOS have a robust quality assurance framework and undertakes Collaborative Reflective Practice Discussion (CRPD's) NYOS also contribute to Multiagency Case Reviews and practice learning events, from which themes and learning are collated and fed into service improvements plans. Children and families are involved in this learning process

Governance, leadership, and partnership arrangements

Youth Offending Teams were established under the statutory provisions of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. The Act sets out the requirement for local Youth Offending Teams and primary duties on key agencies and individuals involved in the delivery and governance of those services.

Over time, the governance and leadership of youth justice services, through Youth Justice Management or Partnership Boards has evolved. In December 2021 revised guidance was published with the aim of enabling local authorities, including education and social care; and statutory partners in health, police, and probation to fulfil their statutory duties effectively.

The Youth Offending Service is part of the Northamptonshire Children's Trust (NCT). NCT is a wholly owned company of the two Unitary Authorities (West Northants Council and North Northants Council since April 2021) created under statutory direction from the department for education in 2020 under Northamptonshire County Council. NCT works in close partnership to continue to improve outcomes for disadvantaged children in the county

In recognition of the scale of Northamptonshire YOS and the challenges the county faces, as described throughout this plan, Northamptonshire has retained a Head of Service with sole responsibility for the delivery of local the Youth Offending Service. They report directly to the Assistant Director for Children and Family Support Services and Youth Offending Service.

Northamptonshire has also retained a distinct Youth Offending Service Management Board. The Head of Service and Board Members (appendix 1) have strong cross cutting connections across various partnership arrangements, outlined later in this plan.

The Northamptonshire Youth Offending Service Management Board meets 8 times per year and is chaired by the Executive Director of Children's Services North Northamptonshire Council. NYOS Management Board has responsibility for:

- Leadership and oversight of justice services for children.
- Contributing to local multi-agency strategies and work with local and national criminal justice organisations.
- Safeguarding children who receive youth justice services.

Partnership Arrangements

In addition to the existing partnership arrangements that support the direct work with children and their parents and carers, the Service is currently represented directly or indirectly at several strategic and operational meetings, including:

Strategic Priority	Meetings attended by NYOS Managers and Caseworkers
Safeguarding and Public Protection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child Protection Conferences. • Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) MARAC (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference) meetings. • Local Community Safety Partnership operational meetings. • Local complex needs panel meetings. • Early Help Partnership Board • Supporting Families Steering Group • Integrated care system children and young people pillar/work streams • Northants Local Criminal Justice Board • Serious Violence Duty Partnership
Child Exploitation and VAPP Panel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child Exploitation Tactical Groups within NCT. • Local multi-agency information sharing arrangements to identify and protect children at risk of exploitation. • Partnership Vulnerable Adolescent Panel in which the NYOS Manager is a standing Chair and a deputy to the running of the panel.
Reducing Re-Offending	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Northamptonshire Reducing Re-offending Strategy Group. • Community Safety Partnerships. • Risk Assessment Panels – management of YP identified as being at high risk of causing serious harm to others, or of experiencing significant harm themselves. • Harmful Sexual Behaviour - NYOS leads the work on Harmful sexual behaviour within NCT with the support of the Police. The NYOS and the Trust use recognised assessment and intervention approaches [AIM] for young people who commit harmful sexual behaviour. • Missing Children Steering Group
Preventing Violent Extremism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NYOS attends the Northamptonshire Prevent Group to ensure that our work is aligned with local initiatives. • NYOS contributes to the local assessment of extremism risks. • NYOS police officers act as a link to local police processes for sharing intelligence in respect of possible violent extremism.
Restorative Justice and Support for Victims	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Referral Order Panels • Referral Order Monthly Training • Restorative Justice Group

Board development

The YJB expects local management boards to take responsibility for all aspects of youth justice service governance; to lead strategically across relevant partners and to ensure a high-quality service is provided to all children. In 2021 the YJB provided updated guidance on youth justice service governance and leadership to support this. This was presented to YOS Management Board members by the Youth Justice Board early in 2022. Below is the YOS Management Board priorities for 2023 /24.

AIM	ACTIVITY
<p>Members of the YOS Management Board fully understand the vision and priorities of the NYOS YJB plan and can articulate their agency contribution to the priorities set out within it and advocate for the service and young people</p> <p>Board members to be active participants in task and finish groups on YJB plan priorities</p> <p>Board members to be supported to lead agenda items on topical themes that contribute to the priorities of the YJB Plan</p> <p>Board members to contribute directly to the YJB plan</p> <p>Board members to fully support 'Child First' ethos within their own organisations</p> <p>Board Members to report on training and development needs. -</p> <p>Board Members to better understand delivery locations and NYOS practitioners</p>	<p>All Board members to attend a development day to understand the strategic priorities within NYOS</p> <p>Board members to be allocated as a lead for all task and finish groups within YOS and update the Board on progress.</p> <p>Evidence of contributions by agenda items</p> <p>Template designed to support information required.</p> <p>All YOS Board members to promote Child first ethos in their organisation. Board members to feedback at each board progress and examples of good practice</p> <p>Induction pack created for Board members. An annual Training and Development skills analysis to be completed with all Board members.</p> <p>YOS staff to present items at the YOS management Board.</p> <p>Young people attend the YOS management Board and feedback on their experience of YOS.</p> <p>NYOS open day for all YOS members to attend and meet all staff and volunteers of NYOS.</p>

Progress on previous plan

Prevent Youth Crime to reduce First Time Entrants

What we aimed to achieve	Activity Completed	Evidence of success
Continue to reduce the number of First Time Entrants in Northamptonshire	<p>Partnership panel established.</p> <p>Attended Police briefings</p> <p>Supported Police weeks of actions identifying YP at risk of knife crime and serious violence</p> <p>Used Turnaround support to identify YP on fringes of knife crime.</p> <p>Partnership work with the police to identify YP on RUI (Release Under Investigation) to target Turnaround.</p>	<p>Achieved a reduction in FTE (Full Time Equivalent) consistently over the last Year, however we still have a high number compared to regional and national figures.</p>
Partnership awareness of the Youth Justice Plan and NYOS priorities that they all will contribute too.	<p>Provided briefing sessions using good practice case examples of multiagency support plans to prevent offending and re-offending</p>	<p>The Board have participated in YJB Board development.</p> <p>YOS Board agenda refined and HOS report provides evidence of good practice.</p> <p>Board members have completed the agency contribution to youth justice Plan</p>
A continued key focus on disproportionality and racial disparity.	<p>The NYOS Management Board will consider the issue from their individual areas.</p> <p>Use Partnership data to inform themselves and ensure that the issue is being addressed at all levels both strategically and operationally</p>	<p>The Overrepresentation and Disproportionality Plan has been signed off by the board and the YJB.</p> <p>The creation of the disproportionality steering groups covering three stands of practice i.e.: staff, young people and partner agencies. Each strand is strategically led and has representatives of all roles and responsibilities from all ethnicity and gender groups.</p> <p>A Peer review carried out in January 2023, it was noted that the elements of disproportionality with young people in care, black minority ethnicities and females was not as much concern as initially thought and the plan produced was fit for purpose. They also identified that consideration for overrepresentation and disproportionality was embedded into all assessments of young people.</p>

What we aimed to achieve	Activity Completed	Evidence of success
Improved emotional health and wellbeing providing easy and natural access to services	Strengthen Service Level agreements with NHFT Health partners to continue to resource Emotional Health and Wellbeing services within the service and prioritise access.	<p>All Young people in YOS are referred for a health assessment</p> <p>The health resource provided to YOS has resulted in the adaptation of interventions early on to better tailor work with young people sooner. They have also supported access to oversubscribed services to ensure the young people receive the support they require.</p>
Speech and Language assessment	<p>S&L assessment completed means that all staff working with the child can be as effective as possible by taking the guidance from the S&L therapist into account when interacting with the child.</p> <p>Further other agencies, such as the police and the Courts, can also be advised as to how to communicate most effectively with the child concerned.</p>	<p>All children within YOS complete a speech and language assessment to determine the level of support they require. A communication passport has been produced for magistrates and judges to better understand the young person's presentation in court. The speech and language resource has also redrafted interventions, policies, and procedures to ensure young people are clear on their expectations.</p> <p>Communication Passport has been introduced for Magistrates and Judges</p>

What we aimed to achieve	Activity Completed	Evidence of success
<p>Improved participation in education, training, and employment.</p>	<p>NYOS to work with education colleagues to explore how they might complement the offer to schools regarding supporting young people at risk of exclusion to maintain their education within a mainstream setting or suitable alternative and improve attendance.</p>	<p>NYOS continue to maintain positive ETE (Education, Training and Employment) performance. The education lead has reviewed and updated the education offer. As part of this a new role offering functional skills for young people will be an integral part of the education offer.</p> <p>All Young people who have SEN support needs are identified and their educational needs are supported in conjunction with their YOS Plan.</p>
<p>Analyse FTE and trends in offending.</p>	<p>Expand analysis and Access to QLIK police Data system. To be shared with NYOS and partners to promote. Improved data intelligence to inform service delivery priorities.</p>	<p>The Police have created a multiagency observatory. YOS have provided the financial resources to fund an additional analyst post. To focus on young people referred to and managed by the Northamptonshire Youth Offending Service (YOS) in both custody and community settings (within both the pre-court and post-court arena) and the wider U18 suspect / offender population known to Northamptonshire Police (as identified on its local crime and recording system).</p> <p>Focus may broaden to include wider data sets drawn from Northamptonshire Children's Trust (NCT) and other YOS Statutory Partners following agreements to share data and information to further inform and support analysis regarding YOS Cohorts</p>
<p>Increase and strengthen the participation and voices of our children and families in the NYOS</p>	<p>Implement participation and consultation events with our children and families</p> <p>Include family and young people feedback into the YJS QA/Audit process</p>	<p>In the last 12 months a youth panel has been created to formulate ideas for service development. An integral part of the management board has been to have case studies and young people in person attend and present their experiences. The YOS continues to collect feedback from young people at the end of their orders to ensure the effectiveness and quality of the service provided to them. A priority going forward is to evidence some of their practical suggestions to create a more young person friendly atmosphere.</p>

What we aimed to achieve	Activity Completed	Evidence of success
<p>To understand and respond to the potentially changing nature of youth crime e.g., criminal exploitation, extremism and radicalisation, child-sexual exploitation and gang associated drug dealing expanding along 'County Lines'.</p>	<p>Develop an Up-stream pilot to address / reduce Serious Youth Violence, (SYV) First Time Entrance (FTE) Reduction Of Reoffending, (ROR) this has been implemented and is the Violence referral scheme (Wellingborough pilot) working with Police to identify early trends in violence / offending and refer to appropriate agencies i.e. PADS (Prevention and Diversion Scheme).</p>	<p>The service redesign has been authorised. The restructure focusses on resources to mitigate and address SYV, FTE, ROR.</p> <p>The Wellingborough pilot was a success and is now embedded in day-to-day practice.</p>
<p>Reduce those that fast track to custody before any YOT (Youth Offending Team) intervention can take place.</p>	<p>We will review Out of Court Disposals (OOC) where a decision for no further action has been applied on more than 2 occasions.</p> <p>We will review 'no further actions' undertaken to ensure those children do not have other risks areas meaning the likelihood of re-offending or FTE is not increased.</p> <p>Expand the use of voluntary police interviews with prior notification given to the NYOS.</p> <p>Consider use of Police Bail conditions to engage the services of the PADS team</p>	<p>There has been a significant reduction in Re-Offending rates in NYOS with them being lower than both National and Regional figures.</p> <p>FTE has continued to be high but has reduced following the introduction of the youth prevention panel and the increased use of outcome 22 and the new turnaround project.</p> <p>The YOS have presented the use of police bail as a diversionary tool to the YOS board. This will be revisited following the PEER review positive response.</p>

What we aimed to achieve	Activity Completed	Evidence of success
<p>To reduce re-offending by young people in Northamptonshire with a particular focus on the relatively small proportion of young people who commit a disproportionate amount of crime in Northamptonshire.</p>	<p>The Northamptonshire Youth Justice Board have monitored and applied scrutiny (of the partnership endeavor) to reduce re-offending.</p> <p>Present at NRBB and request partners look at collective resources to reduce escalation and frequency of offending.</p> <p>Implementation of the NYOS over-representation plan.</p> <p>Better use of data from Asset+ / Core+</p> <p>Start running the re-offending toolkit.</p>	<p>NYOS has successfully maintained a lower re-offending rate than national, regional, family rates evidencing the strong early intervention work is effective in preventing re-offending. The re-offending subgroup run by the Office of Fire, Police and Crime Commissioner (OPFCC has made young people a priority.</p> <p>The PEER review NYOS over representation of some groups in our re-offending cohort They concluded that there was strong evidence of parallel planning with partner agencies to prevent the criminalisation of children. 10 Point checklist and the policy regarding the decriminalisation of Children has been circulated amongst all partners.</p>
<p>To develop high quality and evidence-based interventions that contribute to reducing re-offending and maintain the confidence of partner agencies, the courts, and the public.</p>	<p>The youth justice service will review the effectiveness of current 1-1 and group work approaches and interventions to reducing re-offending, particularly those aimed at the most prolifically offending young people, and will develop and re-design accordingly, with a greater focus on how safeguarding and over representation needs (e.g. communication and learning styles) are being met whilst working with Northamptonshire Speech and Language worker. This should involve co-production with young people.</p>	<p>The resources that have been reviewed by multi agency staff have had an impact on reducing NYOS reoffending binary rate to lower than National, regional, and family levels and to continue the downward trend.</p> <p>The introduction of alternative to custody panels, targeted training on interventions and youth review panels all contributed to this positive performance.</p>

What we aimed to achieve	Activity Completed	Evidence of success
<p>Strengthen the relationship with operational policing through CIRV (Community Initiative in Reducing Violence), LCSJB and Trauma informed custody and Northamptonshire task force.</p>	<p>Violence referral scheme (Wellingborough pilot) in place, working with Police to identify early trends in violence / offending and refer to appropriate agencies i.e., PADS.</p>	<p>The violence referral scheme was a success and is now embedded in practice across all Northamptonshire. The youth prevention panel representatives from CIRV, Early Help, IOM (Integrated Offender Management), PaDS (Prevention and Diversion Scheme) and Social care strengthen and reinforce joint working. The QLIK App now identifies up and coming young people and targeted prevention work can be offered.</p>
<p>Ensure the highest quality though care and resettlement planning are available. Working closely with the designated resettlement leads and relevant social workers (and do this earlier in the child's plan).</p>	<p>Revised approach to Custody and improve resettlement process including embedding new policy and procedures.</p> <p>Promote constructive alternatives to Custody.</p> <p>Amend risk panel process to include Risk of re-offending thereby introducing a multi-agency approach</p> <p>Alternative to Custody Panels introduced.</p> <p>The youth justice service and the National Probation Service will continue to jointly manage cases in transition ensuring consistency in delivery, relationships, and minimising transfers.</p>	<p>The YOS has introduced the Resettlement Policy and appointed Resettlement Lead Practitioners who support case workers in ensuring resettlement is prioritised at the start of any custodial sentence. The YOS seek to engage social care in this process, but this could be improved. The probation service continues to fund a full-time post to ensure the YOS is covered with a professional involved in transfers to adult services as fully and smoothly as possible.</p> <p>A Themed Quality Assurance Audit was completed, a learning reflective discussion held with Managers and teams. There is an action plan in place from recommendation to support improved practice.</p>

Protect the public from harm, decrease in serious youth violence

What we aimed to achieve	Activity Completed	Evidence of success
<p>To ensure that children and young people who pose a risk of harm to others are appropriately assessed and effectively supervised to promote a reduction in that risk.</p>	<p>Maintain an accurate NYOS risk register that details all those young people known to the service deemed to present a high risk of harm to others.</p> <p>Strong management oversight of the register will be undertaken through the NYOS risk panel</p> <p>Develop data analysis around violence reduction and re-offending</p> <p>Embed Violence referral scheme (Wellingborough pilot) in place, working with Police to identify early trends in violence / offending and refer to appropriate agencies i.e.PA</p> <p>Undertake Rapid Learning Reviews on previous serious incidents in relation to knife crime and gang related activity. Make appropriate referrals to safeguard self and others.</p>	<p>Weekly Risk Panel calendars are sent out to all YOS practitioners and managers to ensure adherence and attendance.</p> <p>Very high-risk panels are all overseen at senior management level.</p> <p>Our recent YJB data evidence shows a lower rate of serious youth violence than National, Regional and Family areas.</p> <p>The Wellingborough pilot has now been embedded in the whole county approach to serious youth violence.</p> <p>The collaborative work with the police and QLIK app identifies Young people at the earliest opportunity of offending behaviour allowing us to tackle this before more entrenched criminality occurs.</p> <p>Referrals to NRM (National Referral Mechanism) and MAPPA are encouraged to support and protect the young people and others from unnecessary risk and exploitation-based offending.</p> <p>The HOS is a main contributor to 4 Rapid Learning Reviews (CSPR). Learning from these incidents has been cascaded by Quality assurance leads with the support of the HOS.</p>

What we aimed to achieve	Activity Completed	Evidence of success
<p>To recognise that serious harmful behaviour to others is often a symptom of significant distress and vulnerability, which needs to be addressed through a safeguarding approach for that risk to be reduced.</p>	<p>Quality assurance framework we will ensure that practice in relation to risk of harm to others is robust and meets the expected standards of HMIP. We will seek to improve the early identification of and response to safeguarding issues associated with young people who have offended or come to the notice of the police and children's services as potential victims by improving links between the Children's Services, the Adolescent Service, MASH (Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub) and NYOS Police and partnership panel.</p>	<p>The inception of the partnership panel has acted as a conduit to ensuring young people are criminalised at the last resort.</p> <p>QLIK data intelligence has been scrutinised review police interactions to determine whether a young person is on the periphery of crime.</p> <p>We have recently reviewed the MASH and PACE (Police and Criminal Evidence) processes to ensure there is a single point of entry for YOS contribute</p> <p>The HOS in conjunction with the CHRYSALIS foundation are bidding for lottery funding to develop a Trauma Centre specifically for CIC and YOS clients.</p>
<p>To minimise the potential for a 'transition gap' between youth and adult services where risk of harm to others is relevant.</p>	<p>The youth justice service and the National Probation Service will continue to jointly manage cases in transition ensuring consistency in delivery, relationships, and minimising transfers</p>	<p>The National probation service provides full-time probation member of staff ensuring a knowledgeable professional oversees the transition process and that this starts as early as possible, and support is maintained during transition. Transition starts 6 months prior to the YP 18th birthday.</p>
<p>Ensure that the risks are understood and employed within the Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA).</p>	<p>Implement the MAPPA protocol.</p>	<p>The HOS is a standing member on the strategic MAPPA board and an Area Manager attends all MAPPA 3 cases with MAPPA 2 and 1's attended by and operational manager.</p>
<p>Protect the public from harm decrease in serious violence.</p>	<p>Deliver a multi-agency audit programme (creating a critical friend in quality assurance). Provide support and co-ordinate events with Knife Angel touring Northampton Knife Crime Workshops as part of the Knife Angel Campaign.</p>	<p>The YOS has a series of thematic reviews to look at standards across the service of specific strands of work. So far, the victim and resettlement thematic review has taken place.</p> <p>NYOS provided support workshops and individual consultations to the Knife Angel Campaign.</p> <p>NYOS continue to offer Knife Crime intervention to all identified Young People.</p>

Resources and services

The Youth Offending Service has a complex budget structure comprising of partner agency cash, seconded staff and the Youth Justice Grant from the Youth Justice Board for England and Wales. The table below outlines the provisional contributions for 2023/24, as some contributions were still to be confirmed at the point this youth justice plan was agreed.

NORTHAMPTONSHIRE 2023/24

INCOME	Youth Justice Board ¹	Local Authority	Police and Crime Commissioner	Probation	Health	Public Health	Total
Cash	£705,433	£1,606,151	£200,900	£31,974	£80,000	£66,112	£2,690,570
In-kind		£0	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0
Total Income	£705,433	£1,606,151	£200,900	£31,974	£80,000	£66,112	£2,690,570

1. This includes all grants received from YJB

EXPENDITURE	Youth Justice Board ¹	Local Authority	Police and Crime Commissioner	Probation	Health	Public Health	Total
Salaries	£705,433	£1,439,725	£200,900	£31,974	£78,455	£54,411	£2,510,898
Activity costs	£0	£165,391	£0	£0	£0	£11,701	£177,092
Accommodation	£0	£992	£0	£0	£0	£0	£992
Overheads	£0	£43	£0	£0	£0	£0	£43
Equipment	£0	£0	£0	£0	£1,545	£0	£1,545
Total Expenditure	£705,433	£1,606,151	£200,900	£31,974	£80,000	£66,112	£2,690,570










The YJB Youth Justice Grant is provided for the provision of youth offending services with an aim of achieving the following outcomes: reducing re-offending, reducing first time entrants, reducing the use of custody, effective public protection, and effective safeguarding.

The grant, partner contributions and available resources will be used to deliver Northamptonshire youth Offending services improvement plan, supporting the priorities identified for 23/24.

Performance

This section should contain a summary of key performance targets, describing what current performance looks like, what has contributed to good or poor performance, and what the partnership is aiming for in the future.

Northamptonshire YOS Performance Report YOS Management Board May 2023

NI 19: Rate of Proven Reoffending by Young People in the Youth Justice System (Binary) Jul 2020 – Jun 2021: 21.8% Jul 2019 – Jun 2020: 23.3% Quarterly data ↓ Apr 2021 – Jun 2021: 17.2% Apr 2020 – Jun 2020: 22.4% 	NI 19: Rate of Proven Reoffending by Young People in the Youth Justice System (Frequency) Jul 2020 – Jun 2021: 5.08 Jul 2019 – Jun 2020: 3.85 Quarterly data ↓ Apr 2021 – Jun 2021: 4.80 Apr 2020 – Jun 2020: 2.55 	NI 111: First-time Entrants to Youth Justice System Aged 10 - 17 National PNC Rate per 100,000 pop Jan 2022 – Dec 2022 170 Jan 2021 – Dec 2021 172 
NI 43: Young People Receiving a Conviction in Court who are Sentenced to Custody Jan – Dec 22 0.10 → National 0.11 Jan – Dec 21 0.24 Regional 0.10 Jan – Dec 20 0.20 		Number of Custodial Sentences Local YOS Tracking 2022/2023 4 (3 YP) 2021/2022 8 (7 YP) 2020/2021 13 2019/2020: 6 
Remands to Custody Bed Nights Local Measure 2022/2023: 795 2021/2022: 1215 2020/2021: 606 2019/2020: 971 More STC and SCH due more vulnerable YP therefore costs only slightly lower than 2021/22 	NI 45: Engagement in Education, Training and Employment by Young People who offend 2022/2023 89.8% 2021/2022 89.9% 2020/2021 86.1%* 2019/2020: 82.9% <small>*based on assumption Covid19 had not happened</small> 	NI 46: Access to suitable accommodation for Young People in the Youth Justice System Data not yet available new reporting next year as part of new KPI's 2021/2022: 100% 2020/2021: 99.1% 2019/2020: 98.7% 

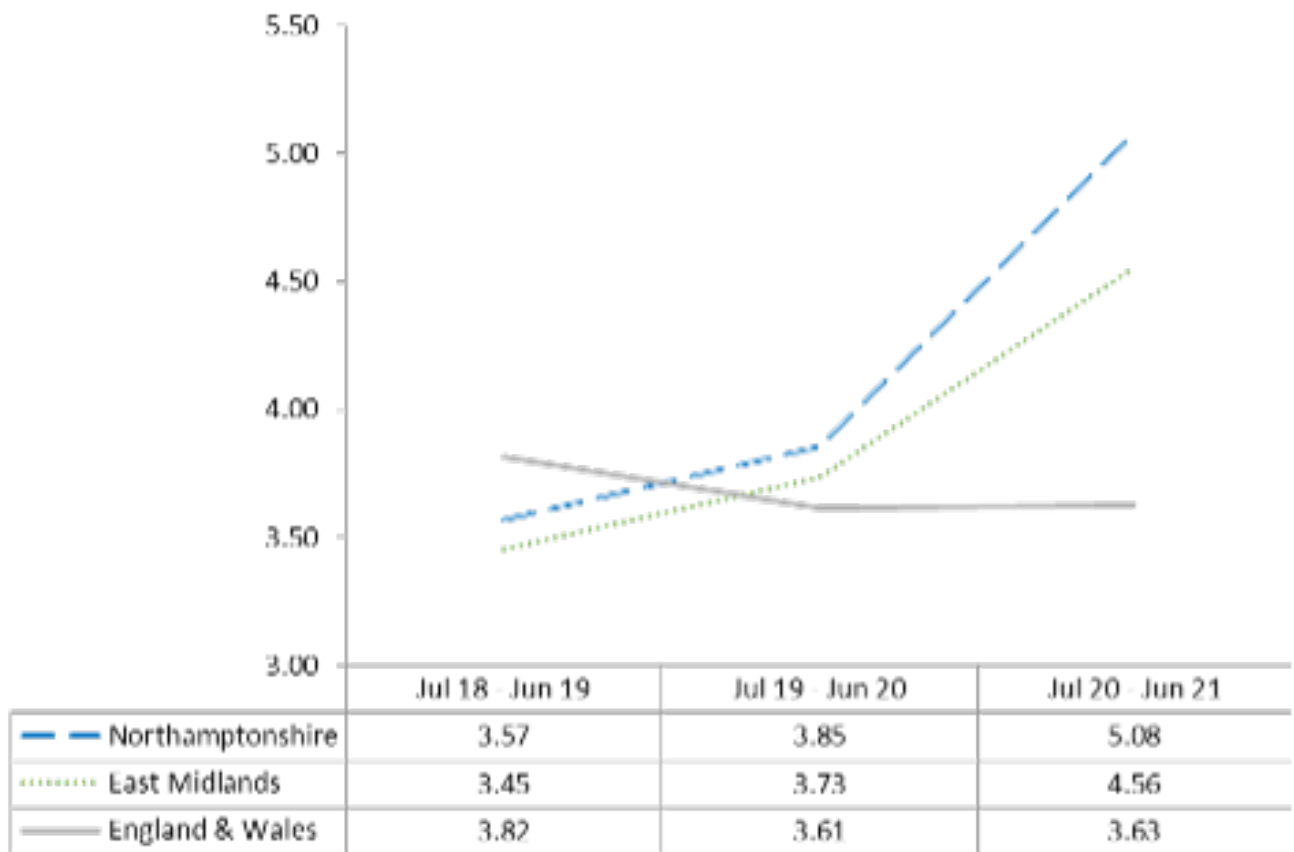
National key performance indicators

Existing key performance indicators

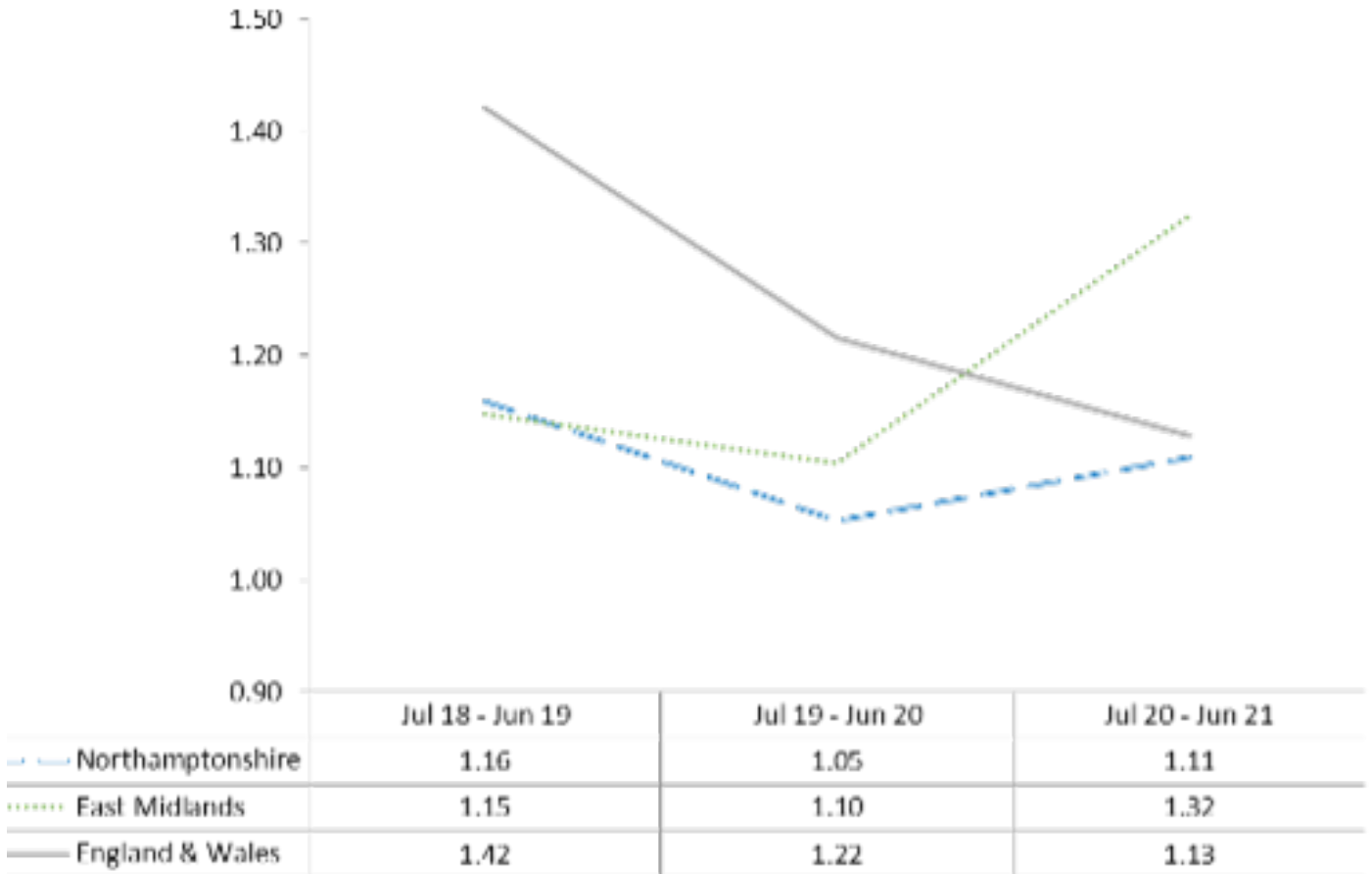
Binary Re-Offending Rate

Annually: Northamptonshire continues to significantly outperform the region, family (28.9%) and national figures. Northamptonshire has reduced the percentage of Offenders re-offending from 27.3% to 21.8% in the most recent data years available.

Average Re-Offences per Re-Offender

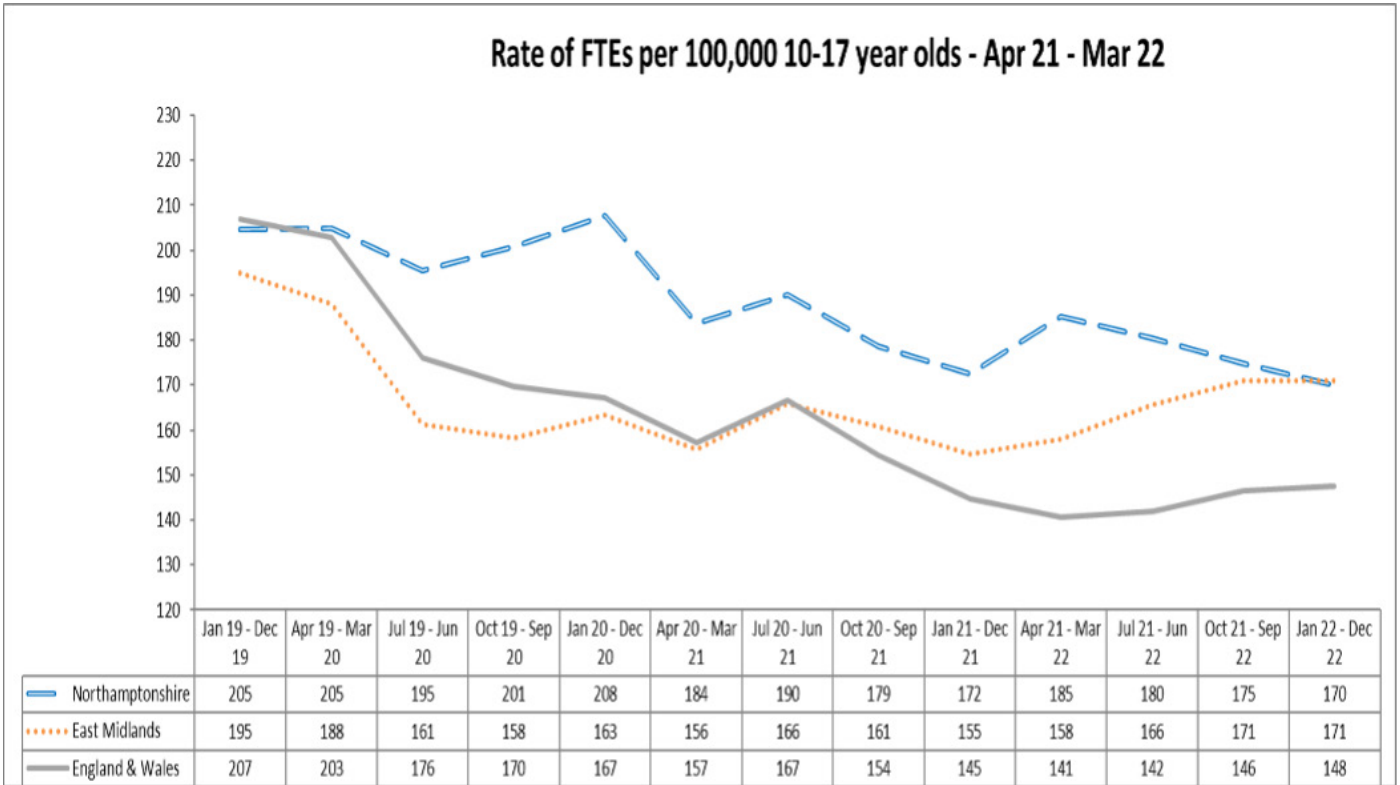


Average Re-Offences per Offender



Annually: high average re-offences per re-offender but smaller cohort than other comparators. Increased from 3.85 to 5.08 in the most recent annual data available. Family is 3.58 in the most recent Annual data.

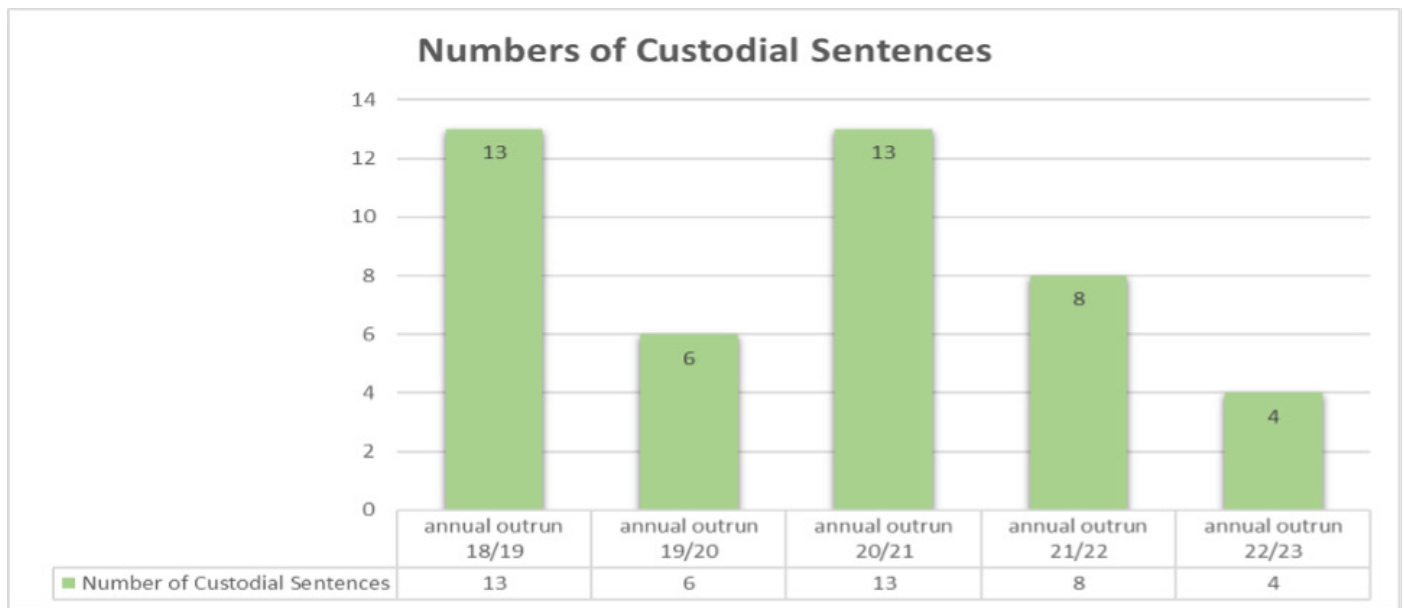
Annually: when looking at total offender cohort average number of re-offences is below the National and Regional figures. Northamptonshire has increased from the previous year in the most recent data available but decreased based on the previous year to that. This is slightly above Family at 1.03



Consistent reduction in First Time Entrants Rate per 100,000 where all other comparators have shown an increase Jan 22 to Dec 22 compared to previous year (Family +23 rate 110 up to 133). Now below regional rate.

Use of Custody

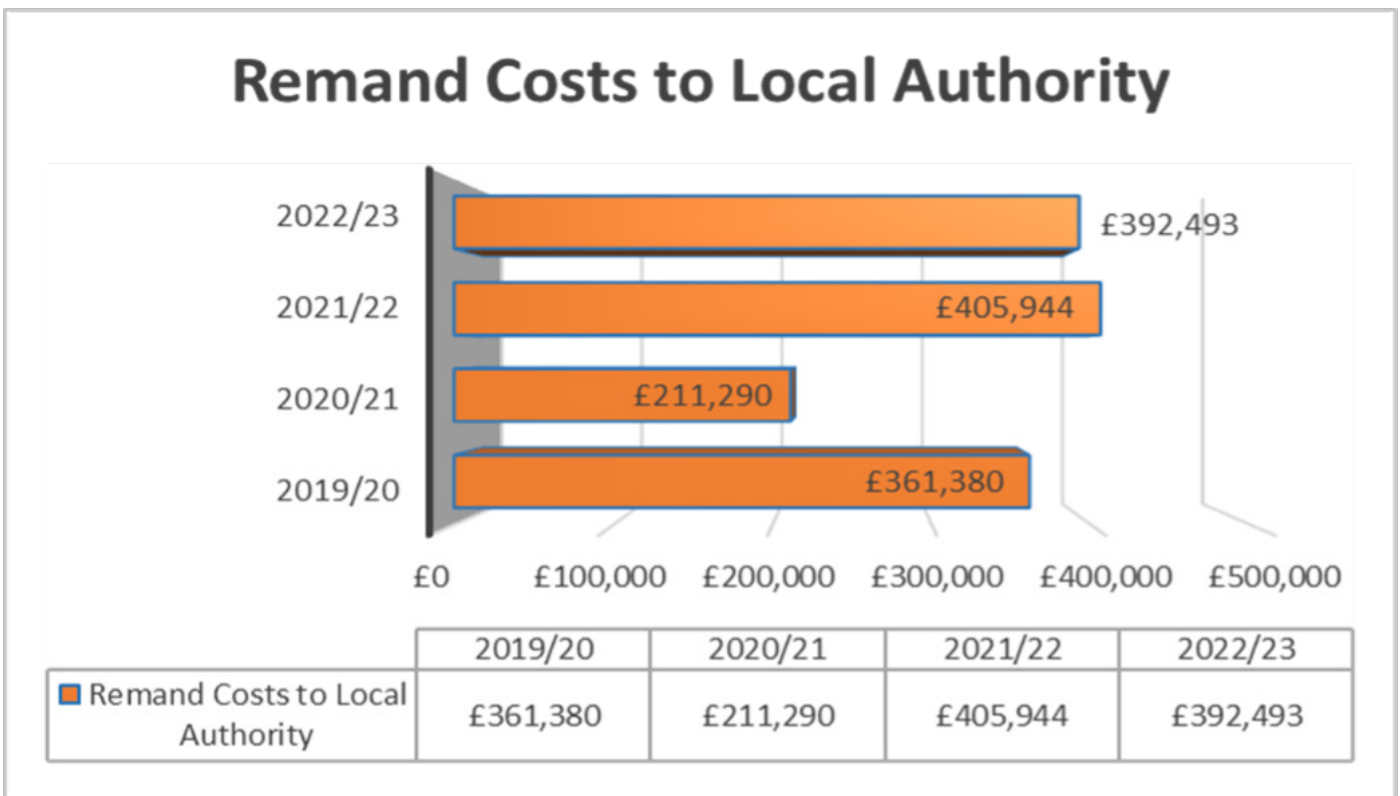
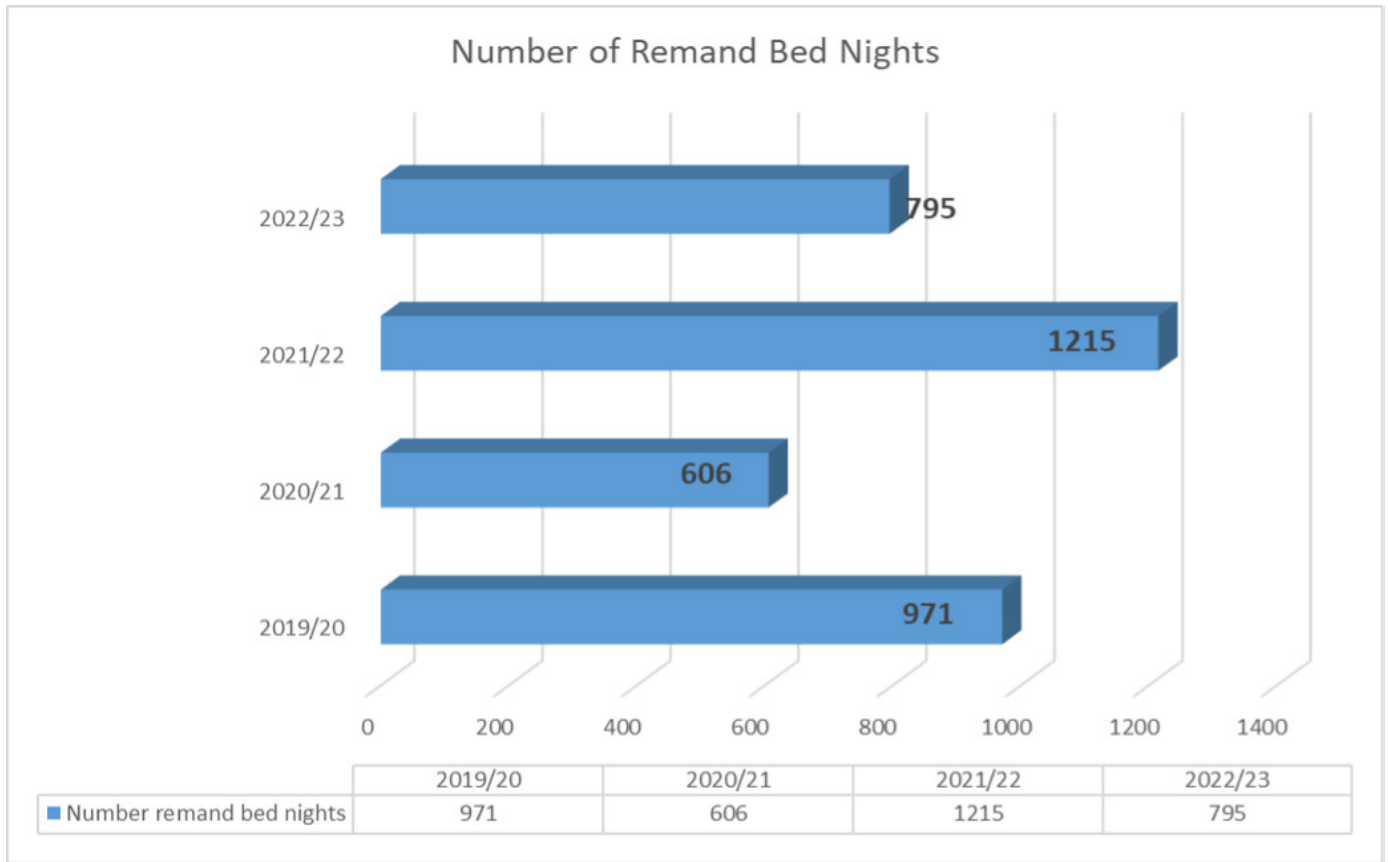
For the Period 2022/23 there have been 4 custodial sentences showing a significant reduction in custodial sentences compared to 2021/22. So far in 2023/24 there has been 1 custodial sentence. We do have 3 young people on remand for serious offences that could potentially, if found guilty, increase the first Custodial sentences for 2023/24. 2 of the 3 have a trial start date of 10/07/23 and one whose next appearance in court is 05/06/23



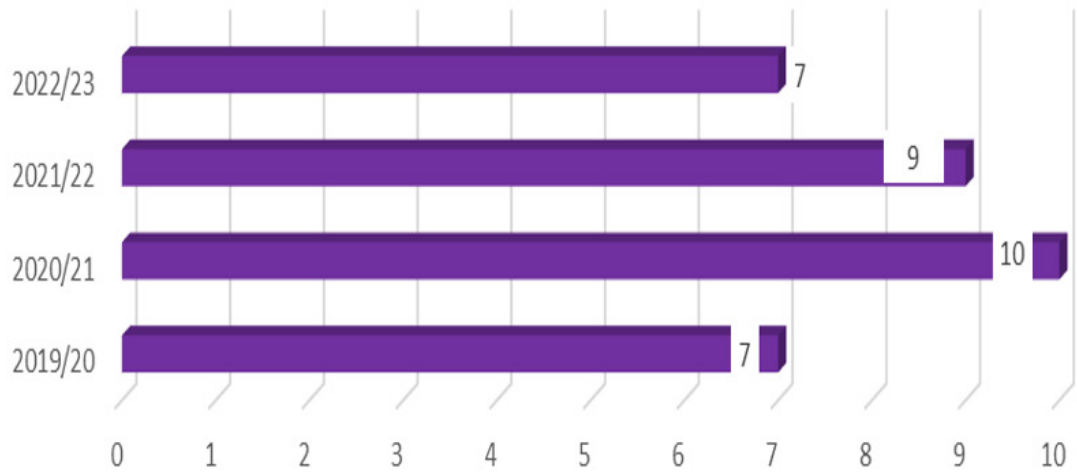
There have been 7 new remand episodes for the 2022/23 period.

- Of these 7 new remand episodes in 2022/23 4 carried over to the 2023/24 with one having been sentenced in April 2023
- The bed nights for 2022/23 have involved 7 young people and remand destinations have comprised of Youth Offender Institutions, Secure Childrens Home and Secure Training Centres
- Of the 795 Bed nights 457 have been at YOI (Young Offender Institution), 218 at STC (Secure Training Centre) and 120 at SCH (Secure Children Home) (Secure Children s Home) (Secure Children s Home) (Secure Children s Home)

Cost of Remands has been close to the 2021/22 levels even though the remand nights have been much less due to the increased use and therefore cost of STC and SCH



Number of New Individual Remand Episodes



	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
■ Number remand episodes	7	10	9	7

Additional key performance indicators (from April 2023)

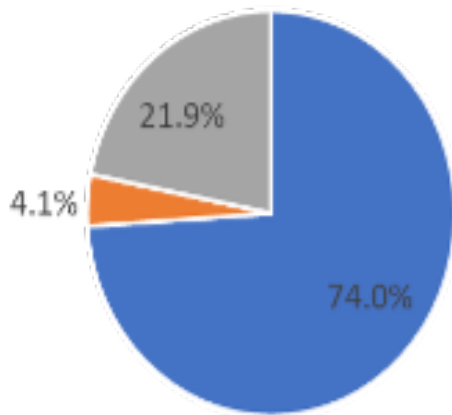
As of April 2023, additional key performance indicators have been introduced by the YJB. The following is an assessment completed for the first two periods of 22/23. This will act as a comparator for when the official data is published by the YJB. Unfortunately, restrictions in reporting requirements have prevented us from being able to complete for all KPIS. We have received reassurance from the system providers that this will be resolved in time for Quarter 1 23/24 reporting framework. The following is a snapshot of the areas we can provide information on. The data is pulled from Asset plus assessments in many sections and does not include data about some the out of court disposals such as CRD's, Outcome 22's or Outcome 20's. This data will relate to YC's and above where the young person has engaged.

Suitable Accommodation & Education and Employment

<p>NI 45: Engagement in Education, Training and Employment by Young People who offend</p> <table border="1"> <tbody> <tr> <td>2022/2023</td> <td>89.8%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2021/2022</td> <td>89.9%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2020/2021</td> <td>86.1%*</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2019/2020:</td> <td>82.9%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>*based on assumption Covid19 had not happened</p>	2022/2023	89.8%	2021/2022	89.9%	2020/2021	86.1%*	2019/2020:	82.9%	<p>NI 46: Access to suitable accommodation for Young People in the Youth Justice System</p> <p>Data not yet available new reporting next year as part of new KPI's</p> <table border="1"> <tbody> <tr> <td>2021/2022:</td> <td>100%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2020/2021:</td> <td>99.1%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2019/2020:</td> <td>98.7%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	2021/2022:	100%	2020/2021:	99.1%	2019/2020:	98.7%
2022/2023	89.8%														
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2020/2021	86.1%*														
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2021/2022:	100%														
2020/2021:	99.1%														
2019/2020:	98.7%														

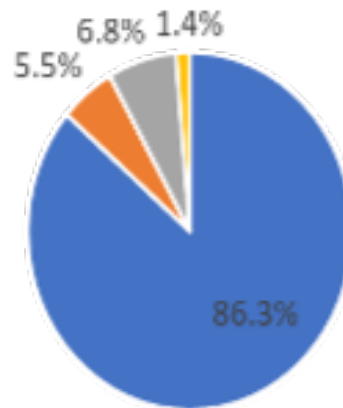
Special Educational Needs and Disabilities/Additional learning needs

Any SEN Identified?



■ No ■ Yet To Clarify ■ Yes

Diagnosed With Social Communication Difficulties

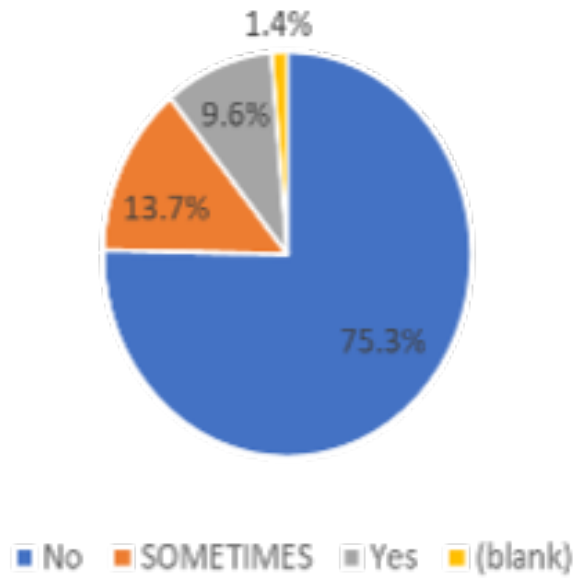


■ No ■ Yet To Clarify ■ Yes ■ (blank)

Any SEN Identified	QTY
No	54
Yet To Clarify	3
Yes	16
(blank)	0
Grand Total	73

Diagnosed with Social Comm. Difficulties	QTY
No	63
Yet To Clarify	4
Yes	5
(blank)	1
Grand Total	73

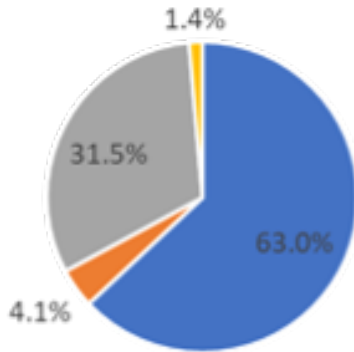
Has a Problem Reading or Writing



Has a problem reading or writing	QTY
No	55
SOMETIMES	10
Yes	7
(blank)	1
Grand Total	73

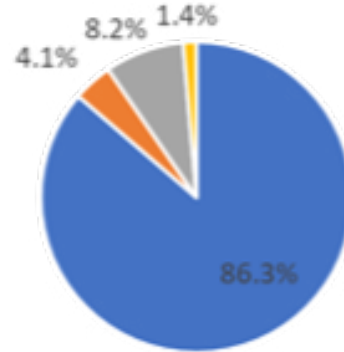
Mental Health Care and Emotional Wellbeing

Any Contact With Mental Health Services



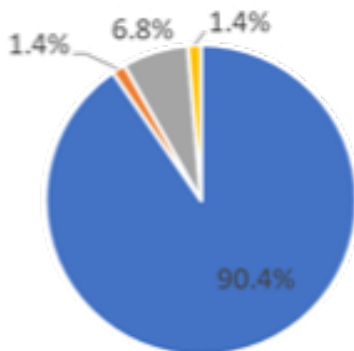
■ No ■ Yet To Clarify ■ Yes ■ (blank)

Feels Constantly In A Low Mood



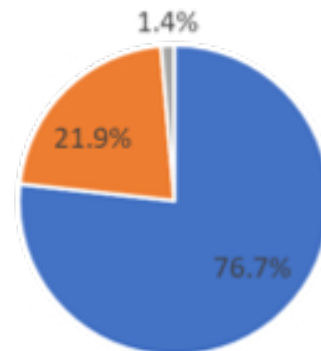
■ No ■ Yet To Clarify ■ Yes ■ (blank)

Feels Hopeless About The Future



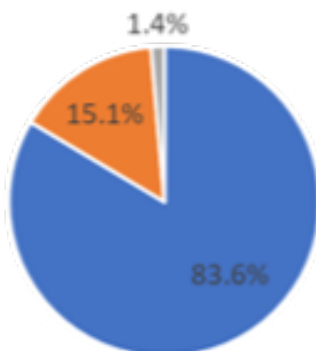
■ No ■ Yet To Clarify ■ Yes ■ (blank)

History Of Deliberate Self Harm



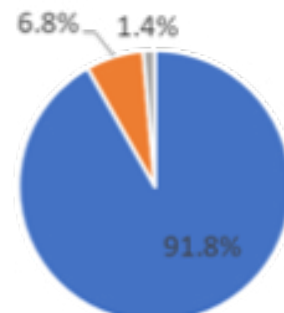
■ No ■ Yes ■ (blank)

Previously Attempted Suicide



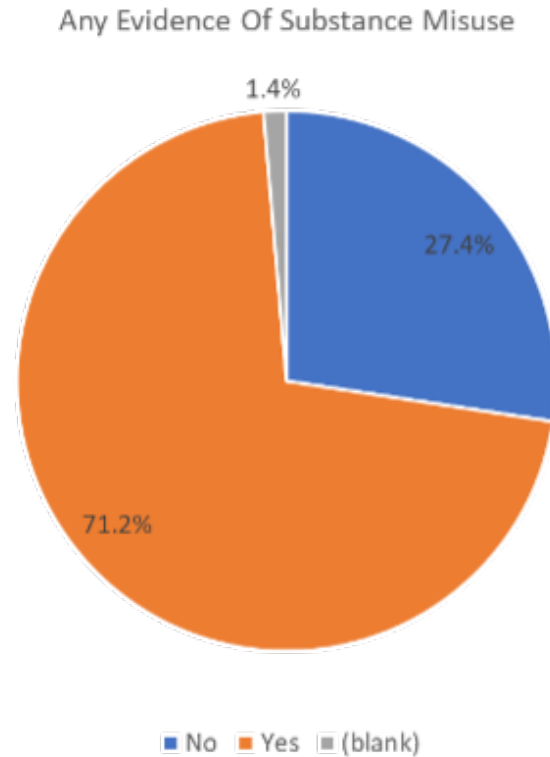
■ No ■ Yes ■ (blank)

Looks Depressed or Exhibits Unusual Behaviour



■ No ■ Yes ■ (blank)

Substance Misuse



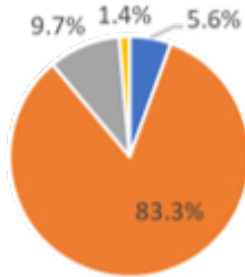
Out-of-court Disposals- Engagement

All programme outcomes Jan 2022 to end June 2022 (211 programmes)	total	%
total completed successfully	91	43.1%
total concluded declined at some point or uncontactable	88	41.7%
total concluded due to further outcome/enforcement	14	6.6%
total concluded for reasons out of YOT control/ other service involvement	18	8.5%

voluntary programme outcomes Jan 2022 to end June 2022 (191 programmes)	total	%
total completed successfully	75	39.3%
total concluded declined at some point or uncontactable	88	46.1%
total concluded due to further outcome/enforcement	10	5.2%
total concluded for reasons out of YOT control/ other service involvement	18	9.4%

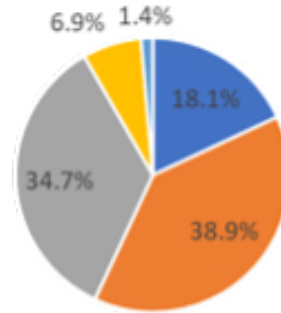
Links To Wider Services

Accommodated By Voluntary Agreement With Parents



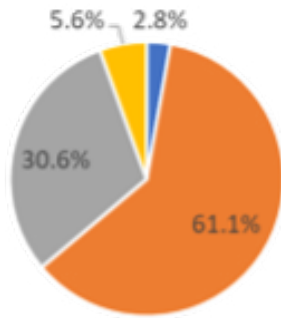
■ Currently ■ Never ■ Previously ■ Yet to Clarify

Any Childrens Services Involvement With Siblings



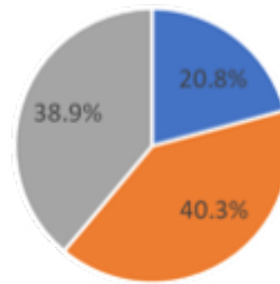
■ Currently ■ Never ■ Previously ■ Yet to Clarify ■ (blank)

Child Ever Had A Child Protection Plan



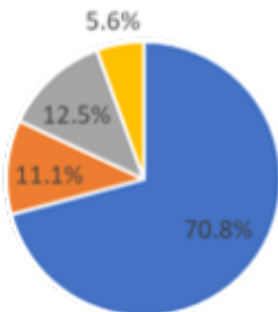
■ Currently ■ Never ■ Previously ■ Yet to Clarify

Identified Child In Need



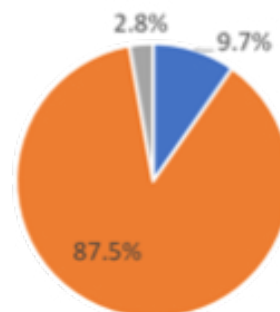
■ Currently ■ Never ■ Previously

Previous Safeguarding Or PPI



■ No ■ Yet To Clarify ■ Yes ■ (blank)

Subject To A Care Order



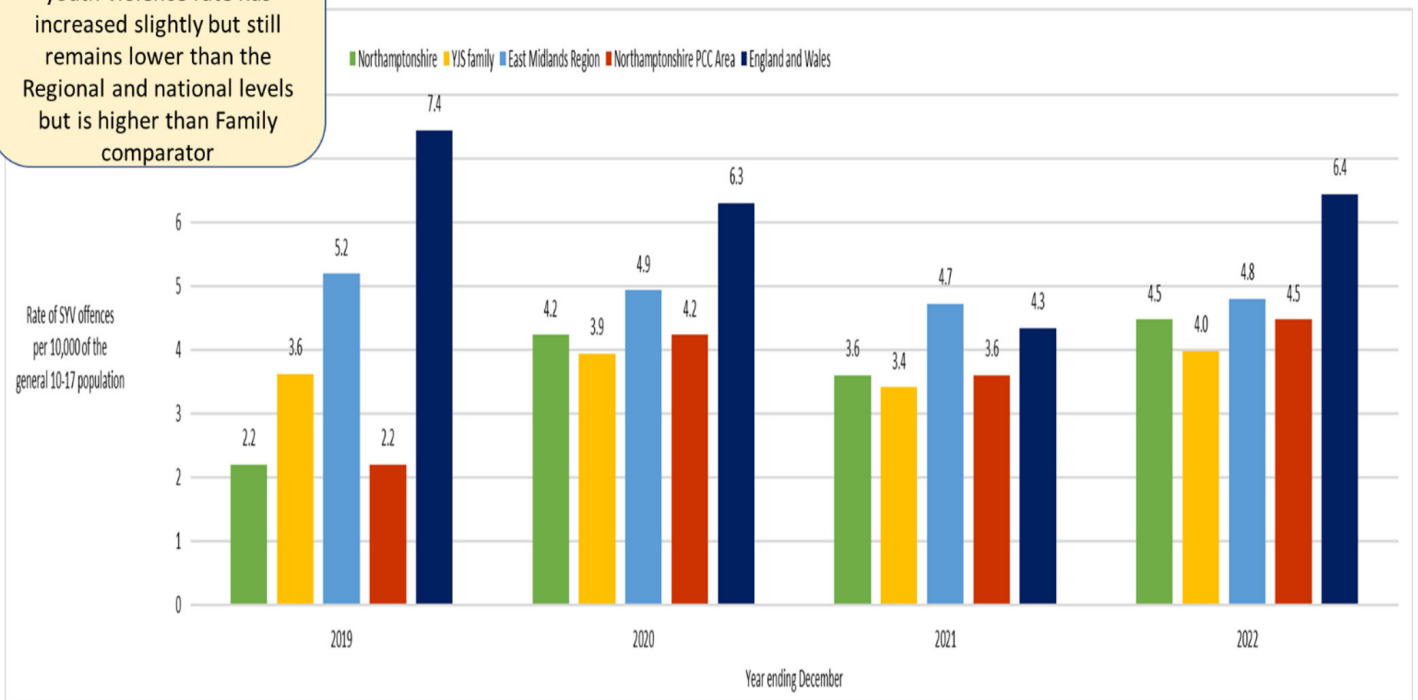
■ Currently ■ Never ■ Previously

Management Board Attendance

- 18th May 2023 = 11 out of 18 = 61.11%
- 16th February 2023 = 14 out of 18 = 77.78%

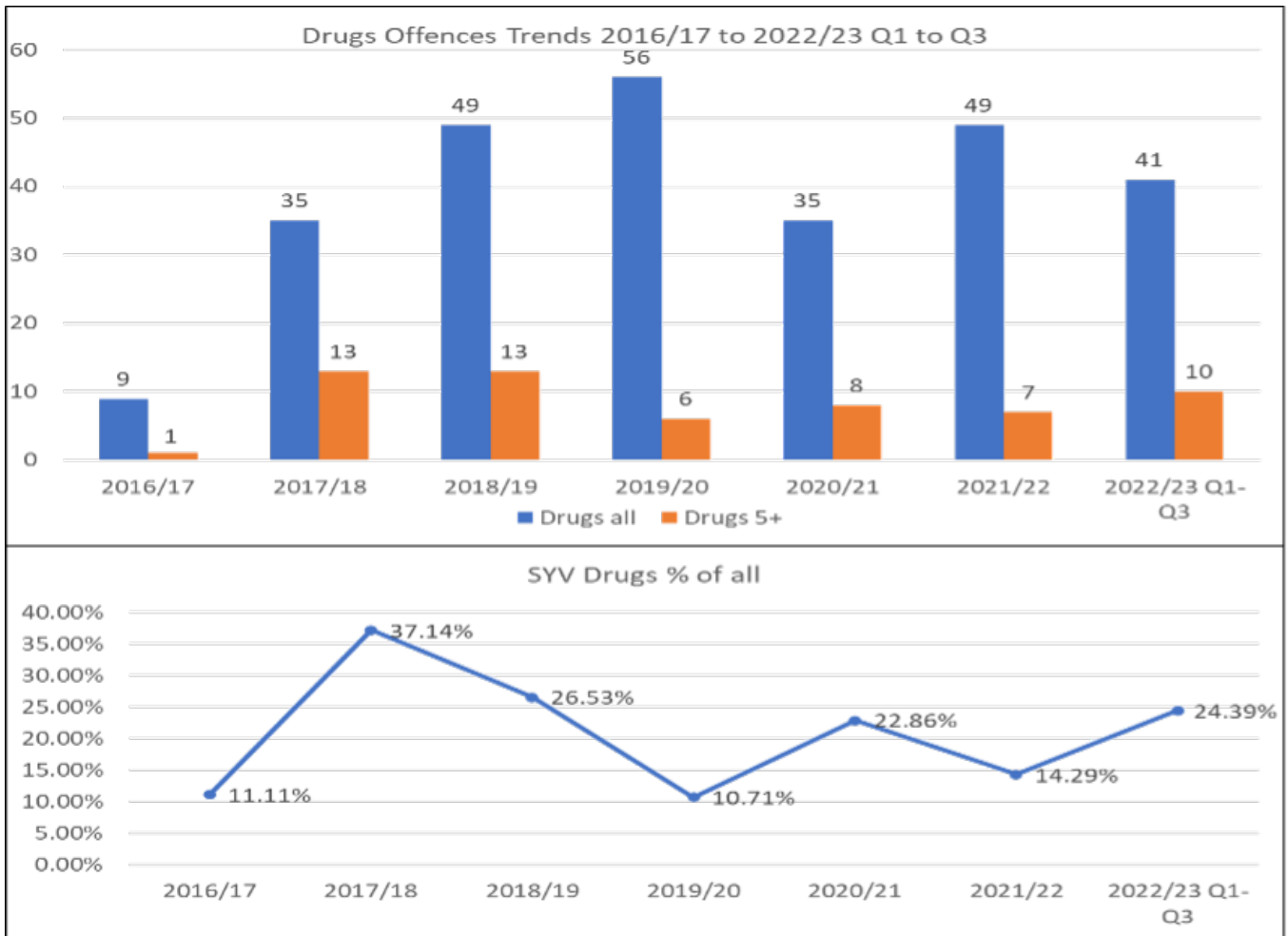
Serious Youth Violence

As can be seen Northamptonshire's serious youth violence rate has increased slightly but still remains lower than the Regional and national levels but is higher than Family comparator



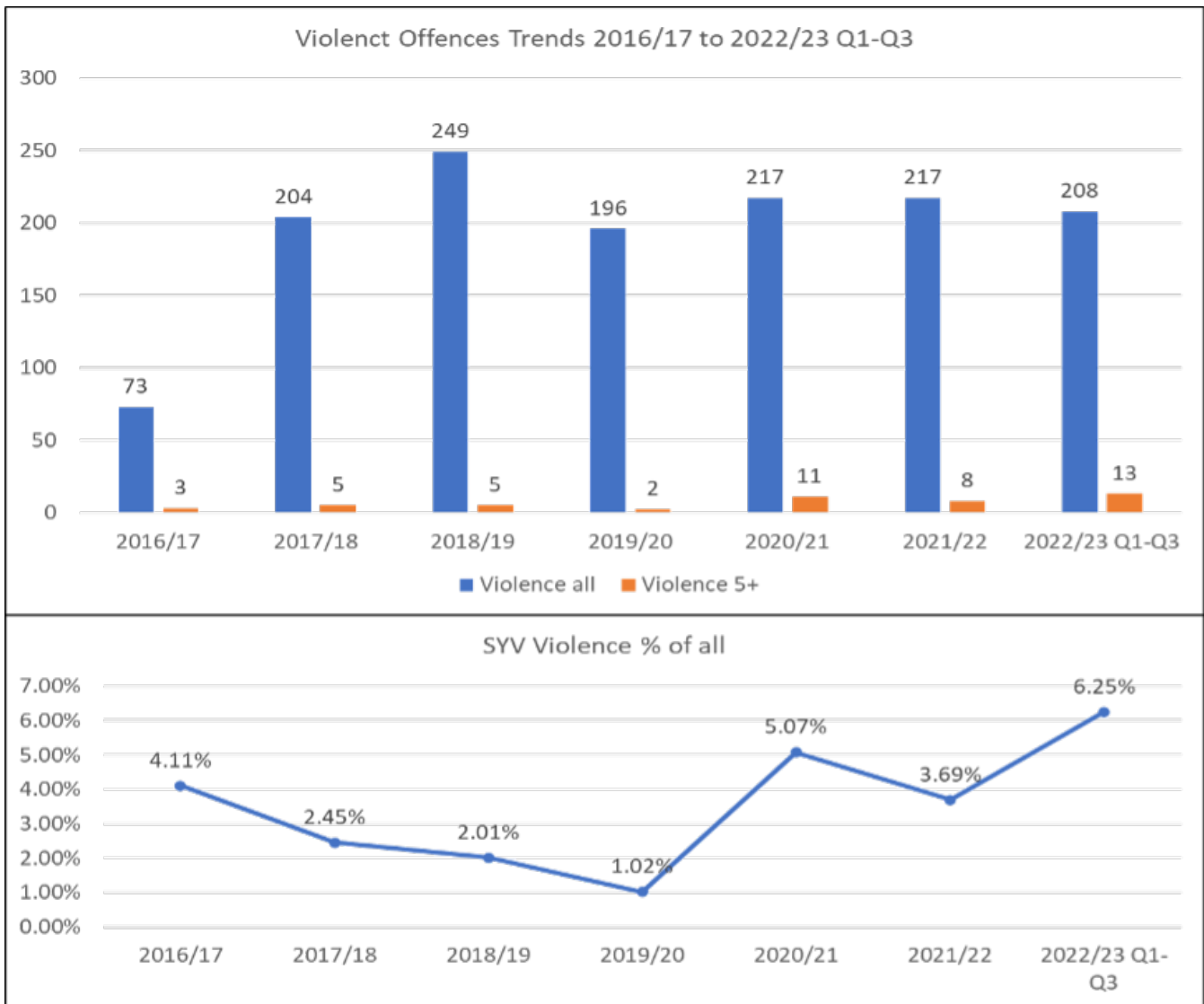
Overall Drugs Offences are creeping back up to 2021/22 levels pending Q4 22/23 data.

As a % of the overall Drugs Offences the serious Drugs offences gravity 5+ are also creeping back up to 2018/19 levels.



Overall Violent Offences are looking to be back up to 2018/19 levels when the Q4 data for 2022/23 is received and almost certainly an increase from last year.

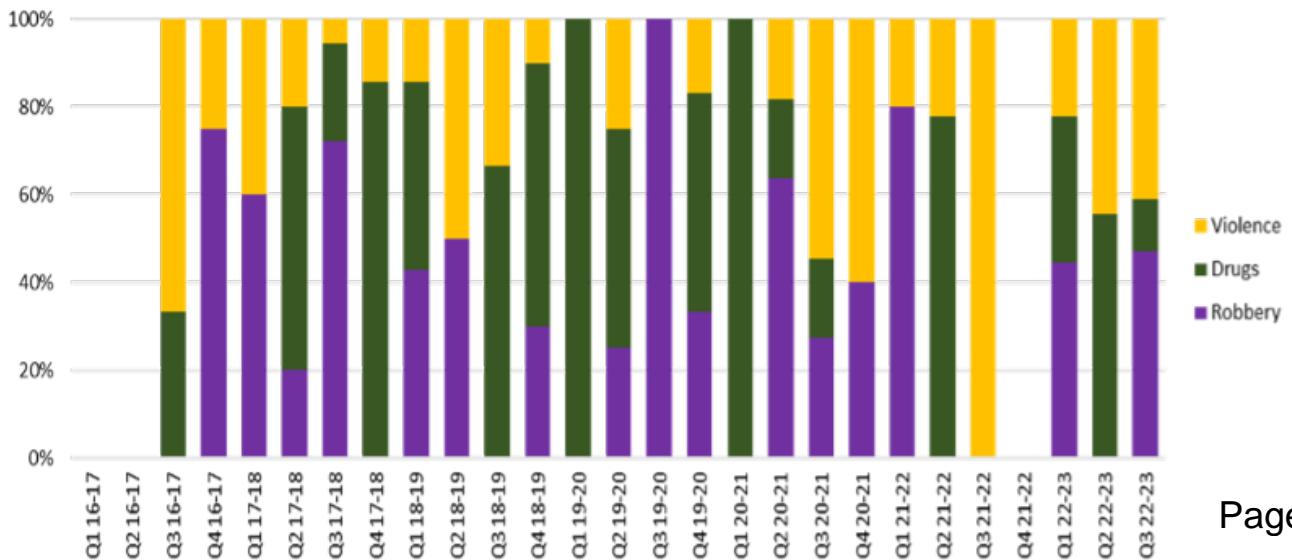
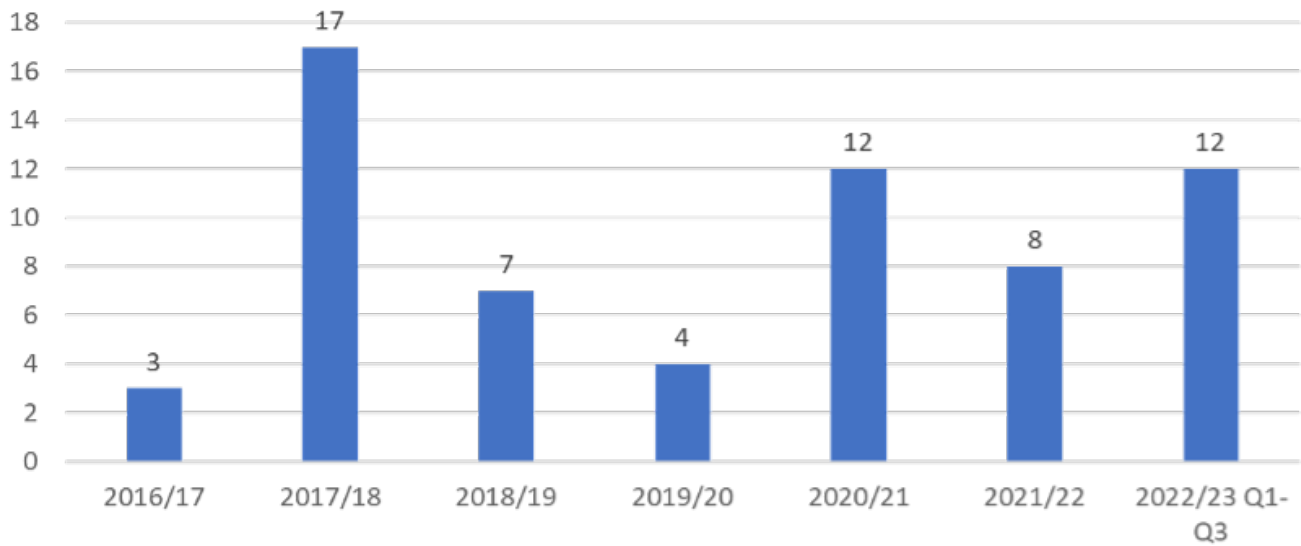
The Serious Violence Offences, gravity 5+, are already at their highest proportion of overall violent offences at 6.25% currently compared to 3.69% last year.



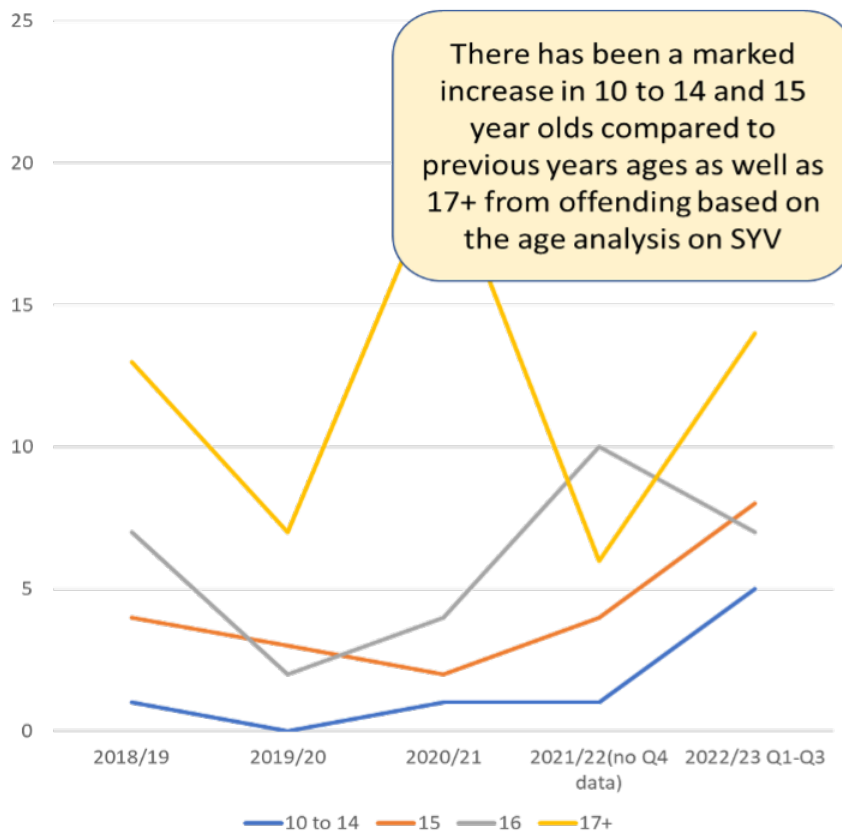
All Robbery offences are 5+ Gravity.
The trend shows an increase back towards 2017/18 peak levels once the final Q4 data is in for 2022/23 and already above last years numbers.

Looking at the comparator of the 3 offending categories of Violence, Drugs & Robbery in 202/23 Q1-Q3 it is clear all areas contribute fairly equally.

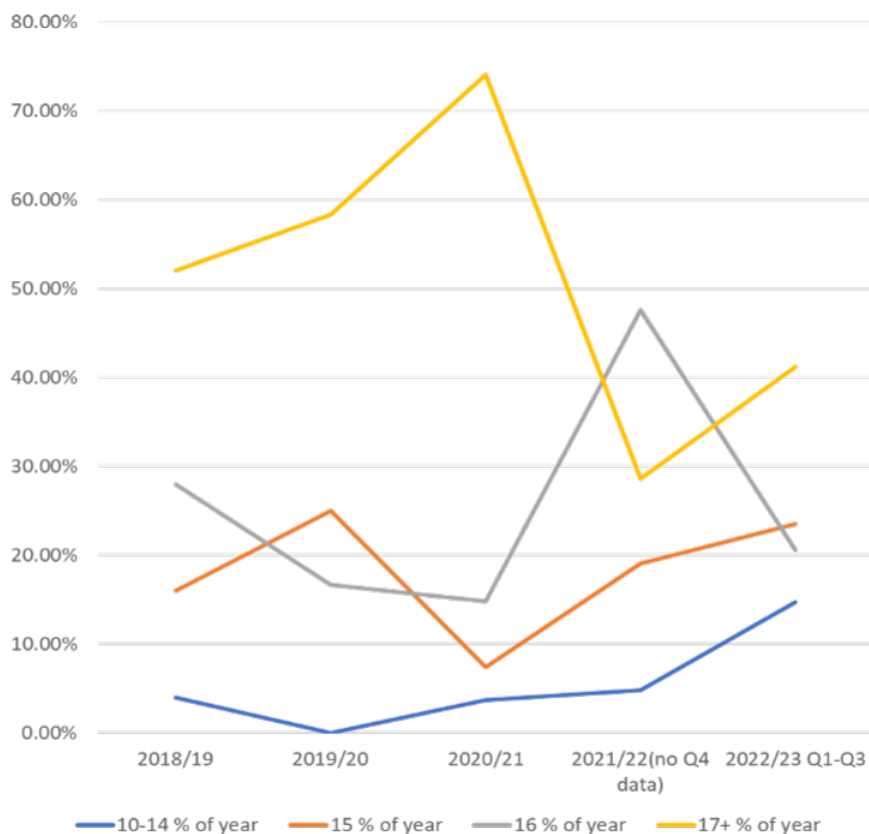
Robbery Trends 2016/17 to 2022/23 Q1-Q3



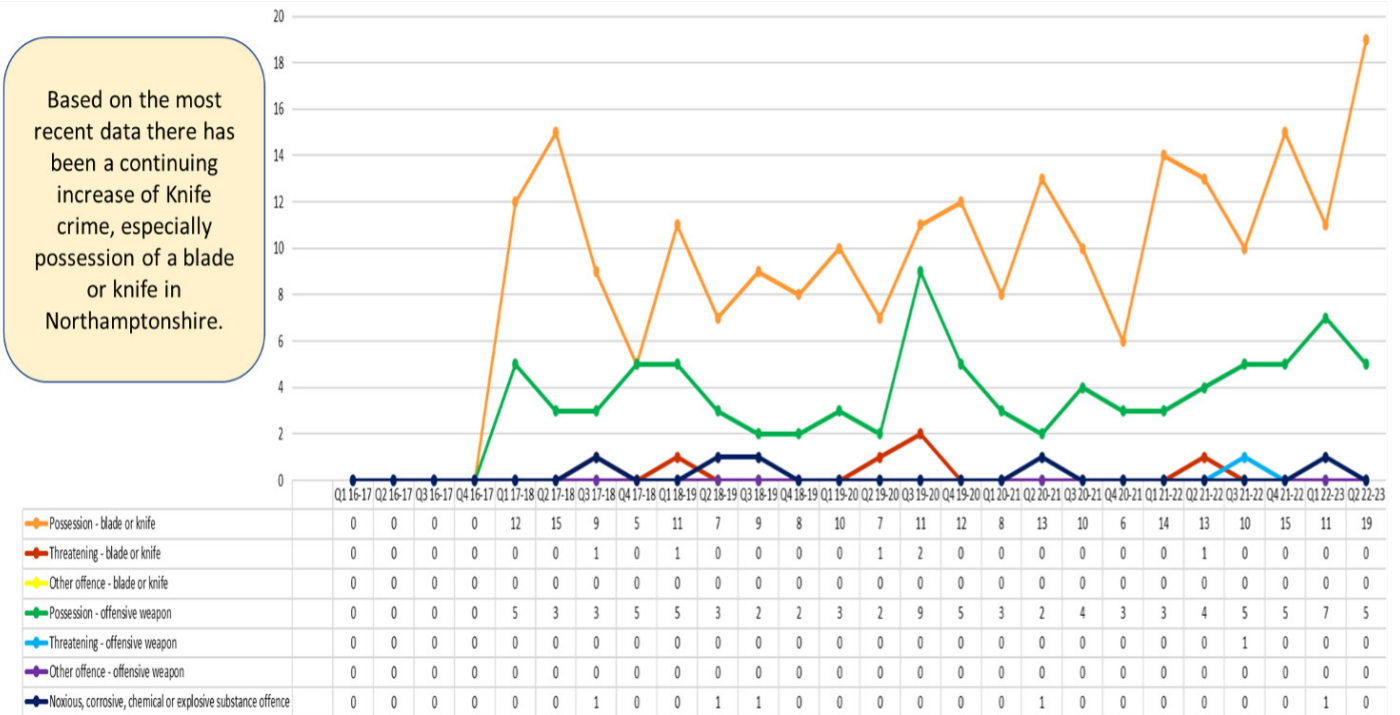
Quantity Of Serious Youth Violence Incidents By Age by Year
2018/19 to 2022/23 Q1-Q3



Age trends as a % of Total Serious Youth Violence Incidents by Year
2018/19 to 2022/23 Q1-Q3



The number of knife and offensive weapon offences with a gravity score lower than 5, Northamptonshire, Q1 16-17 to Q3 22-23



Victims

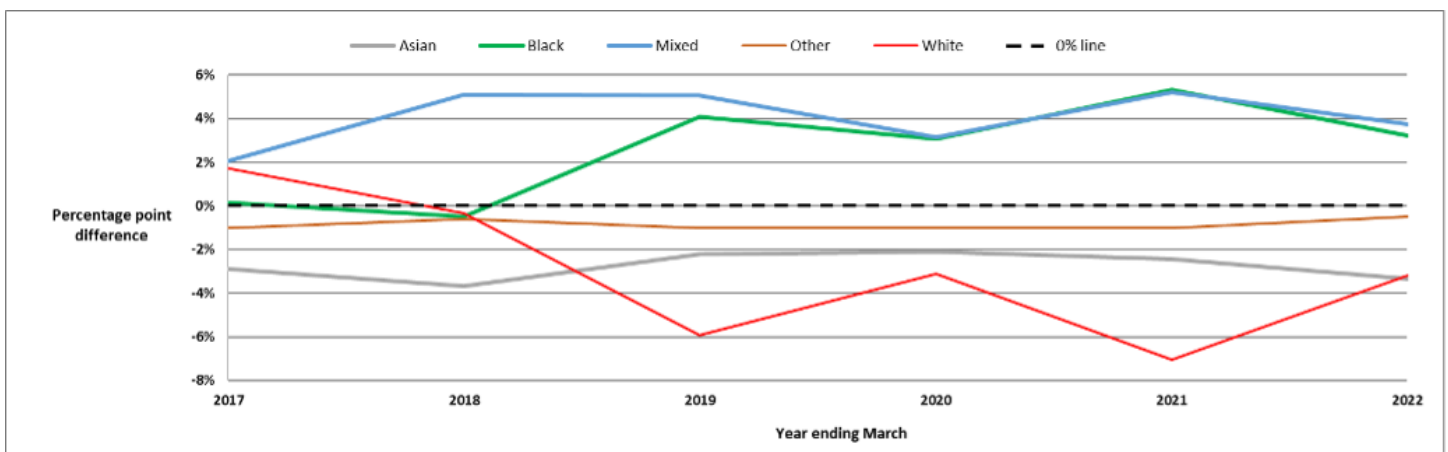
This will be reported in the new KPI run for Q1 2023/24

Children from groups which are over-represented.

Using the most recent data from the Summary Ethnic Disparity Tool we can see this identifies Mixed Ethnicities as being over-represented and Black Ethnicity are also slightly over-represented. Overall, it shows that the Ethnic Minority Group Cohort is overrepresented by 3%/4%. Which is an improvement on recent Years, as can be seen from the graph below, and shows good progress with the Disproportionality Action Plan that Northamptonshire Youth Offending implemented prior to 2022/23.

Ethnic group	2022 Offending Population	Share of total ⁽³⁾	2021 mid year 10-17 population by ethnic group	Share of total % ⁽⁴⁾	% Point Difference	Over-represented and Significant cohort size
Asian	3	2%	3,863	5%	-3%	No
Black	17	9%	4,682	6%	3%	No
Mixed	17	9%	4,274	5%	4%	Yes
Other	1	1%	802	1%	0%	No
Ethnic minority groups ⁽⁵⁾	38	21%	13,621	17%	3%	No
White	146	79%	64,379	83%	-3%	No

Trends in percentage point differences between local 10 17 population and YJS offending population, year ending March 2017 to year ending March 2022(1)



What can also be seen from this YJB data table below is the fact that in higher gravity offences Black and Mixed Ethnicities are more overrepresented.

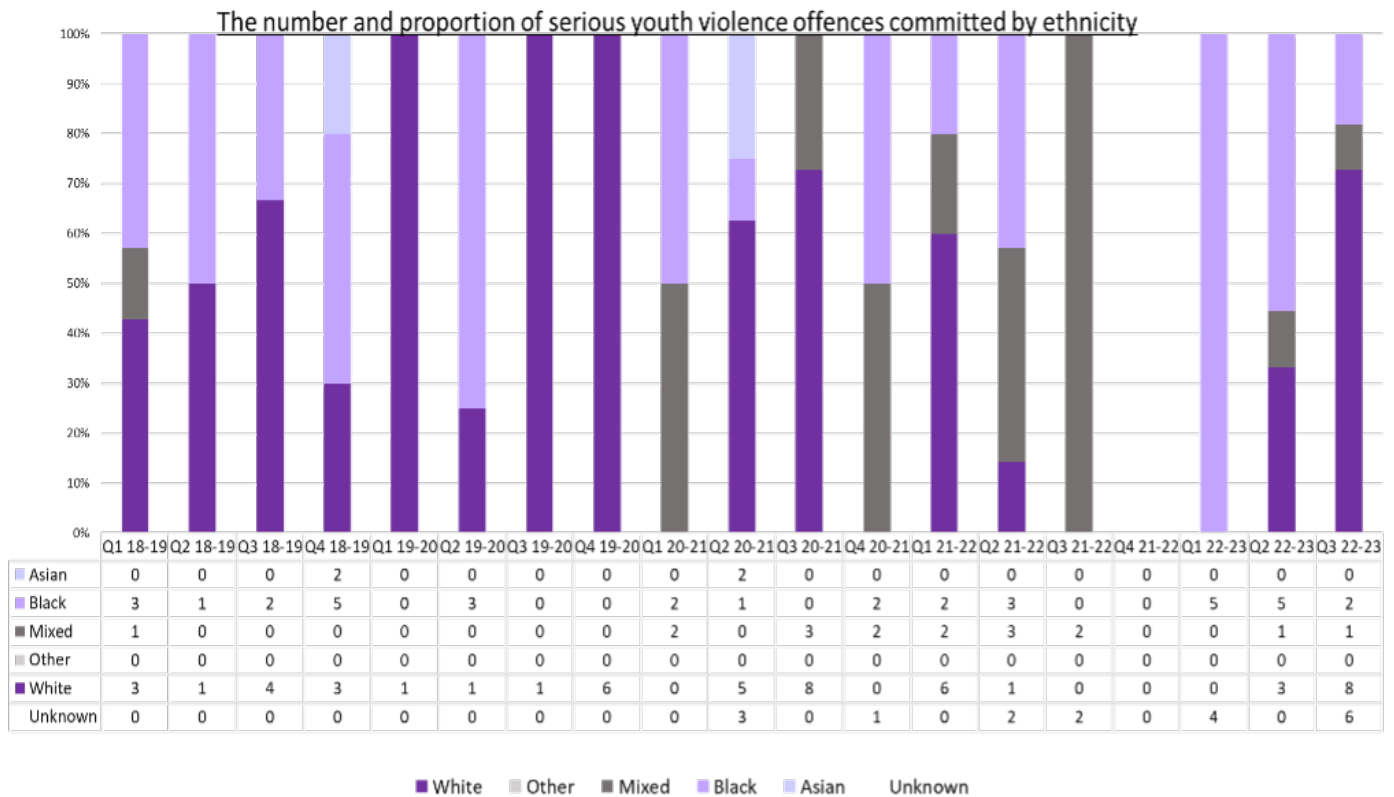
Proportion of offences committed by gravity score, within each ethnicity group

Gravity Score	Asian	Black	Mixed	Other	White	Ethnic minority groups ⁽⁴⁾
1 to 4	100%	68%	77%	100%	85%	74%
5 to 8	0%	32%	23%	0%	15%	26%

Proportion of offences committed by ethnicity, within each gravity score

Gravity Score	Asian	Black	Mixed	Other	White	Ethnic minority groups ⁽⁴⁾
1 to 4	1%	8%	9%	0%	81%	19%
5 to 8	0%	18%	13%	0%	69%	31%

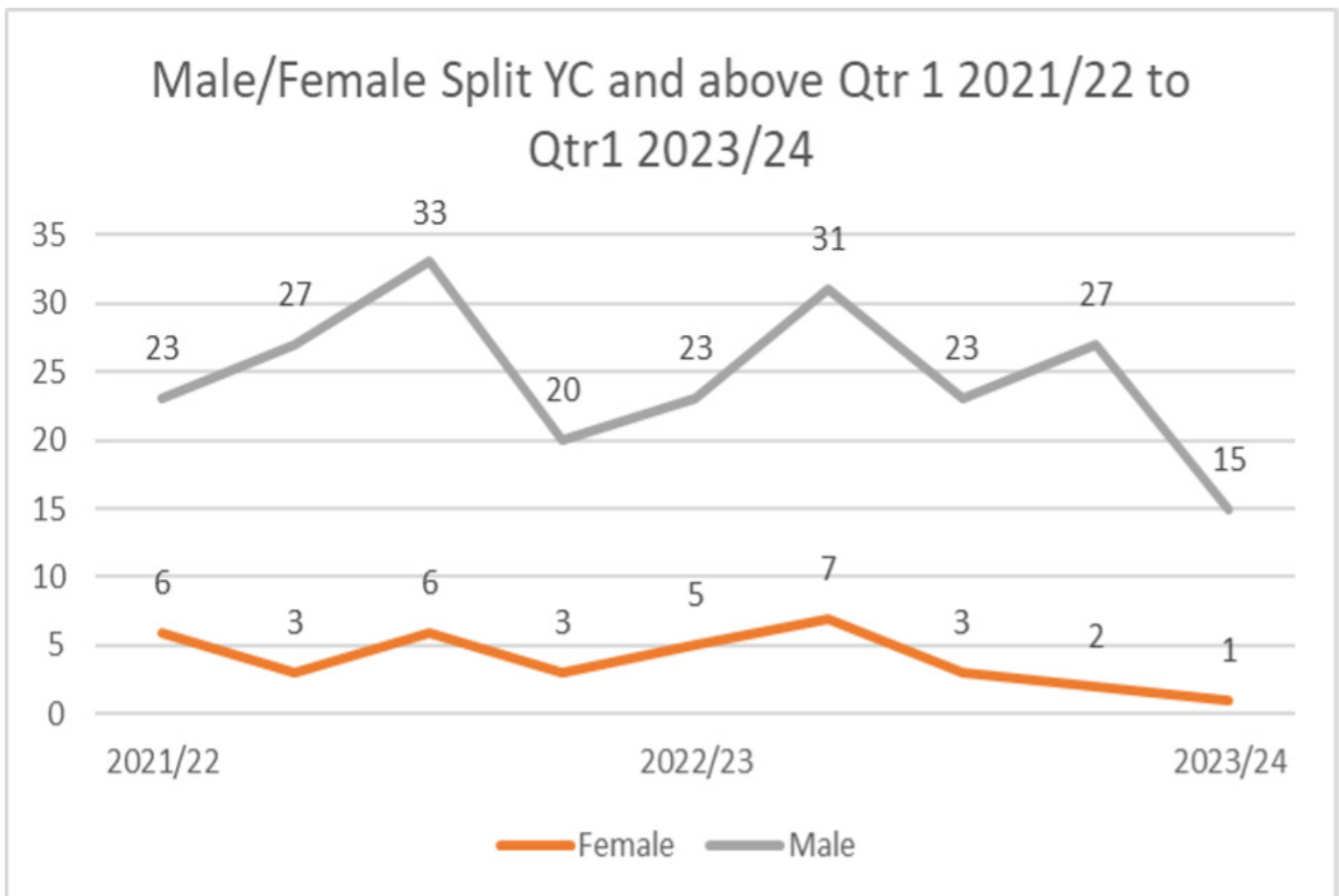
This correlates with the more recent data we see below in the Ethnicity analysis of Serious Youth Violence, although we have seen Black Ethnicities here as more than Mixed, bearing in mind these are based on a small cohort of young people where 1 person can make a significant impact on figures.



Female Cohort

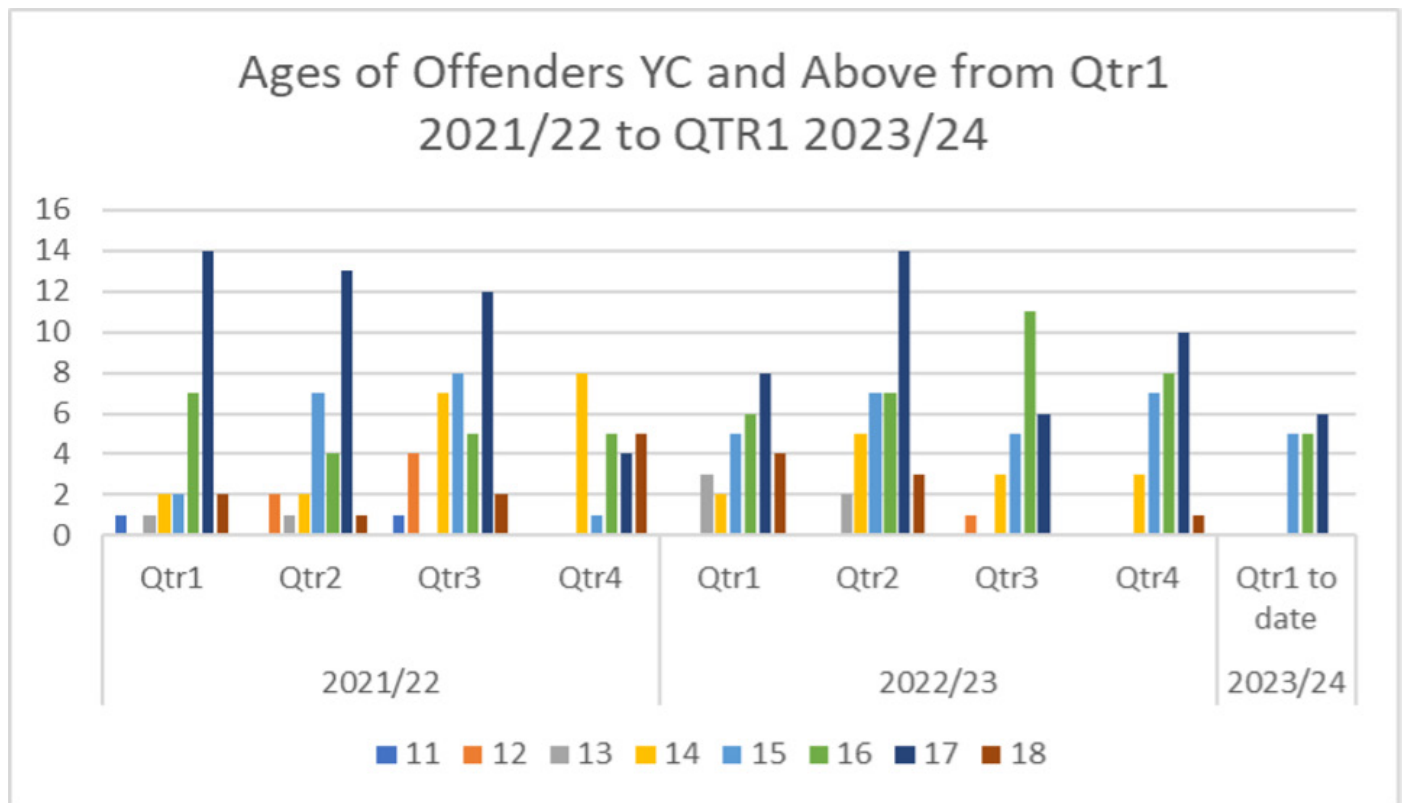
In 2022/23 we engaged in a PEER review on which one of the key areas of investigation was to establish what we initially felt was an overrepresented Female cohort. What came out of this review that Northamptonshire does not have a standout overrepresentation of this cohort and the use of the Girls Group has supported this performance. In 2023/24 our Girls group work is being shared with other Youth Offending Teams which has been instigated through the shared Basecamp Youth Justice platform. Data on our female cohort from 1st April 2021 to 10th May 2023 is below.

Gender	QTY YP	%
Female	36	13.95%
Male	222	86.05%
Grand Total	258	



Age Of Offenders Analysis

Looking at the age groups of offenders receiving a Youth Caution or above it can be seen below that the age of offending is showing some reduction over time therefore our intervention and engagement practice may need to change to be more relevant to this younger cohort. 17 is however still our biggest cohort, at 34%, but purely the increase in some younger ages potentially increases the period in which they could potentially re-offend before becoming 18 and no longer being in the YOS cohort. The 15 and 16 cohort combined represents 41% of the total cohort based on the data below.



Priorities

Prevention

NYOS Prevention and Diversion Scheme continue to offer early targeted prevention work in collaboration with our local Police led initiative CIRV. We take direct referrals from CIRV and offer 1-2-1 tailored interventions to young people who meet the following criteria:

Consent and agreement to engage must be agreed prior to referral being made.

What makes a young person suitable for referral into PaDs (Prevention and Diversion Scheme) for preventative intervention and support?

- Concerns that the young person is engaged in unreported offending behaviour
- Identified as an associate/sibling of others involved in offending, named suspect
- Engagement in violence or aggression in the community or in school
- Links to knife or weapon possession where there is not a direct link to gang activity and therefore does not meet criteria for direct CIRV support
- Escalation of ASB (Anti-Social Behaviour) where enforcement measures are being considered
- What makes a referral into PaDs unsuitable?
- There is already support in place from Early Help Services such as Young People's Service, Strengthening Families or Youth Team
- There is an active crime under investigation with Police for the young person
- There has been PaDs intervention delivered or offered in the last 6months
- All young people referred and accepted are allocated a case worker who will complete an assessment of need, risk, safety, and wellbeing, which will inform and support a tailored plan of intervention. The case worker can support the young person for up to a period of 6months where required, with aim of addressing the presenting behaviours and considering intervention and support for all presenting needs.

Below is some feedback recently received from a parent, which evidences the impact this multi-agency working can have for the young people and families we work with;

NYOS ensure regular attendance within the local Hate and Anti-Social Behaviour Action Groups with the aim of sharing information and offering

Mum described support from PaDs as "life changing as you have not just looked at his behaviours but his additional needs and how we can support him." Mum also stated "I had been saying to school for a long time that X may have further additional needs and they ignored it however you saw straight away that he needed further assessment and referred him to a SALT which has identified a severe language disorder. We are now going to have an EHCP in place which would never have happened, and X will receive the right support in education and at home". Mum feels she and stepdad Rory are now able to parent X "the way he needs to be parented" and although "feeling guilty" for not fully understanding X before, she is now confident in supporting X and "challenging and advocating for X when I need to. Mum stated "X struggles to build relationships due to his ASD however the relationship you built with him in a short space of time was very good which allowed him to trust and work with other professionals. There have been positive changes in him and myself which I thank you for".

support in engaging young people in interventions when they are identified through these groups as involved in ASB or on the cusp of offending behaviours. We are improving our communication with YOS Police to ensure we gain a greater understanding of enforcement action being undertaken and how we can support alongside this to prevent escalation in concerns. Where concerns have been identified and enforcement actions such as ASB injunction or CBO is being considered NYOS attend consultation meetings again to review the behaviours of concern and consider any intervention and support that can be offered to prevent escalation.

As a wider YOS we are supporting with intervention delivery in schools through the serious youth violence programmes.

We have recently received a grant from the Ministry of Justice until March 2025 to support young people on the cusp of offending, through a new programme Turnaround. Our team is made up of a Senior Practitioner and three Practitioners and we are already seeing its benefits and how this gives us the opportunity to work with children and their families using a whole family approach, that would not normally enter the YOS statutory caseload. One case in particular is a young person that was fined at court and is now receiving additional support through our tutors to help prepare him for his GCSE's.

Diversion

NYOS Prevention and Diversion Scheme continues to manage all Out of Court disposals and diversions, referred direct from Police or Youth Court. The team comprises of 12 practitioners, 2 Senior Practitioners and an Operations Manager. We receive an average of 40 referrals per month into the team.

Over the past year we have implemented a multi-agency panel process to provide opportunity for more effective communication and robust decision making. This ensures we are offering an appropriate response the referred crimes whilst taking into consideration the circumstances of the child and the support already in place. The decision regarding Out of Court Disposal remains a joint decision between YOS and Police, however the information provided panel members guides what action is taken alongside any Out of Court Disposal issued.

We have utilised the introduction of Outcome 22 in our area to enable us to offer support and intervention to a young person without the need to use formal outcomes and unnecessarily criminalising or escalating into the criminal justice system.

We continue to develop our processes and will now be prioritising the need to capture the young person and parent/ carer views prior to decision making. To do this we are changing our processes to ensure the young person is provided an opportunity to engage and share their voice from the point of initial referral and throughout.

We use both a summary assessment and ASSET+ to support in assessing and responding to individual needs as well as any key risk, safety, and wellbeing factors.

Northants OOC Scrutiny panel is held twice per year. The Northants OOC Scrutiny Panel is chaired by John Baker, JP, the Chair of the Northamptonshire Bench and includes representation from the Crown Prosecution Service, Police, sentencers (Magistrates), Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunal Service, the Probation Service, the Youth Offending Service (Youth panel only) and the Office of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner. Voice for Victims and Witnesses also attend the Domestic Abuse Scrutiny Panel.

The role of the panel is to ensure that the use of OOC's is appropriate and proportionate, consistent with national and local policy, and considers the victims' wishes where appropriate.

The panel review and discuss anonymised case files as a group and conclude one of four categories:

- Appropriate and consistent with national and local guidelines
- Appropriate with observations from the panel
- Inappropriate use of out of court disposal
- Panel fails to agree on the appropriateness of the decision made.
- The outcomes and achievements of the team and intervention delivered are measured in relation to re-offending rates and engagement in support.

In both our prevention and diversion work partnership working is key. We have access to all specialist based within NYOS and work closely with colleagues in Police, Early Help and Children's Social Care. The multi-agency working supports in addressing more complex needs, managing high risk, safety and wellbeing concerns but also provides a safe exit.

YP – Gary

Between August and October 2022 we received three referrals for Gary into the PaDs for a total of 12 offences of assault, criminal damage and aggravated vehicle taking. The victims of Gary's offending were his mother and siblings. Gary had also engaged in reckless behaviours placing himself at risk. The matters were taken to partnership panel where relevant information was shared regarding family context and Gary's vulnerabilities, an Outcome 22 was agreed with some diversionary interventions to be undertaken with him in response to his offending.

Diversity consideration: Gary is a 14-year-old heterosexual white British male who lives with his single mother and three siblings in the Borough Hill area of Daventry, an area with relatively average crime where violence and sexual offences are most reported. The family live in local authority housing and appear to be of low economic mobility. Gary is NEET and has been for the last three years due to concerns from his mother around bullying. There has been long term CSC involvement and Gary is currently subject to a Child in Need Plan since July 2022. Gary states he has no physical, SEN or SEMH needs, however he presents with significant neurodivergence with traits of autistic spectrum disorder and he has also experience significant trauma through lived experience of substantial domestic violence and a housefire.

Case was allocated to PaDs worker who completed a full assessment with Gary and Mum, liaising with partner agencies to agree a plan of intervention and avoid duplication of other support. PaDs worked directly with Gary to address the reasons behind his offending behaviours whilst social care partners took a wider family approach to address the ongoing challenges within the home. The interventions offered effected changes in the family dynamics, responses to behaviours and supported a more positive, nurturing environment. Professionals worked hard to secure an education placement for Gary, which he is now attending and progressing well. PaDs, referred to H&J to explore support around potential undiagnosed needs and emotional wellbeing, ongoing advice and guidance is planned via Forensic CAMHS consultation. We held regular multi-agency meetings to share update and plans. Gary's level of risk and safety and wellbeing reduced from being high to medium by point of closure. Social care agreed to consider ongoing support through tier 3 family support services as part of their exit planning. School has a good understanding of Gary's needs and have a plan to continue to support his reintegration into education.

There has been no further reported offending for a period of 7months which is a considerable change as we were seeing weekly incidents being reported.

At closure Gary fed back that there had been lots of positive changes for him including being in school, not causing harm at home, he also reported he would feel able to talk to school and mum about any worries in the future. Gary said he learnt a lot about offending, the consequences and impact of this. Gary states that his family know that the support from PaDs has made a big difference for him and they are proud of him. Mum fed back that the level of violence and aggression in the home has decreased dramatically.

Overall, this case is a good example of a multi-agency approach that has achieved positive outcomes for the young person and the wider family.

Education

The local data in relation to Education, Training and Employment on the current open caseload within NYOS is as follows:

- 15% of the total NYOS cohort are current NEET, if we further reduce the cohort to only include post 16 children the proportion increases to 74%.
- 6% of the children are of secondary education age and are currently without a school place.
- Less than 2 % of the children we are on a part time timetable
- 20% of children are eligible for free school meals
- 11% are children in care
- 15% are children current open to children's social care on either Child in Need, Early help, or Child Protection Plans.
- 8% of children currently open have an EHCP (Education Health and Care Plans),
- 12% are assessed as having concerns in relation to social communication
- 17% are identified via the Asset Plus assessment as having SEN or Mental Health concerns.

In September 2022 NYOS implemented a new Education Training and Employment offer. The aim of this is to bring the offer in line with recommendations from the HMIP and Ofsted inspection of ETE services in youth justice and to ensure that we are using our resources to the best advantage of the young people we work with. This offer included the introduction of a weekly triage day for the ETE practitioners and Children are automatically allocated an ETE worker if they are assessed as needing some level of support, or if they are assessed at triage as not needing support there is no ETE worker allocation.

Support offered by the ETE workers includes, liaising with education inclusion and education providers to ensure that every child has access to an appropriate education provision, they work with parents who are home schooling to support with the structure and planning of this, feeding back to the relevant authority where there are concerns that the home education plan is not being adhered to. An example of successes in this area:

RG and MG were not able to access their GCSE examinations due to not being allowed access to school grounds . The ETE worker arranged the young people to sit these exams in the YOS offices. Additionally in relation to CP who has experienced a serious sexual assault and as such was not confident in accessing education, the ETE worker supported the school in developing a plan to re-engage her that is reflective of her needs.

In addition to the 2 ETE practitioners employed by NYOS, the service also commissions tutoring 2 afternoons per week, this is aimed at post 16 children to progress their English and Maths skills.

Over the next 12 months the Education, Training and Employment offer looks to increase the number of post 16 children accessing Level 1 and 2 functional skills in English and Maths, and re introducing the use of ASDAN qualifications, with a concentration on post 16 NEET children. The ETE workers will also be trained to screen for Dyslexia.

Restorative approaches and victims

Within the RJ (Restorative Justice) Team we offer all victims of youth crime an opportunity to have their voice heard and considered in meetings. At risk and Safety Wellbeing meetings there is an update from the allocated victim worker to ensure that the victims needs are heard and acted upon. A member of the RJ Team will attend Alternative to Custody meetings and be involved in Youth Conditional Cautions and Licence condition discussions guaranteeing that the victims need, requests or wishes are included.

To ensure that the victims voice is heard in Referral Order Panels we have reviewed the Quick Guide Card panellists use, to include prompts to remember to consider the victims' voice. All Victim Feedback Reports or CPS documents are shared with panellists, so they gain a greater understanding of the victim's perspective. The RJ Team always offers a victim of a young person the opportunity to attend a Referral Order panel, without the young person being there so they can share their story with the panellist.

An innovative approach we have been trialling is discussing the possibility of a restorative face to face meeting with the young person first, a restorative meeting should be agreed by both parties, however what we found in the team is that the victim would request a restorative meeting and then the young person would decline to be involved, leaving the victim feeling deflated and potential re-victimised. Now we ask the case manager to support discussions with the young person first. If agreed we would then approach the victim and explore if this were something they would find beneficial, empowering the victim who has the right to say no.

To make sure that the young person completes interventions related to victims, interventions to address this have been included in the new Intervention Plan. This encourages case managers to consider victim intervention within their work with the young person, even if there is no direct victim.

Planning for group work sessions to address victim intervention have begun, the sessions will include generic victim intervention, with the opportunity for specific one to one session to be delivered after. Within the team we have a First Aid Mental Health worker who can offer support and guidance to case managers if this triggers a young person who has been a victim previously or is currently being victimised.

Reparation activities have further developed, and we are now able to link in with Salcey Forest, Wicksteed Park and the Salvation Army. Offering young people, a greater opportunity to experience different tasks and linking into their desistance factors.

Serious violence and exploitation

NYOS first started working with Barnardo's a number of years ago, however over the past two years we have created a network of champions within the Youth Offending Service who have received in depth, specialist inputs with follow up sessions to keep them up to date with case law, NRM developments, Child Trafficking Indicators and the Independent Child Trafficking Guardianship (ITCG) Service. We meet on a 6-weekly basis and cover some of the more complex elements that we are likely to need to understand. They also provide an opportunity to share further knowledge and information. Our NRM champions have then been able to give some of this advice within NYOS to make it sustainable. The more complex cases would still come into Barnardo's for support, but some of the others can then be managed by the 'champions' within the service to build service capacity and knowledge within the YOS.

NYOS is also a core panel member at the multi-agency Vulnerable Adolescent (VAP (Vulnerable Adolescent Panel)) panel. Services specifically for young people have developed rapidly in recent years on the back of widespread recognition that young people present complexities, which often exacerbated by outside influences and require a multi-agency focus. The proposal for establishing the Vulnerable Adolescent Panel in Northamptonshire was in recognition that children and adolescents today require support and high-quality interventions to reduce the risk they will be exploited, which would commonly come under the umbrella of contextual safeguarding. The Vulnerable Adolescent Panel is in the first instance a preventive process and a vehicle where appropriate for children and young people who come to notice to have the necessary support that improves their outcomes and life chances.

There are a considerable number of children and adolescents that are discussed in more than one panel, these are the most complex and at risk of harm. The Vulnerable Adolescents Panel aims to replace and cover all forums that discuss the following:

Exploitation and online abuse.

Missing Episodes

Gang involvement

County Lines

Radicalisation.

Trafficking and Modern Slavery

Female Genital Mutilation

One of our Area Managers is also the Deputy Chair of Prevent

We work closely with 2 Social Worker's employed as consultants at both West Support and Safeguarding Services and North Support and Safeguarding Services who support Social Workers with completing exploitation assessments and plans. We meet up with them monthly and they are also invited to our Risk and Safety & Wellbeing panels.

Currently under development in Northamptonshire is the new Partnership Child Exploitation Hub. This will bring together all existing resources across partners to form a new specialist service. NYOS will have bespoke prevention YOS officers working within the hub to support the need for earlier identification and intervention support.

The new Turnaround Programme works closely with the Police and recently we have worked in partnership with them during their weeks of action around Violence Against Women and Girls and Knife crime. This has resulted in some of those children and families receiving support through this new initiative.

A cross section of YOS workers is involved in delivering a multi-agency approach to educate young people about drug harm, knife crime, violence against women and girls, the laws around setting and serious violent crime. Students heard an audio of a witness statement and the perpetrator boasting about the incident before being split into groups to participate in an interactive classroom session to discuss the consequences of all involved in the offence. After the session, pupils spent time learning about the roles each agency has within the legal and social care systems and how they support young people affected by crime.

One Year 9 student commented: "This was an interesting and educational day as we did not know a lot of things about the law for young people, it does make you really think about the consequences and how it can affect you".

Detention in police custody

NYOS have been working in partnership with Northamptonshire Police to decrease the numbers of young people detained in Police Custody and in the event, they are detained the surrounding they are detained to are less likely to provoke a trauma response. In collaboration, NYOS and Northamptonshire Police have altered custody suites using a trauma informed practice. It has been recognised that a high proportion of the children brought into custody are likely to have suffered trauma or an adverse incident. We know that experiencing trauma or prolonged stress in childhood can affect the behaviour, disposition, and development of children, and lead to risk-taking, offending behaviours and self-harm. Being more trauma-informed prevents replicating traumatic experiences and avoids custody staff adding to the chronic stress their youngest detainees are already likely carrying.

As well as changes to the risk assessment at point of booking the detainee which enquiries around neuro diverse issues and the changes to the physical environment within the cell, other actions are undertaken when a child is brought into custody. A 'Golden Hour' email, now known as the 'Juvenile Notification Certificate' is sent to several partner agencies including the MASH (or EDT (Emergency Duty Team) if out of hours) CIRV, YOS, OPFCC (Office of the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner) (Office of the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner) (Office of the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner), Liaison and Diversion. This allows for the feedback of information to the custody staff in relation to the child and best ways to treat them whilst in custody. It can trigger a visit from CIRV and between 8 am and 8pm Liaison and Diversion Health staff will visit and engage with them. There is a bespoke room in custody for this to take place which is more appropriate than the cell environment. It also triggers up to 13 weeks of intervention by OPFCC bespoke youth workers and mental health services. By adopting a trauma informed approach, we aim to have the most engaged and positive approach to the interview process by the child and thus maximise our opportunities for out of court disposals to be used.

It is also recognised that Northants has a high number of children within the justice system. A substantial number of children are pleading guilty at first hearing and would have been eligible for an out of court disposal had they admitted the offence whilst on interview. Work is now ongoing between the custody department, the LCJB and the Justice Department to ensure that we are maximising the use of out of court disposals and other YOS interventions whilst keeping as many as possible out of the justice system. This is being done with the support of solicitors who are often having to advise their clients without a full understanding of the case the police have against their client. This leads to no comment interviews and thus no option to refer to YOS.

At a recent meeting, the YOS have proposed a telephone helpline that officers can call prior to any decision to arrest. To offer options and assistance to the officer and family rather than arrest. Going forward NYOS has requested a grant from the Serious Violence Duty. This grant would be to employ two YOS workers based in Police Custody. It is believed these posts will promote Out of Court Disposals and can advise solicitors and custody Sergeants of the appropriate sanction. We would also like to increase the use of voluntary interviews.

NYOS have continued to commission the services of the "Appropriate Adult Service" to manage all Appropriate adult requests and manage PACES. The Service Specification relates to the provision of Supporting Children and Young People through the custody and courts process by provision of an Appropriate Adults Service. The service is commissioned to operate 24 hours per day, seven days per week, and 365 days per year.

The Appropriate Adult Service performance for 2022/23 is as follows :

721 young people were supported by an AA provided by TAAS

The average response time for an AA to attend was 29 minutes (target is to attend within 1 hour)

66 % of young people said the support they received by TAAS was excellent

Quarterly contract review meetings have been held. This is led by the Commissioning and Strategy Service, and attended by the Head of Service YOS, Team Manager NCT EDT, Northamptonshire Police Custody Contract Manager, Regional Manager TAAS (The Appropriate Adult Service), Data Lead TAAS. There are no significant concerns with the service being provided by TAAS. Feedback from the Youth Offending Service, Emergency Duty Team and Police Custody has been the service is good. The response to a request for an Appropriate Adult is not only fast but also actively supports and advocates for the young person whilst in custody.

A recent example of good practice is:

Job number 169317.

Juvenile 15 arrested - PWITS.

Had previously been in Custody before. He said he couldn't relax in the cell, but said it helped having someone to talk too, as he's mum had refused to attend.

I arranged for cereal bars (we discussed the ones he liked) juice and something to read as he had refused food for the 5 hours he had been in. He said the reading would help pass the time. He said he felt better after speaking to the AA/ Solicitor and CID.

276649

"This dp was a juvenile who had been arrested for murder, he was visibly scared and shell shocked after his interview we had a consultation and he opened up and began crying telling me how scared he was, we spoke for a bit and I consoled him. after he had his charges read out to him we had another consolation in where he broke down again once again i consoled him and he asked if he could just wait and talk a little before going back to his cell. he thanked me for being there to talk and for being able to keep him out his cell a little longer so his head wasn't in such a dark place

Below comment from 16 year old juvenile I saw on the 29th March – 277963

"I was incredibly nervous and anxious about what was happening but now I feel a lot calmer"

Remands

Northamptonshire YOS have a designated Court Team consisting of four Case Managers and two Assistant Court officers. We have a local process that is followed by the team and shared with the wider service for weekend remand courts and bank holidays.

We have a quarterly remand rota which provides consistency for Court staff, Magistrates, young people, and social care.

We have a system known as the 'Golden Hour' which is a system to share information related to children in Police custody. This can include details in relation to health and allows us to prepare ahead of any potential remand hearings.

In the morning, the staff on the rota will contact Custody (Police and Court) to check if any under 18's are in Custody and to gather information. A request for Pre-sentence disclosures (PSD's) is sent to the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) immediately which enables us to secure those prior to meeting the child in Custody.

We have effective working relationships with CPS solicitors and legal representatives. The Senior Manager and Operations Manager with oversight of the Court Team, have regular meetings with NCT Placements and Commissioning. These meetings review the children we have remanded into Youth Detention Accommodation and those in Youth Detention. When we have a child in Police custody and an application for remand could be made, we contact Placements and Commissioning to ensure that a plan can be agreed at the earliest opportunity.

A check of NCT Social care system is completed by the ACO's, and if the child is known to social care, we contact the allocated social worker before the Court hearing.

This collaborative approach provides us with the opportunity to work with partner agencies to create and present a robust, alternative to Custody package in Court. A bail assessment is completed, and, with management oversight, a package is put in place to reduce further offending, protect the public and to offer an alternative to remand.

For each child remanded to Youth Detention we will allocate to a Case Manager and Resettlement Lead within one working day. They will attend the Initial remand planning meeting together and the resettlement process will start with immediate effect. This includes preparing for any subsequent bail applications the child may make. For the more complex young people, we will hold multi-disciplinary bail preparation meetings to explore risks and how to manage those within the Community. This enables us to proactively, seek in supporting a child with bail.

NYOS Senior managers are working jointly with Police Custody sergeants to encourage and support the use of PACE transfers and to reduce the number of children being held for remand court.

The Common Platform has been launched in Northamptonshire on 16/05/2023. NYOS Court team and managers can now access Court listings and information within our area more readily. We will be better equipped to swiftly track a child through the Criminal Justice system due to having access to Court listings nationwide. This enables us to better plan, prepare and liaise with other agencies, inclusive of out of county local authorities and Courts.

Use of custody

Currently NYOS has 3 young people remanded in Youth Detention Accommodation and 3 sentenced to Detention and Training Orders.

Processes have been put in place to manage and reduce the numbers of entries into the secure estate. Referral Order Custody Threshold panels and Alternative to Custody Panels work well as partner agencies are invited to attend and contribute towards both a proposal for sentencing and interventions. These plans are continued to be reviewed during throughout sentence planning and Risk and Safety & Wellbeing (R&SWB) panels post sentence.

At the point of a young person entering the secure estate either through a remand to Youth Detention Accommodation or sentence, a resettlement case manager will be co-allocated to the young person. The resettlement worker will attend all relevant professional meetings and specifically remand/sentence planning meetings and R&SWB panels to ensure that specific plans are in place to ensure a smooth transition back to the community.

Upon a young person entering custody through a remand, they automatically become a “looked after” child and as such are allocated to a social worker whose role is to undertake an initial assessment. NYOS will notify the local authority when this occurs. As with all remands/potential releases, such as bail applications; the local authority placements team will be notified and where possible, pre-planning will take place to ensure that the young person has a suitable plan in place. Again, R&SWB panels are used to monitor progress along with other relevant meetings.

Where it is deemed appropriate, representatives from National Referral Mechanism, Barnardo's, will be invited to contribute to Custody Threshold meetings, R&SWB Panels, and release planning meetings. There will be occasions whereupon a young person's R&SWB concerns are unable to be managed adequately within the home area and in the event of them being released, there will be a necessity to liaise with other out of area agencies such as Home YOS, local authority, and a placement provider.

In terms of development, Release on Temporary Licence has been identified as an area which to date has not been used to its full potential within NYOS. This practice has several potential benefits in terms of preparing a young person for release following an extended period in custody and for a young person to demonstrate their motivation to adhere to conditions. This can also be implemented to support attendance and college interviews, specific family events etc.

Constructive resettlement

Northamptonshire YOS have designated Resettlement Leads within the Court Team. The Resettlement leads within YOS will be assisting Case Managers and young people by providing a guidance service around what is best practice, facilitated through partnership building.

NYOS have Positive Resettlement Guidance 2022, which focusses on implementing the principles of constructive resettlement via specific pathways. These include a focus on continuity for children before sentence or remand, through period in Custody and upon release.

There is a specific focus on the child being fully involved in the resettlement planning. During every planning meeting held in the custodial establishment, the allocated Resettlement worker will be present to act as an advocate for the young person and accurately record the meeting decisions. The tracker will be shared with the young person after every meeting to ensure that they are informed and empowered to take ownership of their sentence and resettlement. The Resettlement tracker titled ‘My resettlement pathway- what my life will look like after prison/care’ is a young person friendly document containing all the relevant information a child should need during their time in Custody. It contains information on all key areas of resettlement, a guide to how remand and sentence planning meetings are held and who is in attendance. This is updated each month with the child. All professionals working with the child both in Custody and in the Community should contribute to this pathway plan.

The key areas focused on within the resettlement tracker are;

- ROTL
- Accommodation
- Education, training, and employment
- Substance Misuse
- Health
- Finance/Budget and/or debts
- Family relationships

A key area of development within Resettlement is the focus on improving the use of ROTL. This should be considered for every young person, and we are committed to improving how we plan and implement ROTL arrangements. An example of this would be using ROTL to allow a child to be introduced to a potential placement and to facilitate introductory meetings with professionals they may be working with when they return to the Community.

The Resettlement worker will support the Case Manager in determining appropriate license conditions using the assessment and resettlement tracker. This will include ensuring that placements are considered at the earliest opportunity, this includes alerting placement services to release dates and liaising with social care. This will promote a timely and robust plan for the child upon release and allow them to become familiar with their potential placement several weeks prior to release.

Resettlement can be challenging, a case example of this would be 'Child L'. He was sentenced to Custody for his first conviction. He was overwhelmed and reluctant to engage in the initial planning meetings and subsequent review meetings. He was allocated a Resettlement worker who visited the secure establishment on several occasions with the Case Manager. Child L declined to attend the meetings and refused to engage with the Resettlement worker. He reported that as he would be returning to live with parents upon release and he felt able to secure his own education and/or employment he saw no value in engaging with her.

The Resettlement worker persevered by working with the Case Manager who Child L was engaging with, attending the reviews and gathering information from those meetings. This enabled her to begin to put together a resettlement plan to share with Child A. She approached him and provided him with her number, she shared the tracker with him and suggested that if he felt he wanted to work with her and share his views about what he wanted when he returned to the Community, he could work with her to plan for his release.

Approximately, two months before his release he contacted her by telephone and engagement began. Child L worked with the Resettlement Lead to put together a plan for his release which included seeking advice from YOS ETE practitioners.

Child L reported that he found it helpful to work with the Resettlement lead and made the process of release much clearer.

NYOS are currently working on a Memorandum of Understanding with Northamptonshire Childrens Trust to further reduce disproportionality of care experienced young people in the criminal justice system. We have identified several key responsibilities and actions across specific teams to ensure a joint commitment. Elements of this, focus on children within the secure estate and includes partnership working to improve and further develop resettlement for example, a representative from social care will attend planning meetings, involved in early release discussions and support in parts of the resettlement plan for the child.

Standards for children in the justice system

Effective practice is a priority area for NYOS. We do this by providing accurate data, monitoring, auditing, and evaluating the work of the service. This means that our goal is to promote a constructive culture of learning, and moreover, offer a service to achieve Continuous Improvement (CI) to all staff as well as recognising good practice with Young People. The mechanisms used within the service are:

- Quality Assurance
- NYOS consistently assess, review and evaluate areas of our practice to prevent further re-offending..
- Internal Quality Assurance

NYOS leadership team meet every month to discuss their Performance and Accountability Report (PAR). This discussion provides a whole service overview of casework and offers a reflective practice opportunity for managers to support each other with team and service challenges.

Mock HMIP Inspections

The YOS complete a Mock Inspection annually and this will as far as practicable mirror the HMIP process. This includes the Inspection being conducted at short notice and using the most recent HMIP Inspection tool. We aim to engage as many staff as possible and managers within the auditing process to ensure we have full ownership across the organisation. We will publish the results across the YOS and offer one to one feedback to staff with the goal of improving practice.

Case Auditing

When an Asset Plus is completed by the Case Manager this is reviewed using the NYOS Quality Assurance Tool. Every Asset+ and Community Resolution Disposal (CRD) is assessed within National Standards guidelines unless there are exceptional circumstances or complications regarding the case.

Thematic Audits

Within NYOS several thematic audits are taking place to ensure that we are meeting the requirements for our HMIP inspection. Once completed each audit will have area of good practice and areas for improvement. The areas of improvement will monitor through a live action plan monitored and overseen by the YOS management board.

Area	Lead	Date
Victims	Liz	Complete
Resettlement	Liz/ Leanne	Complete
Education	Leanne	July
Intervention plan	Claire	Sept
Substance Misuse	Liz	Nov

Performance Development Group (PDG)

Much of the above is brought together and discussed at the PDG with the management team. Each month YOS Senior and Operational Managers attend the Performance Development Group. The meeting is chaired by the Head of Service. This meeting aims to share performance information, promote accountability and good practice. We aim to follow the performance cycle above; planning our work such as Audits and Inspections, monitoring the results and evaluate any findings.

Peer Review

In January 2023 NYOS were delighted to host a Peer Review. The Peer Review team were asked to look at the effectiveness of:

- Partnership arrangements in place to reduce disproportionality of Children in Care (CiC) being criminalised.
- Partnership arrangements at reducing re - offending for CiC (including holding and reducing risk, safety, and wellbeing factors).
- A 'golden thread' throughout the Peer Review was: How partners have responded and adapted delivery for females?

The Peer Review Team feedback was strong and noted there was a culture of learning and continuous improvement. This was evident in quality assurance/auditing processes in place to support continuous improvement, for example of thematic audits, serious case reviews and the peer review process. The PRT also noted that Northamptonshire had several partnership action plans with recommendations and progress being monitored. A further observation was that the PRT found a dedicated, passionate, and stable workforce, who understood the needs/risk of the children they supervised.

It was clear the partnership was in the initial stages of lots of improvement and developmental work which aims to improve outcomes for children and families of Northamptonshire. Much of which was already developing well where for other areas the analytical work was taking place and governance arrangements were still being agreed.

Areas for consideration have been collated and shared with the YOS Management Board as an action plan. Progress will be monitored by the Board throughout 2023.

Workforce Development

In Northamptonshire we are committed to having a highly skilled workforce that can meet the needs of our children and families. Our workforce consists of qualified social workers, nurses, police officers, and practitioners who are educated to degree level in relevant subjects e.g., Criminology, youth justice, social care.

We have an emphasis on a learning culture in Northamptonshire and ensure staff feel valued, listened to, and supported. All staff and volunteers have regular access to training. Most staff have completed the Youth Justice Effective Practice Certificate qualification and new staff are encouraged and motivated to do so. This is role specific and reflects the risk and complexity of working in youth justice.

Staff are trained in other key areas such as:

- Harmful sexualised Behaviour (AIM2/3 and Good Lives)
- Restorative Justice
- Safeguarding Children
- County Lines
- Risk outside the home
- Transitional Safeguarding
- Child Exploitation
- Domestic Abuse
- Child Development
- Children with Disabilities and SEND
- Prevent
- Neglect
- Equality and Diversity

All staff receive regular supervision and appraisals, and ongoing career development is encouraged through this process. All new starters also receive a robust induction package. The Youth Justice Board's Resource Hub provides a platform for practitioners to access a range of tools and resources that support ongoing knowledge and development. Training needs are regularly reviewed and most often linked to the Youth Justice Partnership's key priorities. This has included practitioners attending training on:

- Modern Day Slavery – including Section 45 Defence and the National Referral Mechanism.
- Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE's).
- Deprivation of Liberty and The Mental Capacity Act.
- Disproportionality and Unconscious Bias.
- Resettlement.
- Trauma Informed Practice
- Speech, Language and Communication Needs
- Child First Effective Practice

All staff have accessed the monthly development days that are often facilitated to provide staff with the opportunity to refresh their skills and knowledge, for example Asset Plus workshops and report writing workshops.

10.12 Children from groups which are over-represented

NYOS has seen a reduction in ethnic over representation in the past 12 months, however, it remains a concern

The 2021 census identified black males are representing 6% of the general 10–17-year-old population within Northamptonshire, and mixed ethnicity males as representing 5% of the general 10-17 year of population in Northamptonshire. When we look at offending behaviours 9% of the offending population are represented by Black males, and this is the same for mixed ethnicity males. As such there is a 3% over representation for black males and a 4% over representation for mixed ethnicity males locally. A particular concern is that black males in Northamptonshire represent 9% of all violent offences, and mixed ethnicity males represent 12% of violent offences showing a significant increase in over representation when it comes to violent behaviour.

Over the past 12 months we have seen a shift in the representation of children based on age. Traditionally the most over-represented age group in Northamptonshire has been children aged 17, however, this has decreased slightly and there has been an increase in 15- and 16-year-olds.

When we consider gender, females currently account for 14% of the youth justice cohort which is an increase, and the female cohort locally accounts for a considerable proportion of reoffending, which is ordinarily related to less serious but more frequent offences.

In November 2022, all partners at the NYOS management board signed commitment to the action plan and its implementation. The current action plan was created in March 2022, and adapted when the HMIP thematic report exploring the over representation of Black and Mixed heritage boys in the youth justice system. The plan has commenced in July 2022, and we are currently beginning to review and update the plan for the year 2022/2023.

68% of the 2022/2023 action plan has been completed, with 30% underway and just 2 actions delayed currently. The main challenges have been progressing actions with partner engagement; however, positive progress has been made and NYOS is now involved with the Northants Police equalities action plan, and the Northamptonshire social care disproportionality action plan.

Examples of achievements over the past 12 months have included improved youth police custody processes, the development of a cultural identity intervention for the children we work with (this is currently being finalised), unconscious bias and cultural identity training for all staff, leaflet in custody providing children with understandable information about their options, the offering of early intervention for those children identified by Northamptonshire Police as 'top suspects', training for all practitioners on the creation of a communication passport so this is now offered to all children within the YOS, and a full review of the ETE offer locally to reflect the over representation of children with certain characteristics more likely to be excluded from or not able to access education training and employment.

Over representation remains a priority for NYOS, and this will be reflected in the review of the Over Representation plan for 2023/2024 which will further push the current progress to include joint racial trauma training for staff in NYOS, and children's social care; further progressing youth custody processes; reducing the criminalisation of looked after children by reviewing the partnership protocol and embedding it in practice for social care, placements, police and courts and an additional focus on girls in the youth justice system. The quarterly Diversity and Disproportionality Steering group will also be attended by board members from our partner organisations to drive the actions forward.

Evidence-based practice and innovation

In collaboration with Northamptonshire magistracy, NYOS and the Magistracy have implemented creative solutions to better support the children and young people who appear before youth courts. These innovations have attracted positive attention from the Lieutenancy; the Shrievalty; the magistracy and senior judiciary; the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner; the police; HMCTS; the Centre for Justice Innovation; and many others.

NYOS were invited to present at Centre for Justice Innovation Convention on Problem Solving Approaches. Nina Warren the Court Operations Manager presented on NYOS's approach to problem solving and was commended on our use of Youth review Panel, Problem Solving Hearings and Youth Court Solutions. These have been nationally recognised as innovative. Further details are below.

Youth Review Panel [YRO]- NYOS invite the Magistrates to review Youth Rehabilitation Orders in partnership with NYOS. The magistrates are invited to YOS premises along with the young person and their parents. The setting is informal and encourages young people to engage in a review of their own progress and share their work with the Magistrates. The Magistrates and NYOS have an opportunity to motivate and congratulate the young people on their engagement/progress which inspires them further to make positive changes. The YRO reviews can be multi agency e.g., social care, ETE, reparation reports, victim input.

Problem Solving Hearings – NYOS have been using problem solving hearing for complex cases. Complex cases often require a multi-agency response to a young person's offending behaviour. The problem-solving hearing pulls together all professionals who will have a responsibility for delivering any element of the court order are requested to attend court. In court, each professional is engaged by the presiding justice to declare what they propose to do and how they intend to deliver. To support understanding the presiding justice will ensure there is clarity on behalf of all attending professionals, the child or young person and their family.

Youth Court Solutions is the newest innovation in Northamptonshire. This service has been established to offer an at-court advice and support service at Wellingborough courthouse. Youth Court Solutions is delivered by a range of local charities and coordinated by The Crisalys Foundation working in conjunction with the Youth Offending Service, police and, where necessary, the legal profession. It aims to ensure that all young people have their broader problems addressed, offering access to a wide range of services for clients, children and young people and their families. This may include:

- Help to identify and access local authority, statutory or third sector support services to address the issues which bring children and young people to court
- Introductions to learning and training opportunities to improve employment prospects
- Practical support with financial issues and accommodation
- Information on the working of the criminal justice system

NYOS have also taken part in research commissioned by the Youth Justice Board. The YJB wanted to understand more about why reoffending rates among children are higher among some ethnic minority groups. NYOS was one of a few YOS's to work with Traverse, an independent research company, to do research to explore this in more detail. Learning from this study has been embedded into our Over Representation Action Plan.

NYOS and Northamptonshire Police have a strong partnership. A priority for Northamptonshire Police has been The Prevention and Intervention strategy (currently in draft) which identifies key delivery linked to partnership objectives and alignment of strategic partnerships to deliver for early intervention linked to children and young people. Over the last year Northamptonshire Police have worked in partnership with NYOS to create:

- The development of trauma informed practice.
- Multi agency problem solving
- The Observatory for shared partnership data
- A place-based approach with delivery through Neighbourhood Policing teams
- Creation of the Offender Management Unit which consolidates IOM, CIRV, YOS and the new development of an Early Intervention Hub seek to align coordinated preventative and diversionary support to children and young people.

The Observatory utilises a data visualisation tool Qlik. Qlik has been developed to support the key aims and outcomes

of the Youth Justice Plan. This has included profile and analysis of the First Time Entrant cohort over several years, to identify themes and opportunities for earlier identification and intervention. This has been developed further to produce real time intelligence of young people with ongoing police interaction that have yet to formally enter the YJS. The Qlik app has also been further refined to meet the requirements and criteria for the Turnaround program ensuring young people eligible can be systematically identified and referred to the scheme. This has been trialled using the Police weeks of actions in respects of the Force's matters of priority to refer young people into the program for support that are involved in serious violence, drug harm and VAWG (Violence Against Women and Girls) related occurrences.

A significant development for NYOS and the Police is that NYOS has funded a business analyst to sit within the Observatory to develop products specifically for the Youth Offending Service that will ensure dedicated resource to build information and analytical products that support the wider delivery of the current and future priorities for the YOS and the corresponding Youth Justice Plan.

Service development plan

In February 2022 NYOS was designated a YJB Stage One Priority service due to concerns relating to numbers of first-time entrants to the criminal justice system and the amount of reoffences per reoffender.

Strategic Priority 1 – Prevention and Diversion

The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 s 37 (1). It shall be the principal aim of the youth justice system to prevent offending by children and young persons.

Outcomes sought

- Multi-agency information and intelligence is gathered to identify risks and vulnerabilities in groups, communities, and individuals as they relate to exploitation of children and young people.
- Whole family approaches are used to engage the child's whole system of support at the earliest opportunity
- Prevention and diversion activities are focused on reducing risks and vulnerabilities to offending
- Agencies are able to recognise and respond to the contextual factors that increase the risk of children and young people entering into the criminal justice system
- The need for statutory youth offending and/or safeguarding interventions is reduced

To achieve this we will:

- Ensure children and young people from marginalized backgrounds and communities access universal and universal plus services aimed at improving their outcomes
- Ensure Out of Court Disposals are managed in accordance with the recommendations of the HMIP Inspection report, March 2018 "Out-of-court disposal work in youth offending teams"
- First time entrants are offered targeted and effective crime prevention and diversion interventions
- Ensure information is exchanged to identify the causes and risk factors of young people engaging in crime and anti-social behaviour
- Promote effective multi-agency working, joint decision-making, planning, with children and young people subject to Community Resolution, Turnaround, and Out-of-Court disposal (i.e. Triage, Youth Caution and Youth Conditional Caution)
- Strengthen our coordinated process for the use of point-of-arrest resolution
- Strengthen desistance opportunities through education, training and employment and other means of promoting self-esteem and future opportunities
- Maintain our strong partnership/interface with Health (GP, School Nurses, Speech and Language Therapy, Sexual Health), Education, Early Help key stakeholders.

Strategic Priority 2 – Recognising and responding to child exploitation and serious youth violence

Local data suggests that children and young people involved in offending are more likely to be involved in criminal exploitation and at a greater risk of becoming a victim and/or perpetrator of serious youth violence. This Plan will interface with the aims and outcomes as set out within Northamptonshire Police's annual Strategic Assessment, community profiles and West and North Northamptonshire Community Safety Priorities. NYOS management Board are committed to reducing incidents of serious violence including domestic abuse, sexual offences and knife crime

Outcomes sought

- Support and influence the place-based approaches to our priority neighbourhoods and vulnerable locations
- Focus on early intervention and utilising the powers and legislation available to reduce incidents of anti-social behaviour, youth violence, exploitation, and serious organised crime
- Increased Early Intervention and Youth Offer - Diverting young people from opportunities to commit crime
- Improved understanding of Serious Organised Crime and gang related activity
- Improved education and awareness amongst young people in relation to online abuse, gangs, knife crime, criminal and sexual exploitation and hate crime
- The Serious Violence duty will be delivered
- Develop and embed contextual safeguarding to ensure victims and their families get the right support when they need it most

To achieve this we will:

- Continue to present CYP (Children and Young People) cases that meet the thresholds of VAP, IOM and MAPPA and work with partners in terms of information and intelligence-gathering to identify and intervene CYP's risk of serious harm, safety and well-being at the earliest opportunity
- Continue to access risk and screen all CYP open to YOS using the Child Exploitation tool to identify children and young people who are vulnerable to exploitation and criminal activity, including 'county lines'
- Strengthen our partnership with the Police, Rescue and Response, National Referral Mechanism and National Crime Agency
- Represent YOS in community events, gatherings and initiatives to tackle Serious Youth Violence and County lines
- Continue to coordinate Risk Safety and Wellbeing Panels to share information and draw a joint Intervention Plan with multi-agency partners to manage CYP's risk of serious harm and safety and well-being for them to desist from offending and re-offending
- Coordinate and respond with intelligence-led disruption in the community, utilising available Youth Justice Orders with their conditions to protect children and young people (i.e. Referral Order Contracts, YRO requirements, etc.)
- Support young people demonstrating harmful sexual behaviour and address their behaviour using evidence-based approaches and interventions
- Continue to ensure CYP's subject to early release and DTO (Detention and Training Order) (Detention and Training Order) License and post-conviction have effective intervention strategies to reduce the risk presented to the public and victim

Strategic Priority 3 – Tackling disproportionality in the criminal justice system

The review led by David Lammy, MP (Member of Parliament) (Member of Parliament), in 2017 highlights disparity in the treatment and outcomes for Black, Asian and young people from other racially minoritised backgrounds within the Youth Justice System. In response, the Ministry of Justice published an updated response on Tackling Racial Disparity in the Criminal Justice System (CJS) 2020. This strategic priority aims to address the overrepresentation of Black and brown children, and those from other marginalised groups i.e., Gypsy Roma Travellers from exploited by criminal gangs, entering the criminal justice system and becoming perpetrators and victims of serious youth violence.

Whilst the numbers of children are relatively low, there is a need for the partnership to do more to improve outcomes for children from marginalised groups, particularly those who have had adverse childhood experiences and are at the greatest risk of educational and social exclusion.

We must be ambitious for their futures and ensure effective measures are in place to address the harmful impact of social and racial inequalities and injustice.

Strategic Priority 3 – Tackling disproportionality in the criminal justice system

Outcomes sought

- All agencies work to create opportunities for overrepresented children that promote a strong sense of their own cultural, racial, religious and linguistic identity and build their self-esteem through access and inclusion in education, employment, training and positive activities
- The partnership will seek to actively engage marginalised communities and the voluntary, faith and community providers supporting them in the community in addressing and solving the problem
- Local partners and agencies to develop a comprehensive understanding of the contextual risk factors and social inequalities that Black and brown young men experience and work effectively and purposefully to tackle disadvantage and structural racism
- Children and young people from racially minoritized backgrounds at risk of school exclusion and with additional vulnerabilities to receive targeted support aimed at keeping them in education, access positive activities and build trusted relationships
- Agencies and services have a sound understanding of the mechanisms of institutional racism in relation to the exploitation and criminalization of children from racially minoritized backgrounds
- Out of Court disposals to be considered for Black and brown children and young people to minimize the risk of early entry into the criminal justice system
- Agencies have effective and accessible measures in place to challenge discriminatory practices
- Training is available for all agencies to promote cultural competence in the development of policy, practice and engagement with children, young people and families from racially minoritized backgrounds
- All agencies work to create opportunities for children that promote a strong sense of their own cultural, racial, religious and linguistic identity and build their self-esteem through access and inclusion in education, employment, training and positive activities
- The partnership will seek to actively engage marginalised communities and the voluntary, faith and community providers supporting them in the community in addressing and solving the problem
- Local partners and agencies to develop a comprehensive understanding of the contextual risk factors and social inequalities that Black and brown young men experience and work effectively and purposefully to tackle disadvantage and structural racism
- Children and young people from racially minoritized backgrounds at risk of school exclusion and with additional vulnerabilities to receive targeted support aimed at keeping them in education, access positive activities and build trusted relationships
- Agencies and services have a sound understanding of the mechanisms of institutional racism in relation to the exploitation and criminalization of children from racially minoritized backgrounds
- Out of Court disposals to be considered for Black and brown children and young people to minimize the risk of early entry into the criminal justice system
- Agencies have effective and accessible measures in place to challenge discriminatory practices
- Training is available for all agencies to promote cultural competence in the development of policy, practice and engagement with children, young people and families from racialised backgrounds

Strategic Priority 3 – Tackling disproportionality in the criminal justice system

To achieve this we will:

- Raise awareness and recognise our unconscious bias
- Challenge discrimination within our own agencies in the youth justice system
- Promote equality and fairness
- Adopt anti-racist practices and include anti-racist statements in our policies and procedures
- Continue YOS working group to champion good practice in working with Overrepresented children and marginalised communities
- Ensure the YOS employs a workforce, including volunteers that is reflective of the communities we serve
- Ensure young people receive fair treatment at all stages of the youth offending system and their rights are promoted
- Recognise the adversity faced by marginalized groups and communities and strive to ensure our activities are inclusive and aimed at ensuring equality of service including access to services i.e., education, mental health, substance misuse, safeguarding, health
- Ensure young people are recognised as victims of criminal and sexual-exploitation and enforce the use of Modern Slavery Legislation through referral to the National Referral Mechanism
- Use the Scrutiny Panel for Out-of-Court Disposals to maintain checks and balances in the system
- Ensure that Overrepresented people who are at risk of Custody will be given an opportunity to receive the Bail Intensive Supervision and Surveillance (ISS) Support Package, instead of being remanded in a secure establishment

Challenges, risks, and issue

Legislation and guidance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> YJSs/partnership will need to respond to the changes within the Police, Crime Sentencing and Courts Act (2022), including the Serious Violence Duty. As outlined in Section 5, the storming phase to ensure governance and processes are in place is underway.
Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The YJB grant remains unannounced at the time of writing the plan and while assurances have been given on the maintenance of last year's core grant, this impacts on longevity planning.
Workforce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff changes and new staff induction over the past two years resulted in significant time investment from other staff, including managers. This will continue over the next 12 months as due to the Service restructure and the introduction of turnaround. We have expanded the Prevention and Diversion team allowing us to reinvest resources earlier and prevent entry into the NYOS; with this said, the offer presents a need for a cultural shift within Northamptonshire Police that is currently underway.
Out of Court Disposals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The last year has seen a shift into a higher proportion in the use of out-of-court-disposals that is welcomed, but there is an ongoing challenge in ensuring appropriate decision making with changes to how Home Office Counting Rules are interpreted and that the Association of Chief Police Officers Youth Gravity Matrix 2013 requires urgent updating; a national review is currently underway. HMIP, last year, described this as a '...as a 'postcode lottery' in the use of out-of-court disposals, with wide variation in the policies and processes that govern local schemes. NYOS are currently working alongside Northants Police to develop an updated Out of Court Disposal Policy for the region.
Offence Pattern Trends	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> While most proven offence types have reduced significantly, violence against the person remains the most common offence group type and the County saw an increase in weapon possession amount children last year.
Inspection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> HMIP have moved from a 4-year inspection cycle to a 6-year cycle as a result of the Covid 19 pandemic. NYOS last inspection was 11.03.2015 and the previous full one was in 2012. a new framework (2018) and a new amended framework (2021) has been introduced since then. This has led to the Peer Review taking place as well as external support in reviewing of NYOS to ensure that local auditing is in line with revised inspections.

Sign off, submission and approval

Chair of YJS Board -
AnnMarie Dodds

AnnMarie Dodds

Signature



Date

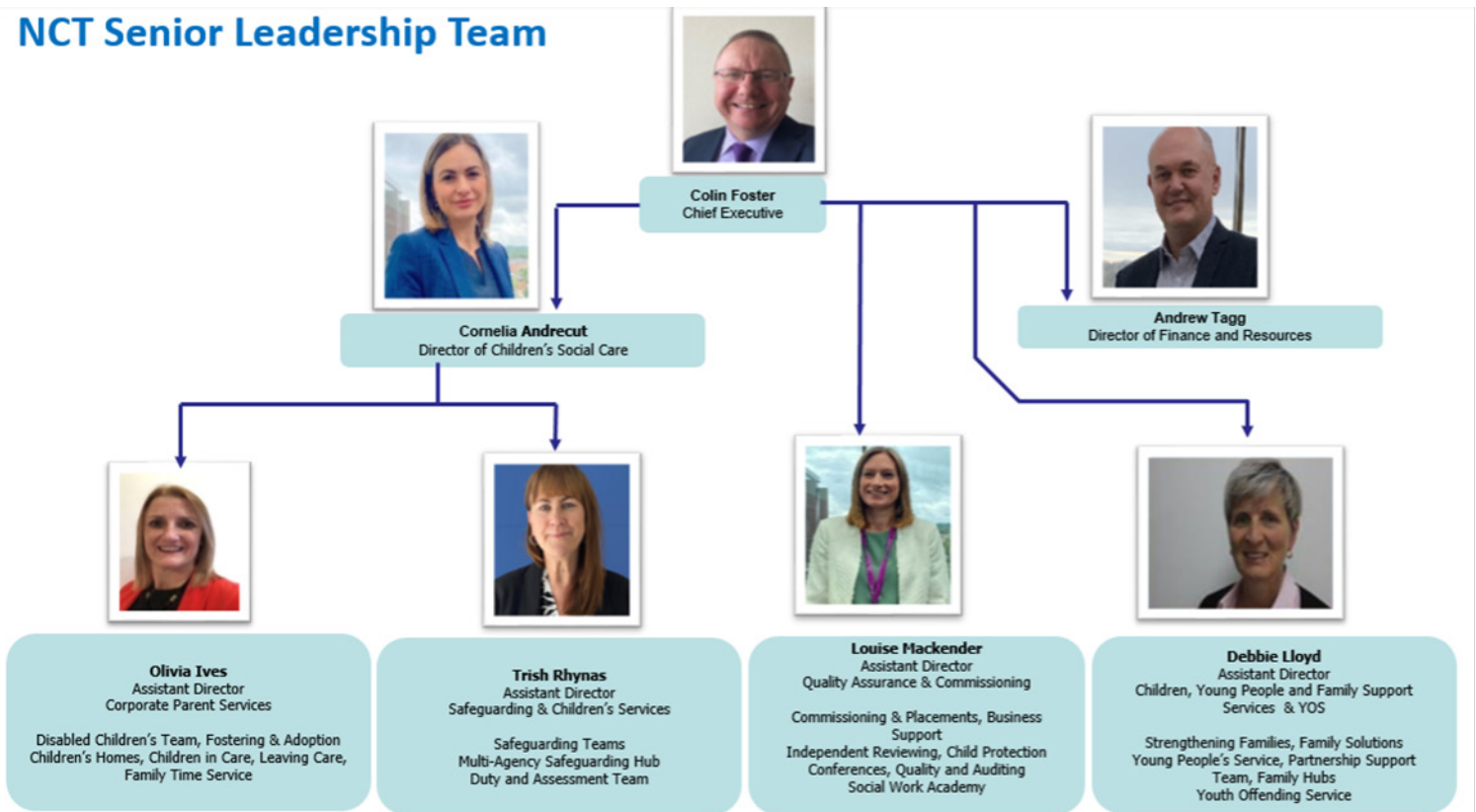
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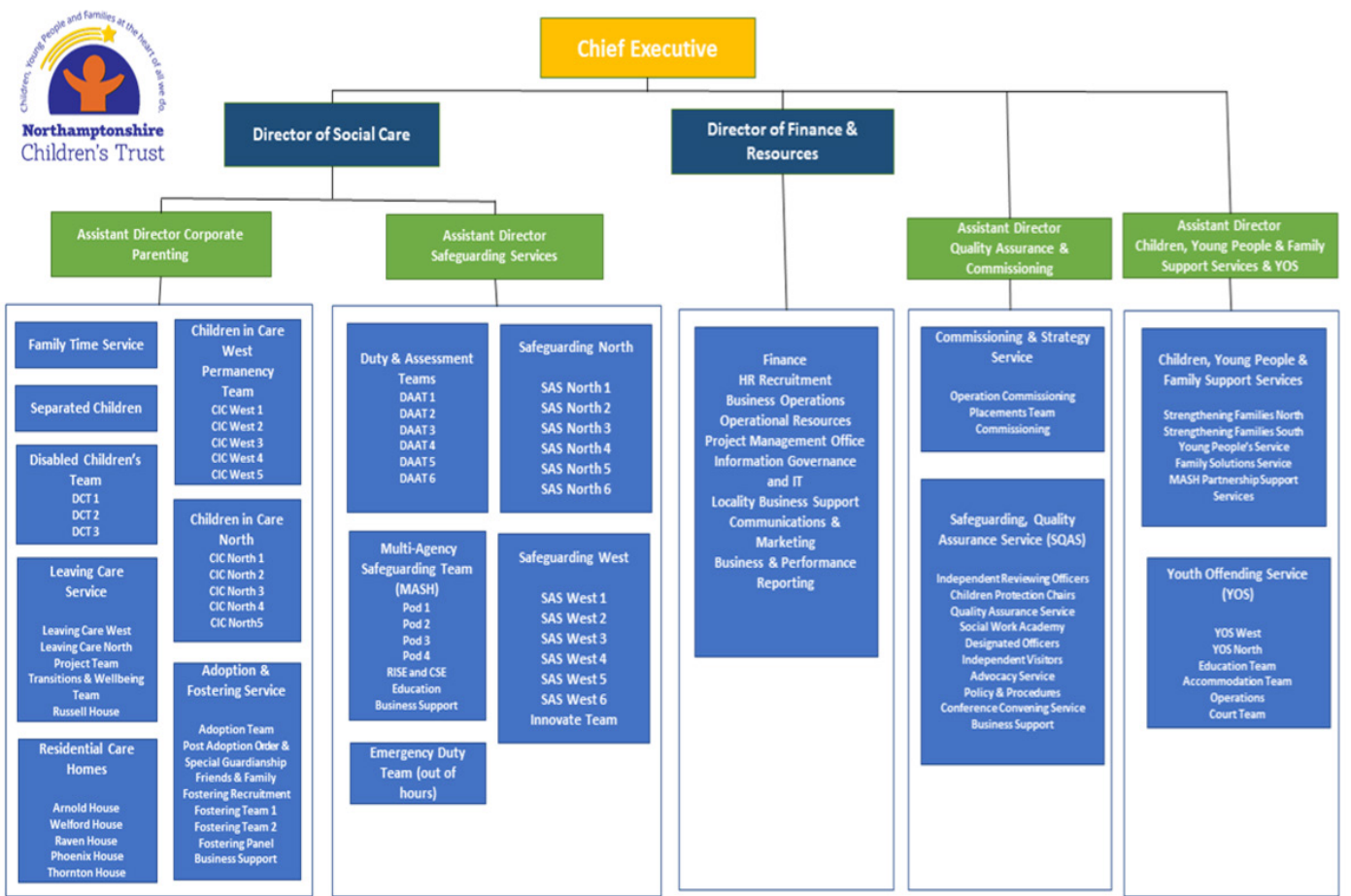
Appendices

Appendix 1: Staffing Structure

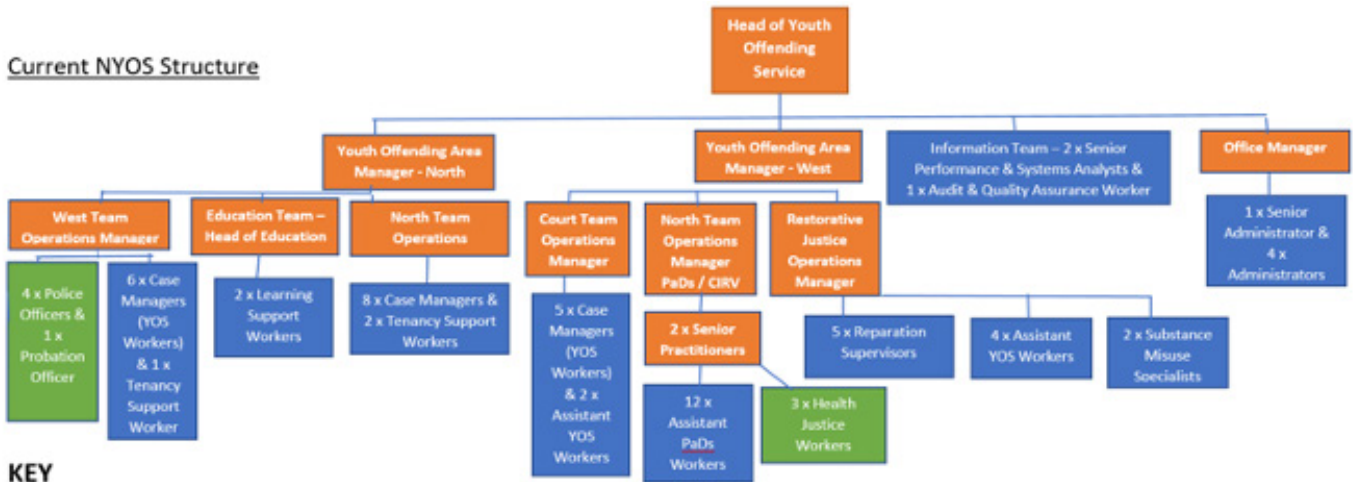
The full staffing structure showing details of the staff roles in the YJS and the reporting arrangements for the Head of Service

NCT Senior Leadership Team





Current NYOS Structure



KEY

- Line Management responsibility
- Partner Agency seconded post
- YOS funded post

Appendices

Appendix 2

Northamptonshire Record of Ethnicity & Preferred Gender of Staff

Ethnicity/ Gender	Managers Strategic managers		Operational mangers		Practitioners		Administrative		Student		Volunteers		Total	
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
Gender														
Asian					3	1							3	1
White	2		3	2	25	6	4	1	1		10	5	45	14
Black					4	1					1	1	5	2
Mixed					3	1							3	1
Other	2				2	1							4	1
Not Known														
Disability (if known)					1	1							2	
													62	19



WEST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNCIL

Council

30 November 2023

Cabinet Member for Children, Families & Education: Councillor Fiona Baker

Report Title	Annual Report of the Service Delivery Contract between Northamptonshire Children's Trust (NCT) and West and North Northamptonshire Councils 2022/23 and Update on the Annual Review
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List of Approvers

Monitoring Officer	Catherine Whitehead	11/11/2023
Chief Finance Officer (S.151)	Martin Henry	11/11/2023
Other Director	Rebecca Wilshire	11/11/2023
Communications Lead/Head of Communications	Becky Hutson	

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1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To provide Full Council with an update on the progress of the 2022/23 Annual Review of the Service Delivery Contract (SDC) between Northamptonshire Children's Trust (NCT) and West and North Northamptonshire Councils which includes the 2022/23 Annual Report.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 As part of the contractual arrangements between Northamptonshire Children's Trust (NCT) and North and West Northamptonshire Councils, there is a requirement to undertake an Annual Review and produce an Annual Report.
- 2.2 The purpose of the Annual Review set out in the Service Delivery Contract (SDC) is:
- a) to consider the quality of practice in the provision of services and the outcomes for children, young people and families in the county of Northamptonshire.
 - b) to facilitate the Councils quality assurance of the operation of the SDC.
 - c) to enable the Councils to review the discharge of their statutory functions insofar as the same relate to the provision of the services by the NCT.
 - d) for all parties to consider whether changes are required to the SDC.
 - e) for the Councils and NCT to consider all applicable factors in relation to the setting of future contract sums paid to NCT including for the next financial year.
- 2.3 NCT produced the Annual Report which was considered and agreed by the Operational Group in August 2023 and Strategic Group in October 2023, in line with timescales and requirements set out in the SDC.

3. Recommendations

3.1 It is recommended that Full Council:

- a) Note that the Annual Report contained at Appendix 1-11 was completed in line with the service delivery contract.
- b) Note that KPI's in the SDC have remained the same since the start of the contract with NCT and that the KPIs will be reviewed during 2024/25
- c) Note that any changes to the SDC would need to be agreed by all parties, brought back to a future Joint Committee meeting for approval and, once approved, be implemented by a Change Control to the SDC.

4. Reason for Recommendations

- 4.1 The arrangements to complete the Annual Review and Annual Report are set out in the Service Delivery Contract and provide a procedure through which the Councils can review the Service Delivery Contract and NCT's performance in delivering its functions.

5. Report Background

- 5.1 Following a statutory direction from the Secretary of State for Education, Northamptonshire County Council was required to oversee work towards the establishment of a Trust for the delivery of children's social care services in Northamptonshire, transferring operational control for children's social care services from the Council to the Trust. Upon the creation of the two new unitary Councils, the commissioning and ownership of NCT was transferred to North and West Northamptonshire Councils.
- 5.2 As part of the establishment of NCT, a suite of contractual agreements was put in place to govern the relationship between NCT and the Councils. The core contractual agreement is the Service Delivery Contract (SDC) and its associated schedules.
- 5.3 The SDC sets out the arrangements for the completion of the Annual Review of the Service Delivery Contract between Northamptonshire Children's Trust (NCT) and West and North Northamptonshire Councils.
- 5.4 The purpose of the Annual Review set out in the SDC is:
- to consider the quality of practice in the provision of services and the outcomes for children, young people and families in the county of Northamptonshire.
 - to facilitate the Councils quality assurance of the operation of the SDC.
 - to enable the Councils to review the discharge of their statutory functions insofar as the same relate to the provision of the services by the Trust.
 - for all parties to consider whether changes are required to the SDC.
 - for the Councils and NCT to consider all applicable factors in relation to the setting of future contract sums paid to NCT including for the next financial year
- 5.5 The SDC states that the Strategic Group shall complete the Annual Review at one of its scheduled meetings and that the Annual Report shall be considered as part of the Annual Review in Quarter 3 (starting in October) in each contract year.
- 5.6 The SDC states that prior to 1st October in each contract year Operational Group shall prepare an Annual Report. NCT are required to prepare a Draft Annual Report by 31st July for consideration and agreement by Operational Group.
- 5.7 The report was agreed by the Operational Group in August 2023 and Strategic Group in October 2023 as part of completing the Annual Review. This is a key component of the Council's strategic oversight and review of NCT.

- 5.8 Key Performance Indicators in the SDC have remained the same since the start of the contract with NCT. Proposed changes to KPI's in the 2021/22 Annual Review were not made following the ILACS inspection in November 2022, this will be considered during 2024/25.
- 5.9 Any changes to the SDC, including KPI's would need to be agreed by all parties, be brought back to a future Joint Committee meeting for approval and once agreed, be implemented by a Change Control to the SDC.
- 5.10 Certain changes to the SDC could be deemed notifiable changes. This means that changes cannot be made without the prior written consent of the Secretary of State for Education. Set out the factual context of the report. This may be a narrative setting out the local or national factual and policy context and may remind Members of previous relevant decisions which have been taken. It is useful to draw links with other decisions which have been or may be taken.

6. Issues and Choices

- 6.1 The content of the Annual Review is defined in the SDC and covers the following topics:
- a) the content of the Annual Report (to be received by Strategic Group in Quarter 3 (starting in October) in each contract year.
 - b) the contribution rates determined by the Fund Actuary pursuant to Schedule 10 (Pensions)
 - c) any matters arising in relation to Schedule 5 (Financial Mechanism) (including whether the Contract Sum for the forthcoming Contract Year remains appropriate having regard to what is set out in the Annual Report)
 - d) with effect from the Second Contract Year, the proportionate share of any Surplus that will be allocated to each Party pursuant to Schedule 5 (Financial Mechanism)
 - e) the results of any audits carried out by the Council during the preceding Contract Year pursuant to the terms of this Agreement
 - f) any significant complaints made against the Trust in respect of the preceding Contract Year
 - g) any serious incidents (including serious case reviews) involving the Trust in the preceding Contract Year
 - h) a review of the Key Performance Indicators and the Services Specification
 - i) a review of the Dependencies and the Support Services
 - j) a review of the governance arrangements under this Agreement pursuant to Schedule 18 (Governance Arrangements) to assess whether they continue to be appropriate and fit for purpose
 - k) such other matters that the Parties may agree from time to time

7. Implications (including financial implications)

7.1 Resources and Financial

- 7.1.1 The provisional outturn position for 2022/23 is £158.837m against the original Contract Sum of £137.450m resulting in an overspend of £21.387m. In accordance with the contract split percentage this equates to:
NNC - £9.444m
WNC - £11.943m

7.1.2 The outturn position for 2022/23 is still to be finalised.

7.1.3 In the Annual Report, NCT have identified potential issues that will impact upon their budget for the 2023/24 financial year. These issues are detailed in the report but are largely related to placements for children in care. The current levels of volatility, efficiency of joint funding processes and current flux of emergency placements, increasing complexity of need in a market where demand outstrips supply are all impacting on NCT's ability to meet children's needs within the current budget envelope.

7.2 **Legal**

7.2.1 The relationship between NCT and the Councils is governed by a series of contractual and legal agreements.

7.2.2 The recommendations set out in this report will allow the Councils to fulfil their responsibilities as set out in the Service Delivery Contract, the Articles of Association and Support Services Agreement.

7.2.3 The arrangements as set out herein represent good governance and maintain appropriate oversight of the Trust by the Councils.

7.3 **Risk**

7.3.1 Both Councils have identified the failure of Northamptonshire Children's Trust to deliver services to the agreed standards and to sustain improvement in children's social care services as a risk on their strategic risk registers. The Annual Review process provides the Councils with an opportunity to scrutinise performance and mitigate against this risk.

7.4 **Consultation and Communications**

7.4.1 This Annual Report has been reviewed and agreed by the Operational Group and by Strategic Group in October 2023 as part of completing the Annual Review. These are the key contractual review meetings between the Councils and NCT

7.5 **Consideration by Overview and Scrutiny**

7.5.1 This report has not been considered by the overview and scrutiny committees of either Council.

7.6 **Climate Impact**

7.6.1 There is no specific climate impact arising from this report.

7.7 **Community Impact**

7.7.1 There is no specific community impact arising from this report.

8. Background Papers

8.1 None

Annual Report of the Service Delivery Contract between Northamptonshire Children’s Trust (NCT) and West and North Northamptonshire Councils 2022/23

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Version	Date	Summary of Main Changes	Author	Shared with
V1.0	12 th June 2023	Initial Draft	NCT	ICF
V1.1	3 rd July 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Addition of contents page and version control • Changes and additions to sections and structure of report • Suggestions for additional content to be supplied by NCT • Comments throughout • Insertion of Appendix 1 with detailed performance overview of KPI’s 	ICF	Operational Group 4 th July 2023 NCT Board 3 rd August 2023
V1.1a	28 th July 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further comments, additions and requests for information from NCT 	ICF	NCT
V2	8 th August 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NCT updates and amends • WNC and NNC education and SEND forecasts 	NCT	ICF 8 th August 2023

			WNC and NNC (education and SEND forecasts)	NCT Board 8 th August 2023
V3	9 th August 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Updated version control table Hyperlinks added to contents page 	NCT	Strategic Group 15 th August 2023
V4	14 th August 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Typing errors amended Contribution rate determined by the Fund Actuary added to 5.1 Section 11.7 Significant Complaints, Children Safeguarding Practice Reviews and Serious Incidents added 	NCT	Strategic Group 15 th August 2023
V5	15 th August 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NCT budget allocation West and North proportional split corrected 	NCT	Strategic Group 15 th August 2023
V6	17 th August 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Updated content following feedback from DCSs/ ICF Appendix 3 added: Supporting data analysis and NCT Performance Scorecard as at end March 2023 Appendix 5 added: National Context Appendix 6 added: NCT Annual Internal Audit Report 2022/23 Section 17 Strategic Direction added Formatting amended 	NCT	ICF/ DCSs 17 th August 2023
V7 FINAL	18 th August 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Updated name of the document and removed draft watermark to reflect that it has been signed off by both DCS's and NCT CEX. 	ICF	Operational Group, Strategic Group, Joint Committee and WNC and NNC democratic governance

1. Background and Purpose of the Annual Review

Schedule 3 Annual Review in the Service Delivery Contract (SDC) details the overarching aims and objectives of the Annual Review:

- for the Parties to consider the quality of practice in the provision of children's social care services delivered by Northamptonshire Children's Trust (NCT) and the outcomes for children, young people and families in the county of Northamptonshire;
- to facilitate the Councils' quality assurance of the operation of the Service Delivery Contract;

- to enable the Councils to review the discharge of its statutory functions delivered by NCT;
- for the Parties to consider whether changes are required to the Service Delivery Contract to be agreed at the Annual Review meeting
- for the Parties to consider all factors that may impact upon future Contract Sums and for the Strategic Group to make a recommendation/proposal to the Council regarding the Contract Sum payable to NCT for the next Contract Year.

The Annual Report forms part of the process of the Annual Review, the contents (as a minimum and where applicable) for the Annual Report are set out in 2.3. of Schedule 3.

The Operational Group reviews and agrees the content of the final Annual Report which is submitted to the Strategic Group for consideration as part of the Annual Review no later than 31st August or the date of submission of papers to the Strategic Group meeting in Quarter 3 (starting in October).

The governance and assurance arrangements for NCT are shown at Appendix 1.

2. Summary of NCT performance against the Key Performance Indicators

As part of the development of Northamptonshire Children’s Trust, 21 KPIs were agreed against which the councils would monitor NCT’s performance. These 21 KPIs are set out in Schedule 6 (Performance Framework) of the Service Delivery Contract. Schedule 6 also defines the targets NCT should be aiming to achieve against each KPI as well as the tolerance levels that are used when assessing whether there are performance issues or failures as defined in the Schedule.

NCT provide the Councils with a monthly performance report which outlines performance against each KPI as well as commentary and how NCT are working to improve. In addition to this NCT also provides a monthly Quality Assurance Report to the Social Care Improvement Board and Operational Group monitoring progress against the “Social Care Improvement Plan” and the “Children’s Trust Scorecard” with additional data about NCT’s performance.

A full list of KPI’s and summary of NCT’s performance against each of these in the 2022-23 contract year is included at Appendix 2 and the highlights are included below.

2.1 What worked well

- NCT achieved ‘*Requires Improvement to be good*’ Ofsted ILACS inspection judgements for North and West Northamptonshire in November 2022, reflecting an improvement in the performance, quality and outcomes for children since the 2019 ‘Inadequate’ rating of Northamptonshire County Council’s children’s services.
- The majority of performance indicators were at or within tolerance during 2022/23.
- Performance remained strong (above 90%) throughout the year for KPI 3 (single assessments taking place within timescale). The performance of this KPI was 95% in March 2023 and has been on target or above for 34 consecutive months.
- KPI 9 (percentage of care leavers aged 17-21 and in employment, education or training (EET)) and KPI 10 (percentage of care leavers aged 17-21 living in suitable accommodation) remained better than the national averages¹. It has been above target since May 2022 and has spent the entire year above target.
- KPI 16 (% of social work vacancies) remains low (low is good) staying between 15-20% throughout the entire year, indicating that NCT are able to attract and retain social work staff. Whilst the proportion of social care posts filled with agency staff has remained within tolerance

¹ 63% of NCT care leavers were in employment, education or training as at the end March 23 in comparison with the national average of 58% (2022; latest available figures); 95% of NCT care leavers were living in suitable accommodation as at the end of Mar 23 in comparison with the national average of 89% (2022; latest available figures).

and was only slightly higher than the national average at the end of March 2023 (17.8% in comparison with 17% nationally), this, and the use of managed service teams² remain a concern in terms of continuity for families, sustainability and affordability. Despite ongoing national recruitment and retention challenges, NCT was in a better position than other children's services in the region by having a small net increase in permanent staff at the end of the financial year.

- KPI 18 (Average time between the LA receiving court authority to place a child for adoption and deciding on a match) has been below target (low is good) since April 2022 and stayed below target for the entire year. This can be attributed to strengthened family finding and matching processes which have been implemented alongside improved permanency tracking arrangements.
- KPI 19 (% of children in care placed for adoption within 12 months of an agency decision that they should be placed for adoption) has been above target (high is good).
- Compliments have continued to significantly outweigh complaints.

2.2 Challenges and areas to work on:

- KPI 1 (% of all referrals with a decision within 2 working days) has been a challenging area for most of the financial year. The measure has been below tolerance since September 2022, making it below tolerance for the final 7 months of the annual period.
- KPI 5 (% of Child Protection Conferences held within 15 days of a strategy discussion being initiated) has also been a challenging area. Performance was below tolerance (low is not good) for 6 consecutive months from October 2022 – March 2023.
- A range of factors have contributed to below tolerance performance for these two KPIs, including increases in demand; business support vacancies and a requirement to achieve vacancy factors on NCT staffing budgets; multiple systems used in MASH and turnover of staff. Actions to address these issues have been identified, are being progressed and reported to the Councils.
- As defined in the SDC, a monthly KPI falling outside of the relevant tolerance for three (3) consecutive months or more is defined as a "Performance Failure". Performance Failures can trigger a formal process being initiated by the Councils. These Performance Failures were dealt with informally during 2022/23, with regular reporting to Operational Group.
- KPI 6 (% of children that became the subject of a Child Protection Plan for a second or subsequent time) has been an area that fluctuated between being above tolerance (low is good) in June, September and November 2022 and then within tolerance or at or below target for the remaining months of the financial year. The impact of the Covid 19 pandemic and the cost of living challenges have been contributing factors, as has the robustness of the process when families are 'stepped down' from statutory interventions so that outcomes can be sustained; action is being taken to address these factors through the Early Help, Neglect and Exploitation multi agency action plans; and internally within NCT the step down process between Social Care and Child and Family Support Services will be reviewed and strengthened by Q2 of 23/24.
- KPI 11 (Social workers with caseloads above target) has remained within tolerance as NCT has taken action with use of agency staff and managed service teams to mitigate increases in demand and national recruitment and retention challenges. This continues to be a priority focus to enable manageable caseloads and the phasing out of managed service teams by Apr 2024.
- KPI 8 (Children in care with 3+ placement moves in the last 12 months) has remained within tolerance, however placement stability remains a priority and implementation of the sufficiency action plan has progressed in 2022/23 with actions to achieve improvement in this area.

² As at the end of March 23, NCT has 3 managed service teams, these are teams of qualified social workers and managers supplied by an external organisation and have been used to mitigate the impact of the national shortage of qualified social workers.

- Implementation of Circle to Success started before the end of the financial year and one of two new emergency children's homes partially opened, with full opening of this and the second home due in Q1 of 23/24. An additional 5 bed children's home was included within a block contract in 22/23 and plans are progressing for a DfE capital funded home utilising a WNC owned property for 4 children due to open in Q2 of 23/24. Progress has been slower on developing an additional 4 bed children's home due a suitable property not yet being identified, and an additional 2 bed home development delayed due to the interface with residential short breaks for children with disabilities.
- Re-commissioning of NCT's children's homes, fostering and independent supported accommodation frameworks is in train, for new frameworks to be in place for Apr 24. Recruitment of NCT foster carers has continued to be prioritised, also within a challenging national context, as has supporting retention of existing carers. 19 additional foster carer households were approved in 22/23, however 23 closed therefore creating a net loss of 4 households. The average utilisation rate of NCT fostering households in 22/23 was 69%, just above 68% in 21/22. The non utilised places includes those that aren't available. There was a lower proportion of vacant places that could be used in 22/23 at 4% in comparison with 9% in 21/22 showing that better use was being made of existing NCT fostering households in 22/23.

3. Service Delivery

3.1 Children and Family Support Services (CFSS/Targeted Early Help) and Youth Offending Service (YOS)

Services

- **Targeted Partnership Support in the Localities and MASH** - West and North locality arrangements for practitioners with countywide support and management
- **Targeted Strengthening Families Team** - West and North locality arrangements for practitioners with countywide support and management
- **Adolescent Services**
- **Missing & RISE (sexual exploitation)**
- **Early Help Board**
- **Youth Offending Services**
- **Data Management** – for supporting families payment by results

Context

The purpose of Early Help is a whole system approach to prevention and intervention. It is a way of working, and everybody's business. It is about working in a collaborative way to support children, young people, and families to build on their strengths, overcome challenges and make positive changes for themselves. By acting early, we can prevent problems from getting worse and help children, young people and families to find the right solutions that will support and improve their life opportunities. Additionally, a strong early help offer reduces the need for statutory intervention later on. NCT deliver targeted early help through the Children and Family Support service (CFSS) as part of the partnership offer.

The 2022 ILACS inspection found that:

- *'Children in need of help and protection receive much better support than they did at the time of the inspection in 2019'.*
- *'Leaders have developed and implemented an early help offer'.*
- *'Early help has been strengthened and children are identified early when they need help. While there is sometimes a short delay before intervention, children and families benefit from an increasing number of services which, for many, help to improve their lives'.*

A new partnership Early Help Improvement Strategy and Action Plan is launching in Q2 2023 to support progress in this area. NCT is also supporting the West and North unitary councils to write their own Early Help strategies and action plans, and linking NCT work with other strategies, such as the SEND Strategies.

Through partnership working, data has shown an increased use of early help assessments. NCT have also improved the early help model of reporting around family and closure summaries.

Northamptonshire Youth Offending Service (NYOS) is hosted by NCT. NYOS works with the North and West Northamptonshire Councils and partners such as Health, Police, Education, Community Safety Partnership, and other key stakeholders to deliver the best outcomes for children, young people, and our community. In general, data shows an improvement in Northamptonshire's youth offending, in comparison to the increase which is being seen nationally and regionally.

The YJSIP (Youth Justice Sector Improvement Partnership) peer review in January 2023, reported:

- The service is 'impressive,' it is innovative, creative and child focused
- YOS practitioners and managers were not only committed, but they also went above and beyond with the young people and the relationships built are fantastic
- The improvements in the past three years are clearly evident.
- The partnership is becoming more robust with supportive, child centred relationships

3.2 Children's Social Care Services - Children's Social Care Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub, Assessment services and Safeguarding

Services

- **The front door** - Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) – Countywide
- **Assessment** – West and North locality arrangements for social work and family support workers (FSW) with countywide support and management
- **Safeguarding** – West and North locality arrangements for social work and family support workers (FSW) with countywide support and management
- **Emergency Duty Team (EDT)**– Countywide; with proposal that adults EDT services will be transferred to WNC/NNC

Context

Partnership working is a basic but key requirement and legal duty across all areas of safeguarding services. Working Together 2018 is the statutory guidance that outlines the requirements to safeguard children and it makes it clear that everyone who works with children has a responsibility to keep them safe and no one agency can do this alone. The guidance sets out key roles for individual organisations and agencies to deliver effective arrangements for safeguarding. It is essential that these arrangements are strongly led and promoted at a local level, specifically by local area leaders, including Local Authority/Trust executives and Lead Members of Children's Services, the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner, Integrated Care Board (ICB) and through the commitment of the Chief Officers in all organisations and agencies. Partnership working has improved since the implementation of NCT but continues to be an area for ongoing development.

The purpose of the Safeguarding services is to manage the 'front door' for statutory social work (MASH) and to support and protect children who meet the threshold for statutory social work e.g. children in need; children subject to child protection plans; children subject to private proceedings; children subject to Public Law Outline (PLO) pre-proceedings; and initiation of care proceedings if required. The Safeguarding service also supports children in care subject to S.20 voluntary care arrangements if there is an imminent plan for them to return to the care of their family.

The Emergency Duty Team (EDT) also falls within the Safeguarding service remit and the forthcoming Exploitation hub will be managed within Safeguarding. EDT currently delivers services for both children and adults. They work closely with social care teams and partner agencies across the county. Work is progressing to disaggregate the EDT service so that NCT can focus solely on their core business.

NCT is committed to developing the MASH into a service which provides children and young people with timely responses from the most appropriate agency/professional to support families to thrive and stay together wherever possible. MASH is a screening, information-sharing, and decision-making process and they do not case hold so when the decision has been made about the most appropriate outcome for a child/ren, the case is submitted to the relevant operational team to progress, signposted or is closed. Due to the continued and increasing business demands, the Safeguarding Partnership agreed to an independent review of the 'front door' to improve the service which will take place in Q2 of 2023/24.

NCT Duty and Assessment teams provide a countywide statutory social care service and complete single assessments over a 6 week period to identify and support the needs of children and families. Short term intervention is offered during the assessment period where appropriate. Children's cases then either transfer to an appropriate team e.g. Safeguarding, Children in Care or step down to Early Help services or close if no further action is required. Business needs and pressures have continued to increase which can impact on performance for example management oversight and supervision is not consistent. However, positively, timeliness of assessments remains good and above the national average. Due to national and local pressures around the recruitment and retention of 'front door' social workers, a managed service team has been in place to mitigate for vacancies and manage caseloads.

There are 15 Safeguarding teams across the service who are based in localities. Safeguarding teams protect, support and offer services to children in need, children subject of child protection plans, and children subject of private proceedings and pre-proceedings (PLO). They work with children and families with long term complex needs that sometimes necessitate legal proceedings and/or S.20 voluntary accommodation arrangements. Due to national and local pressures around the recruitment and retention of Safeguarding social workers, two managed service teams have been in place to mitigate for vacancies and manage caseloads.

The 2022 ILACS inspection found that:

- *'Referrals about children in need of help and protection are identified promptly and responded to by staff in the multi-agency safeguarding hub. However, some referrals are not transferred quickly enough to the duty and assessment teams, even when it is immediately evident that a fuller assessment is required'.*
- *'Thresholds are applied well and investigations are undertaken effectively, which result in appropriate actions to safeguard children'.*
- *'Assessments undertaken by the duty and assessment service vary in quality'*
- *'Most child protection core group and child in need meetings are held regularly and include key agencies. However too many children's plans end prematurely when agreed actions have been completed but desired outcomes have not always been achieved, particularly for children living in situations of long-term neglect'.*
- *'Work with families at the pre-proceedings stage of the Public Law Outline has been strengthened significantly since the last inspection. This work has had a positive impact and enables many children to remain at home safely, avoiding the need for court proceedings and for them to come into care to secure their safety'*

Since the inspection the multi-agency Neglect Strategy and action plan has been developed and training rolled out for practitioners.

3.3 Corporate Parenting Services

- **Court** – Countywide
- **Children in Care including Life Story work** – West and North locality arrangements for social work and family support workers (FSW) with countywide support and management.

- **Family time (children in care's contact with birth families) services** – West and North locality arrangements for practitioners with countywide support and management
- **Fostering** – Countywide. Due to being a Children's Trust, the fostering service is classified as an independent fostering agency
- **Adoption** – Countywide. Due to being a Children's Trust, the adoption service is classified as a voluntary adoption agency
- **Care leavers** – West and North locality arrangements for practitioners with countywide support and management.
- **Management of Children's Homes** – countywide
- **Disabled Children** – countywide – providing specialist statutory social care support to children with disabilities whose needs range from children in need, child protection to children in care.

Context

The purpose of the Corporate Parenting service within NCT is to deliver high quality, effective services for every child and young person in our care and support for those in the court system. The role that Councils and Children's Trusts play in looking after children is one of the most important things they do. They have a unique responsibility to the children they look after and their care leavers (relevant and former relevant children). A strong ethos of corporate parenting means that sense of vision and responsibility towards the children they look after and their care leavers is a priority for everyone.

Corporate parenting is an important part of the Ofsted inspection framework and the corporate parenting principles are referenced in Ofsted's Inspecting Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) framework. The corporate parenting principles are about embedding a positive culture in the Local Authority towards looked-after children and care leavers and their success will depend on the extent to which Directors, Councillors, Heads of Service and front-line managers champion and promote understanding of them. Achieving this to a 'good' standard will require close collaboration between NCT, each Council and partner agencies and extends far beyond ensuring that corporate parenting boards effectively discharge their duties.

NCT has committed to classifying care experience as a protected characteristic to support and advocate for the children and young people in our care and who NCT have cared for.

We have an increased focus on life story work, ensuring that staff are trained to understand the importance of chronologies and genograms to children and young people, and to support them to review their life story at an appropriate time. Social workers encourage children to attend their review meetings or obtain their views and advocate for them if they do not wish to attend. Care plans are more child centred.

At the 2022 ILACS, inspectors found:

- *'Overall quality of practice for children in care and care leavers has improved since the previous inspection, particularly regarding adoption, although considerable variability remains'*.
- *'Most children come into care when it is necessary and appropriate for them to do so. For most children, particularly very young children, this is planned and timely'*.
- *'Reviews for children in care are timely and minutes are sensitively written to children'*
- *'Children in care are supported to take part in a wide range of leisure and social activities. Their talents are promoted and celebrated. As a result, children have fun, make friends, develop a sense of achievement and feel proud of themselves'*.
- *'Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children are well supported and provided with help in line with their assessed needs'*.

In relation to children with disabilities, inspectors found:

- *'Practice in the disabled children's team to assess and support disabled children and their families as stronger. Social workers know their children well and use a wide variety of communication styles to gain the child's voice'.*
- *'For older disabled children in care, planning for their transition from receiving support and accommodation from children's services to being supported by adult services starts too late'.*

In relation to care leavers, inspectors found:

- *'Personal advisers take time to build relationships with care leavers. They often work persistently to address issues and advocate for young people to access services in their efforts to support them. Young people who spoke to inspectors described personal advisers as 'amazing' and 'brilliant'. Some care leavers have experienced changes in personal advisers, which has affected the quality of their relationship and support. A few care leavers have been introduced to their personal advisers very late, causing anxiety about the transition towards independence'.*
- *'Most care leavers are well supported into education, employment or training. They are supported by their personal advisers to maintain their educational placements and to do well at university'.*

3.3.1 Circle to Success

In 2022/23, the Councils agreed a significant investment (£1.3m) in the Circle to Success programme to be delivered within NCT, in partnership with Impower and Innovate. The programme began in January 2022 for 12 months and is working to achieve the following outcomes:

- Children and young people's needs are understood, and permanency is achieved within homes where they can flourish
- Children and young people who are unable to live with their parents are cared for by carers who provide a secure base through the provision of therapeutic parenting and enjoy meaningful relationships with parents and/or significant people in their lives
- Professionals working as part of the team around children work from a therapeutic care perspective and are skilled in completing evidenced based assessments to inform care planning
- Sufficiency requirements for homes for cared for children and care experienced young adults are understood and commissioning arrangements ensure that children receive care in the right setting at the right time and that value for money is achieved.

Experience of similar programmes in other areas has shown an initial period of approximately 6 months of training, testing and iterating is required before any benefits are realised, with full realisation of benefits after 2-3 years. The savings target for the Circle to Success programme for 2023/24 is £3.8m

Initial work during Q4 2022/23 included training social workers to complete Valuing Care assessments of an identified cohort of children to better understand needs and opportunities to return home or move to a placement that better met their needs; recruitment of resilience foster carers. From Q1 23/24 children will begin to receive therapeutic interventions.

3.3.2 Fostering

Fostering annual report:



Fostering Annual
report 2022-2023 Fir

3.3.3 NCT Residential Children's Homes

Home	Last Full inspection date	Grading	Monitoring visit	Comments
Thornton House URN 2608872	<u>11th January 2023</u>	Requires improvement to be good	Improved effectiveness	Opened Jan 2020 Interim inspection 9 March 2022
Phoenix House URN 2608892	<u>7th February 2023</u>	Good	20 th -21 st October 2020	Opened Feb 2020
Welford House URN 2608968	30 April 2019 October 2021 <u>15th November 2022</u>	Good Good Good	24 Feb 2021	Interim Inspection 4 March 2020
Raven House URN 2615067	April 2019 11-12 Aug 2021 <u>9th August 2022</u>	Good Good Good	22-23 Sep 2020 12 Nov 2020	The assurance visit resulted in a restriction notice from 28 September which was lifted 20 Dec 2020.
Arnold House URN 2616670	2-3 rd July 2019 17 -18 May 2022	Requires improvement to be good Good	17 June 20 22 July 20 13-14 October 20 26 Jan 21 Jun 21 <u>Nov 29th, 2022</u>	N/A

3.3.4 Adoption

NCT Adoption Annual Report:



Adoption Annual report 2022-2023 v4.

3.4 Commissioning and Quality Assurance

Services

- **Quality Assurance (QA)** – Countywide with West and North locality focus
- **Voice of children and young people** – Countywide with West and North locality delivery
- **Commissioning including Placements for children in care**– Countywide
- **Independent reviewing officers (IROs)** – Countywide
- **Designated Officers (LADO)** – Countywide with locality leads
- **Independent visitors** – Countywide with West and North locality delivery
- **Child protection conferences** – Countywide with conferences taking place in locality areas
- **Social work academy** – Countywide
- **Policy and Inspection support** – Countywide with West and North locality focus depending on requirement e.g. Ofsted

Context

The purpose of the Quality Assurance & Commissioning services within NCT is to deliver high quality, effective and objective quality assurance and commissioning at the individual, service and strategic level, in order to improve the experiences and outcomes of the children we support and to achieve best value. The service also drives the implementation of NCT's Quality Assurance Framework, children and young people's Engagement Strategy, Commissioning Strategy, Sufficiency Strategy and Equalities Strategy. As with other areas of practice, the QA&C service must be able to respond to increases in demand and complexity for social care services.

The service makes a significant contribution to the delivery of NCT's workforce strategy by delivering and commissioning an effective continuous professional development offer and pathways into children's social work roles.

Quality Assurance & Commissioning is responsible for following functions:

- Independent Reviewing Officers and Child Protection Chairs and business support for child in care reviews and child protection conferences
- Designated Officers
- Principal Social Worker
- Quality Assurance manager and auditor
- Co-ordination and support of volunteer independent visitors for children in care
- Advocacy for children who are supported by NCT
- Leading and contributing to multi agency safeguarding quality assurance, case reviews and other partnership activity to improve outcomes for children e.g. MARAC, MADRA, NSCP sub groups
- Social Work Academy and learning and development. This includes supporting newly qualified social workers during assessed and supported year in employment (ASYE), social workers recruited from abroad and routes into social work posts (i.e. student placements, apprenticeships)
- Continuous professional development for NCT workforce
- Children and young people's engagement officers and leadership
- Inspection preparation and support, including self- assessment and regional improvement
- Leading the delivery of equality strategy and action plan
- Production and co-ordination of NCT policies and procedures
- Commissioning, including developing and undertaking joint commissioning with partners
- Brokerage of homes for children and bespoke support for children and families

Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) annual report:



IRO Annual Report
2023 fin.pdf

NCT's Sufficiency and Commissioning Strategies



Sufficiency Strategy
22_25 Final.pdf



Commissioning
Strategy.pdf

The 2022 ILACS inspection found:

- *'Active and influential groups exist for children in care and care leavers to contribute to improvements in the trust. The experiences of children, young people and families who use the services are important to leaders. An up-to-date Engagement Strategy and participation*

framework promote participation and the feedback is then used to inform service and strategic developments’.

- *‘Most children in care live in good-quality placements, including specialist provision that meets their needs well’.*
- *‘A small number of children live in unregistered children’s homes. While senior managers quality assure and monitor all these placements and are working with providers to seek registration, leaders accepted during this inspection that their oversight has not been robust enough to be assured that the welfare of every child living in these arrangements is being protected’.* Action has subsequently been taken to strengthen this oversight.
- *‘Leaders understand the need to develop sufficiency of placements and are proactive in developing the right services for children and families. Forward plans, as well as responsiveness to changes in demand, are creating a much more resilient workforce and range of services to meet levels of need, such as increasing the capacity of social work and leaving care teams. Progress is being made to develop placement capacity through an ambitious sufficiency strategy’.*
- *‘Staff development is highly valued and supported through the social work academy, which is helping to stabilise the workforce’.*
- *‘Leaders know the service well and are realistic about the scale of the ongoing improvement journey. However, they recognise that there has been some over optimism on their part about the quality of services for some specific cohorts of children’.*
- Inspectors identified NCT’s ‘strengths-based quality assurance framework’ as an area of improvement since the previous inspection.

4. Summary of the Councils’ Performance of its obligations in the SDC and SSA

4.1 Support services summary

A wide range of support service provision is provided to the Children’s Trust by North Northamptonshire and West Northamptonshire Councils. This arrangement is set out within the Support Services Agreement (SSA) between the parties. Performance is reviewed by the Support Services Board which is chaired by NCT’s Director of Finance and Resources and attended by officers from both Councils. In 2021/22, the health and safety function transferred into NCT and in November 2022, the majority of children’s learning and development functions transferred into NCT. Both of these transfers were as a result of Support Services Change Control.

In March Q4 22/23, a total of 38 KPIs were reported. Of these, 34 reported a green outturn (89.5%). Three reported an amber outturn (7.9%). Two of these related to the percentage of incidents resolved within agreed performance standard thresholds in terms of response and resolution times, and one was in response to the percentage of reactive maintenance tasks completed within priority timescales. One KPI reported a red outturn (2.6%) due to loss of IT systems (at least 72 hours) occurring (reported as estimated user culminative hours). Six further KPIs have not been reported with 2 of those currently unable to be reported upon. Performance of the Support Services’ KPIs are shown in Appendix 3.

The quality and detail of the performance reporting on Support Services has been excellent and has allowed NCT to hold the Councils to account for performance. Overall, services have performed strongly, and service leads have worked closely with NCT colleagues to support them on their improvement journey. The Support Services Board have reached a level of maturity where issues and risks can be worked through in a solution focused way understanding that cooperation builds stronger performing Services. In 2023/24, the Councils, working with NCT are undertaking a cost review of all Council provided Services to refresh the work initially undertaken during the setup of the Trust.

Significantly, over the coming 4 years, the Trust is working with the West on an exciting IT refresh programme, funded by both Councils, where all individual devices will be replaced ensuring the workforce are equipped with the technology to support their roles.

Where changes are made to Support Services, the Councils will consult with NCT to understand their impact and to consider how services can be best delivered in the future.

Some services have performed strongly, and service leads have worked closely with NCT colleagues to support them on their improvement journey, for example the Complaints service has strengthened the support provided to NCT which has improved NCT's response to complaints.

4.2 Retained functions and their interface with NCT

The Councils' retained services have continued to establish and develop following the local government reorganisation and disaggregation of services that were previously delivered on a countywide basis. The Councils now have their own Directors of Children's Services, previously this was a joint post. As each Council develops its own strategies, boards and delivery groups, NCT officers are increasingly required to produce more information and attend more meetings. This is impacting on capacity.

The Councils are also working to improve the services they continue to deliver, especially around support for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). This is being led by the SEND Accountability Boards which has representation from NCT. Any future transformation of SEND services will have an impact on NCT.

The Councils have continued to deliver a satisfactory Intelligence Client Function to manage the contractual relationship between the Councils and NCT.

4.3 Property

When formed and now, NCT occupies 29 buildings across Northamptonshire with 17 in the West and 12 in the North. It was recognised that due to historic underinvestment, the quality of the buildings, NCT are delivering services from is poor and that the pace at which the Councils have acted to rectify this has been slow. This was hindered in 2021/22 by the disaggregation of the property support service delivered to NCT and the need to put in place appropriate systems and processes. This meant that NCT are often delivering services in buildings that are not fit for purpose and poses an operational risk, especially where buildings are used by children and families such as children's homes, children's centres and buildings used for family time.

Maintenance, refurbishment and equipment in property has been a standing item of concern at the monthly Operational Group. Significant progress has been made in 2022/23 with a programme of priority works agreed with each Council informed by condition surveys, however maintenance, refurbishment and equipment replacement schedules have remained slow to clarify. Timeliness of works in children's residential homes has been noted by Ofsted. Many buildings, such as the Weston Favell centre require urgent refurbishment works and equipment refresh.

This year, NCT alongside the ICF have been working together to rectify this through a number of mechanisms:

- Accommodation Strategy
- Following submission by NCT of the medium-long term accommodation requirements, work has been undertaken with the Councils to identify locations and premises more suited to locality working. Intensive work during the end of 2022/beginning 2023 has led to a set of options proposed by the Councils, this includes looking at both the existing Unitary estate and where required, the wider market.
- Plans for a programme of works and scheduled development will be developed into Autumn 2023.

- Using data from site condition surveys, NCT has been working with the Councils individually to agree a schedule of planned maintenance which will bring buildings up to standard. Funded via the Councils' Capital Works Programme, this begins to address priority works within current sites. NCT will continue to work with both Councils and the ICF to agree and deliver an accommodation strategy aligning this with the strategies of both Councils
- Monthly operational SLA meeting with North and West Property teams are now in place.

NCT continues to work with both Councils to review its future property strategy and how this aligns with the strategies of both councils in a collaborative way. A practical example of this was seen via the closure of Lodge Road and the development of the Abbey in Daventry.

Children's Homes Development – This year has seen significant development within our existing residential homes and the development of further capacity to begin to meet sufficiency requirements. Working closely with the North and West property teams, key maintenance requirements have progressed along with planned works in response to Ofsted recommendations.

In November 2021, NCT submitted bids for capital funding to the Councils for a new four bed children's home and renovations to an existing property (John Greenwood Shipman) to create a two bed children's home provision. Capital funding was approved by the councils in November 2022. Searches for a suitable property for a new four bed children's home, led by WNC, took place from February 2023. As at the end of March 2023 searches were continuing. The renovations at John Greenwood Shipman were postponed in Q4 of 22/23, due to the ongoing discussions with Council and Health Chief Executives in relation to the redesign of residential short breaks services which are delivered from John Greenwood Shipman.

Capital investment and suitable properties have been identified by the Councils and work undertaken to develop residential capacity has seen a detailed programme of works developed which delivers 10 new places and 15 new block contract places. Both of these provide examples of NCT and the Councils working together to deliver improved value and better outcomes for our looked after young people. This year also saw the successful bid to the DFE to secure £202,191 for the development of a new home in the West, where the Unitary provided a building as match funding. This is due to be opened by the end of September 2023. NCT continues to work with the Property teams in the North and West to explore opportunities for joint working to deliver better value and improved outcomes through investment and utilisation of the Unitary estate.

Supported accommodation - This year has also seen progression in plans to offer accommodation and support to care leavers. With an aim of reducing cost and improving outcomes for NCT's care leavers, a programme of in-house provision and strategic partnerships has been developed. 25 beds are planned for delivery over the next 12 months with additional properties regularly reviewed with the hope of adding to the portfolio. Reviewing new properties, whether part of existing unitary stock or on the open market, is done in close consultation with NNC & WNC Property teams. The supported element of the accommodation is designed to speed and aid the transition from care to independent living and ultimately increase the chances of the moves being successful. This includes access to University of Northampton accommodation, a partnership assisted by WNC and an HMO in Wellingborough leased from NNC is in the process of being commissioned. Further properties from both NNC & WNC are being explored and a partnership with the YMCA is also developing

4.4 Procurement for NCT data, databases, and casework records

The current children's social care case management system used by Northamptonshire Children's Trust, CareFirst (provided by OLM), has been in use since 2005 and has for some time been considered to be at the "end of life". Case management systems are a vital part of the delivery and the improvement of Children's Social Care, providing the foundations for performance management, quality assurance and statutory reporting.

During 2019, Northamptonshire County Council awarded a contract with OLM Eclipse for the provision of a new children's and adult social care Case Management system and associated finance modules. Implementation commenced with adults, which went live ahead of the Councils' vesting day. Post-vesting day, the programme was transferred to joint responsibility between the Councils and NCT. The Eclipse Implementation programme team undertook an implementation readiness review and identified significant concerns with the application of the system to Children's Social Care.

In February 2022, it was concluded that there was no way forward with the current OLM Eclipse contract and therefore a new procurement is now needed. The decision not to implement the system has knock on effects on NCT's ability to deliver savings agreed as part of the contract sum negotiations for the 2022/23 financial year as well as the ability to deliver improvement in services.

Funding has been approved by the Councils and the Councils and NCT are currently working together to procure a new system for the end of the current contract in January 2025, with a significant amount of pre-procurement work in progress and the establishment of a Programme Board chaired by WNC Chief Executive. The Councils funded staffing cost for system development which will transfer to WNC in April 2023.

The Councils have also agreed funding for a new case management system for Adoption and Fostering, with procurement due to conclude in Q2 of 2023/24 (see 4.9 below).

4.5 Transfer information from government, information regarding partnerships, policies and procedures and casework records to NCT

This has been delivered by the Councils and the Councils and NCT continue to work together in partnership to improve services delivered to children, young people and families in Northamptonshire.

4.6 Act as the Corporate Parent

Elected members and the officers are the corporate parents for Northamptonshire's children in care and have a collective responsibility across services and local authorities to safeguard and promote their life chances. North Northamptonshire Council and West Northamptonshire Council have ensured contribution from education and other retained children's services, housing services and the Council's universal services in supporting children in care. Both Councils have an offer for care leavers relating to council tax. However, both offers are different and this has been raised by the Northamptonshire care leavers group and is being discussed through the Corporate Parenting Board.

During the financial year 2022-23, the Corporate Parenting Board met five times, and remained a single entity covering the whole county. It was chaired by both councils' elected Lead Members with Cabinet responsibility for children's social care. NCT provides professional expertise and advice to the Corporate Parenting Board, in order to help the councils discharge their responsibilities.

Aside from its own annual report, during 2022-23 the Board received and scrutinised annual reports from the Independent Reviewing Officer Service, fostering and adoption services, the Virtual School, and the Integrated Care Board. Statutory health assessments remained an issue of intense scrutiny for the Board, but members were somewhat reassured by the remedial actions being undertaken.

Every Board meeting included a scorecard of selected metrics, prompting debate and challenge from Board members. This showed recovery in terms of some key health-related metrics and continuing strong performance in terms of care leavers in employment, education and training. Ad-hoc and thematic reports to the Board included a detailed presentation around the sufficiency of foster places and the challenges therein; services available for young people leaving care, including disparities in council tax exemption schemes between the two councils; an update on a national safeguarding review for children with disabilities in residential placements; and care-experienced people's contact with the criminal justice system.

Although there is more to do, the Board made sure young people's voices were heard and utilised. A care-experienced young person was recruited to the Board as a full member, and the Board liaised with the NCT's participation groups. In many cases, young people contributed to the reports and

presentations which came to Board, particularly the leaving care item. Every Board included a dedicated slot for celebrating the achievements of children and young people, and a very successful celebration event took place in July 2022 with children nominated for awards in four categories.

An LGA diagnostic of Corporate Parenting was completed in 2022/23 which identified a range of strengths, areas for consideration, opportunities and risks; and suggested next steps to improve impact for children, including:

- Getting on the same page – what is corporate parenting?
- Strengthening the overall governance and impact of the CPB
- Developing the confidence to challenge effectively and be a ‘critical friend’
- Understanding the effective use of data to make a difference as a corporate parent
- Building IT skills and using children and young people’s media effectively listening and responding to children and young people including use of surveys
- CPB members visiting/shadowing children cared for and leaving care teams to understand the child’s journey and experiences
- Making sure you use regional forums/networks for learning and support
- Visiting and learning from other CPB’s and modelling how they do business
- Mutual observation and feedback from the CPB Chair from another council

4.7 Consult NCT on any corporate or property strategy

The Councils have consulted with NCT on various corporate or property strategies. NCT submitted property requirements in March 2022. Each organisation has considered where their staff will work from and how their decisions in this area impact upon each other.

Property and Support Services arrangements are a standing item at the monthly Operational Group. Although significant progress has been made, maintenance, refurbishment and equipment replacement schedules have remained slow to clarify. Timeliness of works in Children’s Residential Homes has been noted by Ofsted. Many buildings, such as the Weston Favell centre require urgent refurbishment works and equipment refresh.

4.8 Support NCT with grant funding

The Councils have supported NCT with accessing any grant funding and both NCT and the Councils recognise that they should work together to maximise the funding available for services by taking advantage of any opportunities. Any in-scope grants such as the Supporting Families Grant and funding for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) have been passported to NCT as part of the contract sum. Improved performance by NCT on delivering outcomes for children and families has meant an increase in funding available as part of the Supporting Families Programme.

In 2022/23, NCT and the Councils were successful in bidding for capital funding from DfE for a new children’s home, utilising a WNC owned property, due to open in September 2023.

4.9 Implement any actions resulting from a regulatory inspection

Services delivered by NCT were subject to numerous regulatory inspections in 2022/23. There were many recommendations from these inspections that have been incorporated into the improvement plan. Two key actions for the councils have been identified and are still outstanding:

- Extension to Thornton House children’s home – Ofsted inspections in December 2021 and March 2022 made the recommendation under the children’s homes regulations 2015 for an extension to be made to house a sleep in and wash area for staff as well as extra storage space for the young people. Capital funding was agreed in Q4 of 2022/23 and the project is due for completion in Q3 23/24.
- Implementation of a new case management system for Adoption and Fostering – Ofsted noted the current electronic recording system used by the Fostering agency does not enable good quality tracking and does not meet the needs of the Adoption agency. Funding has now been agreed and procurement is expected to conclude in Q2 23/24.

There have also been a number of external and peer reviews undertaken during 22/23 and it is important that NCT, WNC and NNC continue to work together to address issues identified within these.

4.10 Ensure NCT is adequately insured

The provision of Insurance to NCT is governed by the Support Services Agreement and is delivered by NNC. NCT were adequately insured during the contract year.

4.11 Procure provision of appropriate ICT to enable the Emergency Duty service

This was successfully delivered by the Councils.

5. Cost of delivering services in 2022/23

5.1 Contract Sum

The provisional outturn position for 2022/23 is £150.066m against a net budget of £128.631m resulting in an overspend of £21.435m. However, an additional investment of £11.891m was agreed during 2022/23 reducing the overspend to £9.544m. In accordance with the contract split percentage this equates to:

- NNC - £4.215m
- WNC -£5.329m

This included £0.728 for managed service teams and £2.062m inflationary increase of 3.2%.

In year funding was received from NNC and WNC of £3.575m reducing the additional funding requested from the councils to £17.860m, £7.887m for NNC and £9.973m for WNC.

In accordance with the agreement made at Strategic Group in November 2022, 2022/23 additional costs relating to placements and transport pressures were funded to the year-end actual position. Risk around the forecast remains due to increasing placement demand and price both locally and nationally and the contribution from partners around joint funding arrangements.

An external review of NCT's Placements Commissioning (February 2022), found that progress had been made to strengthen arrangements relating to joint funding of packages and this was evidenced in additional funding contributions; however, there are opportunities to embed this further and re-balance the proportionate contributions from different agencies, accompanied by clearer representation and accountability at decision-making panels. The review found that decisions regarding levels of funding contributions were not informed by an agreed protocol and decisions have to be separately ratified within individual agencies outside of the Multi Agency Resource Panel (MARF). There also appeared to be no established process or protocol for agreeing additional funding contributions where the overall package cost increases.

The review identified that for all children in care, NCT/social care meet 96% of the cost of those placements, in comparison with other areas where education and health ordinarily contribute approximately 20% and 21% of cost of placements respectively.

Subsequent to the review, work was undertaken to develop a joint protocol however this had not been agreed by the end of 2022/23.

The cost of performing the services in 2022/23 can be summarised as follows:

Summary	Gross Budget excl one-off Investment	Less Income	Net budget		Exp Forecast (Incl. of actuals)	Income Forecast (Incl. of actuals)	Net Forecast Outturn	Variance before agreed additional Investment	Additional Investment agreed in 22/23 contract Sum	Net Variance
	£'000	£'000	£'000		£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Staffing	46,782	-4,334	42,448		49,306	-4,334	44,972	2,524	2,524	0
Other non-Staff costs	343	0	343		343	0	343	0	0	0
Placements	60,648	-7,380	53,268		77,695	-7,602	70,093	16,825	7,743	9,082
Contracts	4,767	0	4,767		4,767	0	4,767	0	0	0
Children's Homes	3,484	0	3,484		3,762	0	3,762	278	104	174
Legal	4,700	0	4,700		5,065	0	5,065	365	0	365
Adoption	7,046	-100	6,946		7,890	-100	7,790	844	844	0
Transport	1,930	-566	1,364		2,779	-566	2,213	849	676	173
Other care	6,554	-353	6,201		6,484	-372	6,112	-89	0	-89
NCT Central - Other budget	133	0	133		133	-161	-28	-161	0	-161
Support Services / SLA	4,977	0	4,977		5,482	-505	4,977	0	0	0
Grand Total	141,364	-12,733	128,631		163,706	-13,640	150,066	21,435	11,891	9,544

The contribution rate determined by the Fund Actuary was 16.8%.

5.2 Key Issues

Staffing (£2.524m overspend)

The overspend related to the adoption of the national pay offer of £1,925 per FTE and the continuation of managed service teams due to increased demand.

Placements (£16.825m overspend)

Placements remains the biggest single risk and is incredibly volatile. NCT continues to mitigate and negotiate to secure placements at a lower cost. However, the market and availability of placements remains extremely challenging and the inflation pressures from the independent sector is in excess of budgetary provision, this trend experienced during 2021/22 has continued into 2022/23. The placements budget will continue to remain under significant pressure as it remains extremely volatile both locally and nationally.

NCT did not receive demographic growth as part of the contract sum negotiations, NCT proposed the creation of a placement reserve representing 10 -15 % of the overall placements budget, excluding inflation elements above the contract sum. This was an alternative to demographic growth as the impact of the Covid 19 pandemic became clearer. As part of the contract sum 22/23, NCT received an inflationary increase of 3.2 %. This is against the backdrop of higher than projected inflation costs, which based on the Consumer Prices Index (CPI) stood at 10.5% in the 12 months to December 2022.

As NCT has evolved significant mitigation measures to manage costs have been implemented. This was supported through the 22/23 contract discussions between Sept 2021 and Dec 2021. It was agreed to put mitigation in place and deal with pressures as they arose during 22/23. As practice in an inadequate children's social care system evolves more measures can be put in place to mitigate demand. In 2019/20 external placement costs were £44.5m, whereas in 2021/22 they were £44.9m. The development of the initial contract sum for the period Nov 2020-Mar 2022 included the delivery of £4.4m savings linked to placements. This amount was removed from the initial contract sum. A further £2.5m of placements savings was removed from the budget in 2022/23, linked to the development of two new children's homes provisions and partner contributions to placement costs. The development of the children's homes was dependent on capital funding from the councils, purchase and refurbishment of a property, and refurbishment of existing property. Councils' approval of capital funding for these projects was received in November 2022. The second element of the placement savings related to increasing the joint funding contributions to placements from partners and to commission an independent review and benchmarking analysis. This would result in the

development of a joint funding protocol. The joint funding protocol had not been agreed by the end of March 2023.

Legal (£0.365m overspend)

The legal demand pressure for the 22/23 financial year was £365k, this was due to inflation increase above the contract sum and increasing demand in legal matters. A fee increase of 4% was implemented from November 2022 and there are concerns in relation to potential for retrospective charges and late billing. The table below breaks the demand over the past four years. The key element is the increase in demand from 3,978 in 2019/20 to 4,659 in 2022/23.

Historical Invoice Splits	FY19-20	FY20-21	FY21-22	FY22-23
Time	£2,614,260	£2,906,534	£2,922,700	£3,158,928
Disbursements	£1,875,919	£1,715,047	£2,260,926	£1,906,274
Total	£4,490,179	£4,621,581	£5,183,627	£5,065,202
Average cost per billed matter	FY19-20	FY20-21	FY21-22	FY22-23
Total	£1,000.00	£1,074.00	£1,115.00	£1,105.00
Time only	£554.00	£680.00	£631.00	£693.00
Disp only	£446.00	£394.00	£484.00	£412.00
Matters Billed	3,978	4,147	4,557	4,649

Despite the increased demand the transformation workstream has had a number of successes in terms of cost mitigation and also improving the understanding of the data.

- Our 3 biggest areas of transformation focus in 22/23 were Counsel (QC & Junior), Expert fees and emails received. These 3 areas are £245k underspent compared to last year.
- Acknowledging that demand has increased there are 90 more matters billed to Dec 2022 than Dec 2021. With an average cost per matter last financial year of £1,115 that is worth £100k
- Removal of legal team attendance as standard from weekly Gateway meetings at the start of the financial year avoided c£90k.

Adoption (£0.844m overspend)

The overspend is related to the implementation on the Local Government Ombudsman's decision on the historic uplifts of allowances.

Transport (£0.849m overspend)

The overspend relates to inflationary pressures which is consistent with the pressures in both councils in the provision of home to school transport. Work is ongoing with the Councils to finalise the year end forecast position and also the development of the service for 2023/24. Work to develop an SLA is focused on improving forecasting from the system used to source transport and improved journey planning and procurement. The transport hub will continue to review each case to minimise cost and reduce demand.

Savings Programme

The full savings programme delivery of £2.99m is contained within the outturn position. Including £2.45m relating to children's homes capital projects and increased contributions from partners as agreed in the contract sum for 2022/23.

Savings Delivery – 2022/23

Area	Description	Target FY 2022/23	R	A	G Inc. Mitigations	Narrative – May 2023
Staffing	A full service review is underway around the support functions within the Trust in order to streamline operations. Support services are disaggregated across the trust leading to duplication and inefficiency. There are a number of legacy systems and processes, which are being reviewed to ensure a safe transition to the implementation of the new ways of working. The delivery of savings is dependent upon the investment in IT infrastructure, including the implementation of a new social care case management system to maximise resources and deliver efficiencies.	£0.330m	£0.013m	£0m	£0.317m	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Original savings dependent on case management system Mitigation non delivery of original savings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reconfiguration of business support Weekly Recruitment Panel's 9.6FTE Business Support vacancies held pending restructure £275k (22/23 only). Transport Hub vacancy £28k deleted PA Team post deleted - £14k (Part Year)
Placements £2.450m	The development of the placement sufficiency strategy and the development of the in house fostering capacity.	£1.250m	£1.111m	£0	£0.139m	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NCT are forecasting 30 fostering approvals with a net growth of -6 households and planned increases to children's homes capacity has not taken place resulting in non delivery of £1.250m savings NCT's Provisional Outturn reported at OG in May 2023 a pressure of £5.206m to joint funded income of which £1.200m is non delivery of expected savings. NCT have reported savings/cost avoidance of £2.312m for 22/23 through price negotiation and regular review of placements. The ICF has validated the calculations for these.
	Placements (£1.2m) – Review of Joint Funding arrangements as part of the multi-agency resource panel process	£1.200m	£1.200m	£0	£0	
	Placement mitigations through price negotiation and regular review of placements	N/A	£0	£0	£2.312m (Mitigation)	
Transport Review	This is a continuation of savings programme around the development of an efficient service, robust placement and threshold management and annual review. The processes are now in place and work will continue to deliver further efficiencies in this area.	£0.100	£0.019m	£0	£0.081m	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Forecasted demand has increased by 12%, cost per journey by 25% since 2021 Reduction in declined journeys delivered £81k savings It is likely that this will continue felt with circa £122.5k savings yet to be defined
Legal Services Review	Undertake a review of the use of Legal services and a gateway approval process. 2022/23	£0.110m	£0m	£0	£0.232m	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shift from using Counsel - £17k Rationalization of meeting attendance - £90k Reduction of cost per matter - £125k Overperformance of savings delivery by £0.122m
		£2.990m	£2.343m	£0m	£0.769m (savings) + £2.312m (mitigation) = £3.081m	

Income Summary 2022/23

- Joint Funding invoiced: £6,135,000
- Grants £14,076,000. Grant funding is generally paid to the Councils and is passported to NCT as contract income and contract variation income.
- Other income £1,480,000. This includes contract variations, investment income, carry forward reserves, recovery of payments, income to support Newly Qualified Social Workers in their assessed and supported year in employment.
- Capital - NCT does not hold capital funding. Children's homes projects and foster carers are funded by council capital funding.

6. A summary of any Changes to the SDC

The following changes were agreed through the change control process:

- **Support Services agreement** – *in light of the disaggregation of previously countywide learning and development services, it was agreed to transfer the L&D children's team and functions to NCT. The remaining L&D SLA with North Northamptonshire Council covers access to non-children's services specific training, e-learning, L&D business systems consultancy and e-learning development and apprenticeships.*
- **Strategic Group** – *Inclusion of additional members*

7. Service demand in 2022/23 and expected demand 2023-25

7.1 2022/23 Demand

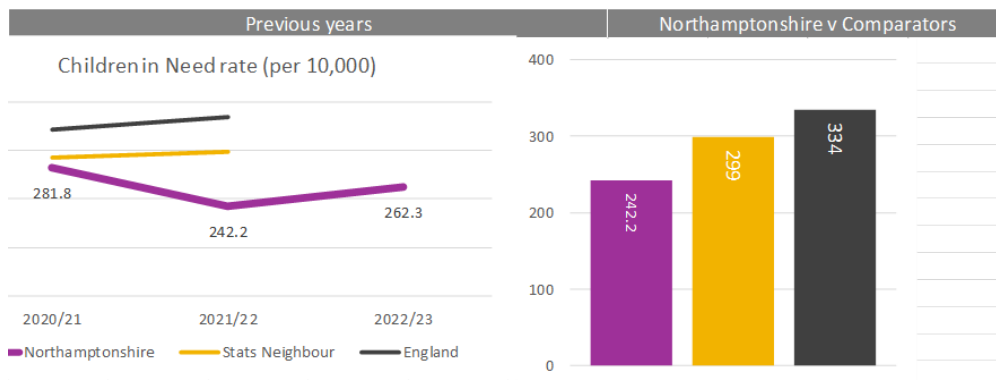
2022/23 saw an increase in demand for NCT services including:

- Number of families allocated to Children and Family Support Services (101 more in 22/23 than in 21/22)
- Number of referrals to MASH (3,231 more in 22/23 than in 21/22)
- Number of assessments (592 more in 22/23 than in 21/22)
- Number of s.47 investigations (803 more in 22/23 than in 21/22)

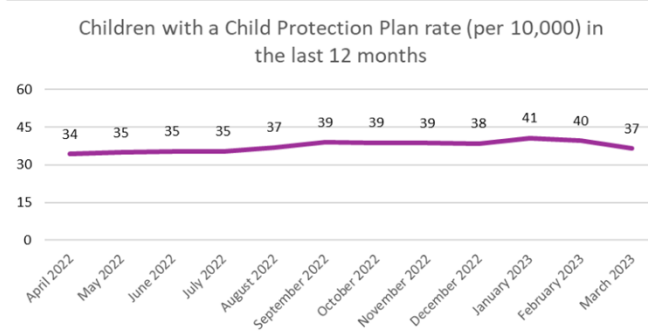
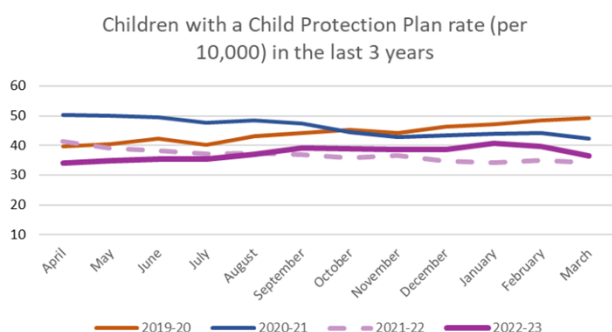
This is likely due to the rising cost of living, the continuing impact of the Covid 19 pandemic and impact of universal services not operating as normal during the pandemic, underdeveloped early help partnership offer, and an increase in the complexity of needs of children and risks of exploitation. The

rate of children in need, children on a child protection plan and children in care all increased in 22/23 in comparison with 21/22.

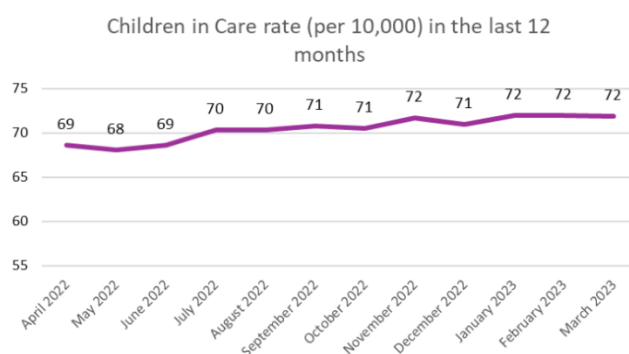
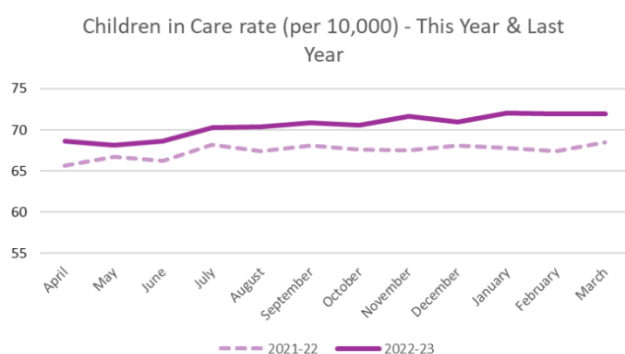
The rate of children in need was 262.3 per 10,000 at end of March 23, an increase from 242.2 in 21/22. This equates to 295 additional children. The rate was below both national and statistical neighbour rates.



The rate of children on a child protection plan was 36.5 per 10,000 at end of March 23, an increase from 34.1 in 21/23. This equates to 34 additional children. The rate was below the England national average and above our statistical neighbour rates.



The rate of children in care was 71.9 per 10,000 at end of March 23, an increase from 68.5 in 21/23. This equates to 46 additional children. The rate was above England and statistical neighbours.



7.2 Predicted Demand for 2023/24

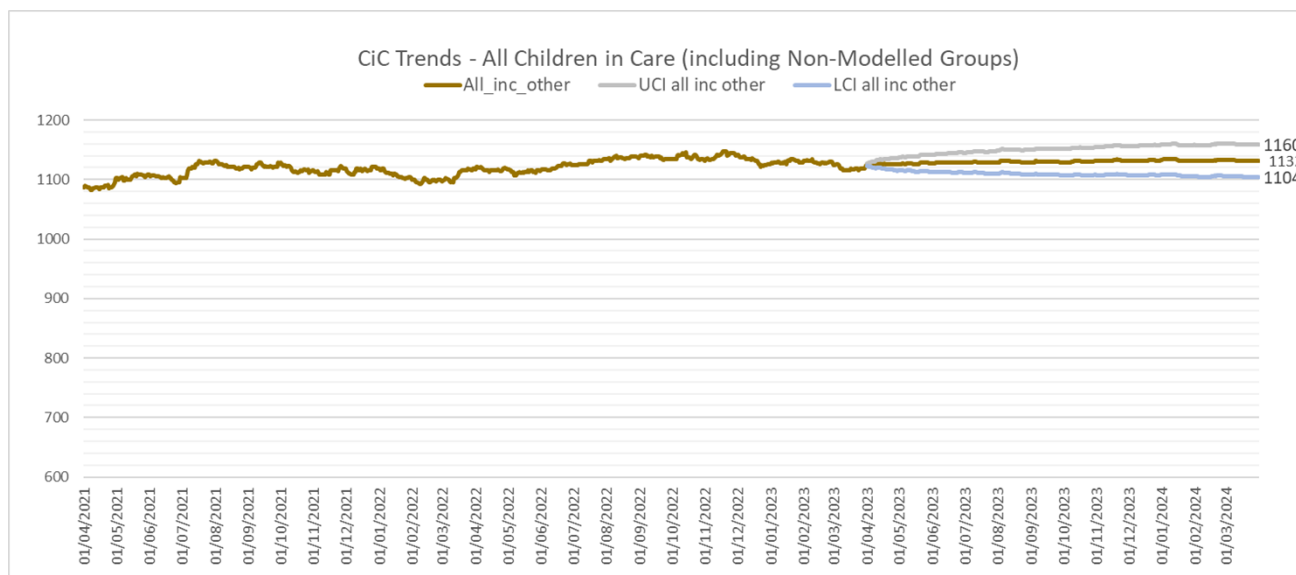
The current and forecast numbers of children in care and the expected demand for placements are included in the document below. The care population (excluding Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC)) has increased 1% from 1118 at the end of March 2022 to 1224 at the end of March 2023.

The current and forecast numbers of children in care and the expected demand for placements are included in the document below.



LAC Modelling
Apr23 draft v0.6 - 1Y

Trend- All Children in Care, Excluding UASC



An increase of 1% up to 1132 is forecast to March 2024. We are forecasting an increase of children in care in the 1-4 years and 16-18 years age groups in this period.

Care Leavers

As at March 2023, there were 891 care leavers aged 16 and above. Our projections tell us that this population is likely to grow to 1080 by March 2024, however, since March 2022 the population of care leavers has decreased by 49 young people (from 940). As per the table below, the number of 16 and 17 year-olds has increased and the number of young people aged 21+ has decreased. We can still expect the number of care leavers to increase in the next couple of years due to the number of young people currently in care aged 15-17 years-old.

Leaving Care Cohort by Age	Total (March 2022)	Total (March 2023)
16	258 (14 of whom are relevant so no longer in care)	293 (9 of whom are relevant so no longer in care)
17		
18	146	152

19	140	136
20	165	155
21	100	72
22	55	36
23	47	28
24	29	16
25	0	3
Total	940	891

During 2022/23 as the Councils and the ICB further developed, there has been an increase in localised strategy development and delivery. Whilst there are many benefits to the new organisational structures and ways of working, this has an impact on NCT's capacity because there are now North and West based strategic, operational and task and finish groups that NCT is requested to participate in to deliver partnership strategies. North and West based strategies and partnership delivery groups that NCT participate in include:

- Local Area Partnerships
- Community Safety
- SEND
- Early Help
- Family Hubs
- Corporate Parenting Boards
- Housing

8. Actual or anticipated changes in legislation and their effects

8.1 Stable Homes, Built on Love: Government response to reports on Children's Social Care

In February 2023, the government announced its implementation strategy in response to the publications of Josh MacAlister's Independent Review of Children's Social Care 2022, The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel's recommendations following the tragic deaths of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and Star Hobson, and the publication on Children's Social Care by the Competition and Markets Authority 2022.

The government set out its vision for reform of children's social care, based on of six pillars, underpinned by a £200 million investment over the next two years to address urgent issues facing children and families.

The six pillars are:

1. Family Help provides the right support at the right time so that children can thrive with their families
2. A decisive multi-agency child protection system
3. Unlocking the potential of family networks
4. Putting love, relationships and a stable home at the heart of being a child in care
5. A valued, supported and highly skilled social worker for every child who needs one
6. A system that continuously learns and improves, and makes better use of evidence and data

The government has consulted on the proposals, seeking views on its responses to various recommendations, including support and protection for children and families, support for kinship carers and wider family networks, reforms to the experience of being in care, including corporate parenting, support for the workforce and delivery and system reform.

Each pillar maps to the outcomes and enablers within the proposed Children's Social Care National Framework and Dashboard, published alongside the strategy, which was also subject to consultation.

A third consultation was published on proposals for the child and family social worker workforce. The proposals included a set of national rules on engagement of agency social work resource, including price caps on what local authorities may pay for an agency worker, post-qualified experience needed for an agency assignment, use of project teams, references, notice periods and movement between agency and substantive roles, collection and sharing of pay and agency data and adherence of procurement routes with the national rules.

The consultation feedback is being analysed by the government and a response is anticipated.

8.2 Unregulated and unregistered placements

Since September 2021, it has been unlawful for any looked after child under the age of 16 years to be housed in a placement setting which is unregulated or unregistered with Ofsted. The rationale for this legislation is recognised and supported. However, there are national placement sufficiency challenges which mean these legislative changes places additional pressures on localities.

The vast majority of our children in care live in homes that are suitable for their needs. During 22/23 there has continued to be a small number of young people in unregistered placements in this context of national challenge in placement sufficiency. The number of children in unregistered provision has reduced since the ILACS inspection in October 2022. For these children we have in place senior manager oversight, consideration of risk and robust support plans, consultation with all parties, legal advice, discussion with the providers about their status and encouraging registration, and communication with Ofsted. Regular reporting on unregistered placements is in place to DCSs, Operational Group and Social Care Improvement Board.

Ofsted are taking enforcement action, which may mean some CQC registered care providers and providers of independent supported accommodation cease operating. Until there is sufficient registered provision available locally/nationally that can meet the needs of children, we are likely to continue seeing increasing costs as local authorities compete for places. Work continues to deliver our sufficiency strategy to increase access to local, suitable homes for children that can meet their needs, including working with the councils to identify potential properties for new children's homes.

8.3 National standards for providers of supported accommodation

From 28th April 2023, under the Supported Accommodation (England) Regulations 2023, supported accommodation providers in England will be able to register with Ofsted. It will be illegal for a supported accommodation provider to operate if they have not submitted a complete application which has been accepted by 28 October 2023. Providers with evidence of a live, accepted application can still accommodate young people aged 16 and 17 until their registration comes through.

NCT's commissioning team has been and will continue to support providers through registration, including signposting and sharing of national guidance. The general feedback from providers on NCT's framework is that they will be registering and close monitoring will take place to ensure this happens within the above timescales.

There is likely to be a financial impact for local authorities as registration will cost providers between £4,500- £5,500 (according to size). Providers will then be required to pay an annual fee. This is still under consultation and will be published in 2024; the initial proposal was between £2,700 and £3,000. Providers are also likely to require changes in their staffing to support the registration requirements which would increase costs to commissioners.

8.4 Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services

In January 2023, 'the experiences and progress of care leavers' was incorporated into the Inspecting Local Authority Children's Services framework for ILACS standard and short inspections.

In March 2023, Ofsted confirmed that they will be undertaking two separate inspections of NCT, one for North Northamptonshire and one for West Northamptonshire. The inspections will take place at

the same time, with two lead inspectors, two inspection teams and will produce two separate reports. This will have resource implications for NCT to manage two inspections at the same time.

8.5 SEND and Alternative Provision improvement plan: Right Support, Right Place, Right Time (March 2023)

The SEND and Alternative Provision Improvement Plan sets out how the government plans to work alongside children, young people and their families, and those who work across every part of the SEND and alternative provision system, to deliver improvements for every child and young person with SEND and in alternative provision.

The proposals aim to:

- Fulfil children’s potential so that children and young people with SEND or attending alternative provision enjoy their childhood, achieve good outcomes and are well prepared for adulthood and employment;
- Build parents’ trust through an easily navigable system across health, education and care, which restores confidence that their children will get the right support, in the right place, at the right time;
- Provide financial sustainability so that local leaders can make best use of record investment in the high needs budget to meet the needs and improved outcomes for children and young people, while ensuring local authorities remain on a stable financial footing.

The implementation will be led by the councils with NCT being a key partner.

8.6 Family Hubs

The councils are leading on the development of Family Hubs, with NCT as a key partner.

The Family Hub and Start for Life Programme is now being rolled out across North Northamptonshire. Key areas for support include mental health during pregnancy and beyond, parenting, infant feeding and home learning to promote early language and literacy development.

8.7 Integrated Care Systems

Integrated Care Systems are now in their infancy. The ambition is to create greater integration of health and care services, improve population health, reduce inequalities, support productivity and sustainability of services and help the NHS support social and economic development. More care in people’s homes and the community will be provided and will be led by the needs of the local area within a broad national framework. The CYP Transformation Programme, as part of the ICS in Northants is focusing on system improvements and priorities for children, with the NNC Chief Executive as the sponsor.

9. The strategic priorities and outcomes for the Services

The Strategic Priorities for the Services are set out [in Northamptonshire Children’s Trust’s Business Plan](#) for 2023/24-2026/27. This Plan was approved by NCT’s Board and by the councils through the [Children’s Trust Joint Committee on 15th February 2023](#).

This sets out NCT’s vision to place “Children, Young People and Families at the heart of all we do – in every action we take and every action we make.” To fulfil this vision NCT have identified the following priorities:

- Effective leadership
- Recruit, retain and develop an awesome workforce
- Strong relationship-based practice
- Insightful quality assurance and learning
- Healthy partnerships
- Robust and effective resource management

These priorities have been developed to enable NCT to achieve their identified outcomes for children, and young people:

- Live safe, be safe
- Fulfil potential
- Develop resilience
- Enjoy good health and wellbeing

Our progress against the priorities set out in the Business Plan are tracked through the Improvement Plan linked below, which is reviewed monthly and reported to Operational Group and the Social Care Improvement Board.



NORTHAMPTONSHIRE CHILDREN.pdf

10. Any social, demographic or other relevant factors which may impact on the services

10.1 Impact of Covid-19, the cost of living crisis and its impact on children & families

Post-pandemic, there are higher levels of need amongst children and families and children's social care and partner organisations are carrying a greater level of risk. This is typical of the national picture³ with an increase of children in care (see figures in Section 7) and complexity of children's needs, which is putting pressure on the availability of placements, within a market which does not meet the needs of children (as identified in the Independent Review of Children's Social Care⁴ and the Competition and Market's market study of children's social care⁵). Families continue to present with complex, multi-layered needs which are more acute. The rising cost of living has also had an impact on the volume of re-referrals (see ADCS safeguarding pressures report at footnote 3), as well as influencing social workers to work for agencies as take home pay rates are more attractive.⁶ There is also increasing demand and waiting lists for partnership services, including ADHD and ASD assessments and domestic abuse support.

10.2 Asylum seekers from Afghanistan

In the period 2022/23 there were 57 Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children from Afghanistan receiving a service from Northamptonshire Children's Trust: 28 care leavers and 29 children in care.

10.3 Timeliness of initial and review health assessments for children in care

The timeliness of initial and review health assessments for children in care has been unsatisfactorily below target for some time. As at the end of March 2023, 55% of children in care had an initial health assessment within 28 days of becoming looked after, and 66% of children in care had an up to date health review. These are undertaken by the children in care health team commissioned by the NHS. This could mean that the health needs of some of our children may not be understood or supported in a timely way. NCT have reviewed and improved our processes within NCT and continue to work with health colleagues to take action to address the issue and the impact is being monitored at board level.

³ see ADCS [Safeguarding Pressures Phase 8 Executive Summary FINAL Dec 2022](#))

⁴ [Independent review of children's social care - final report \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

⁵ [Final report - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

⁶ [Children's social work workforce, Reporting year 2022 – Explore education statistics – GOV.UK \(explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk\)](#) shows agency workers increase 13% from 21 to end of 22. Regional and local intelligence tells us it is agency pay, backed up by the controls the government have consulted on.

10.4 Impact of historical poor social care practice and previously under-developed early help offer

Prior to NCT being in place, children's social care in Northamptonshire was found to be inadequate by Ofsted. Serious case reviews and child safeguarding practice reviews have also identified previous inadequacies⁷. There is a historically underdeveloped early help offer from children's services and the partnership. The impact of this previous poor practice mean that children and families did not necessarily receive the right support at the right time, and in some instances, this continues to have an impact on children's outcomes now, as identified in quality assurance activity and inspections. It also meant agencies were more likely to refer to children's social care when a child was not at risk of significant harm because they did not feel there was sufficient early help available. This also created a poor reputation for Northamptonshire which can influence our partnership working, ability to secure placements and attract social workers. While improvements are being felt, it will take some time to change the reputation and fully develop the early help offer across our system.

10.5 West and North Northamptonshire school place planning and SEND forecasts

10.5.1 North Northamptonshire

From 2011 to the Census in March 2021, the overall population of children and young people aged 0-19 grew by 9%, or 6,800 people, to approximately 85,500 people in total. The profile of the population got slightly older. The number of children aged 4 or under fell by 4%, to around 20,000, whereas the number at school age (aged 5 to 15) increased by 7,500 or 18% to 50,000. The number of young people aged 16 to 19 stayed the same at 15,000. There was growth of 9% in the number of households with couples with dependent children (to 30,600), but growth of 20% in the number of households with grown-up children (to 9,500), and 17% growth in the number of lone parent households (to 16,300).

These figures are taken from the Census because the ONS has only published estimates for mid-year 2021, the Census was only shortly before that, but comparing Census figures allows us to see trends over the last ten years as well.

Primary

The demand for primary school places in North Northamptonshire is broadly reflective of national trends. The increase in the demand for places experienced since 2010, is forecast to plateau and decrease in the period ending 2023/28, despite ongoing local large scale housing developments. NNC are forecasting overall falling rolls across primary schools in the majority of planning areas with some localised spikes in demand. As a consequence, all the planned new schools which are proposed as a result of Housing Developments are being reviewed to ensure that any new provision meets an identified need and does not create unnecessary surplus capacity. NNC are working with schools to address forecast surplus capacity issues by proactively reducing published admission numbers and reutilising unused space to meet SEND or other needs.

Secondary

The larger cohorts of students that are moving through the primary phase of education continue to move into the secondary phase in North Northamptonshire. The total number of students expected to attend a Northamptonshire secondary provision is forecast to increase slightly, by 129, from 2023 to 2029 (1%), but this masks variations between planning areas in terms of total change and the profile of that change over the forecasting period.

Certain planning areas are experiencing pressure on specific year groups which is impacting on the availability of places for in year applications which have increased significantly over the last 12

⁷ [Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews - Northamptonshire Safeguarding Children Board \(northamptonshirescb.org.uk\)](https://www.northamptonshirescb.org.uk)

months. NNC have negotiated a number of bulge classes within Secondary Schools to contribute to meeting the in year pressures. Weldon Village School which will grow to be 8 FE opens its doors Sept 2023 and as it fills will relieve pressure across the Corby area. Hanwood Park Secondary School is in development and planned to open in Sept 2026, this will provide much needed places across Kettering. Further temporary expansions will be required to meet pressure in this area in the meantime.

SEND

The forecasts suggest that numbers of children with SEND, special schools, SEND units, resourced provision and independent special schools will grow over the forecasting period. This is in line with previous trends showing 10% growth each year for the past 3 years. However, pressure on alternative provision will stabilise as capacity is increased through a range of new provision.

As a result of a sufficiency review undertaken by NNC, a new approach to SEND early help funding has been introduced into mainstream schools alongside SENIF plus for the early years sector, increasing investment in Early Help by over £2.5 million. The implementation of the funding is part of the locality wide SEND offer to schools.

The findings from the review also highlighted the need to develop more unit provision across each of the four local areas in North Northants. To date 32 additional places have been secured in existing or new SEND units. Further work is ongoing to further develop unit provision, with the aim of increasing unit provision by up to 100 further places.

10.5.2 West Northamptonshire

The demand of the school places in West Northamptonshire is broadly reflective of national trends. Reception intake numbers peaked in 2017/18 - there were 4,080 children on roll in reception in January 2007, according to census data, compared to 5,075 children on roll in January 2017. This represented an increase of 995 new starters and can be linked to consistent increases in live births between the period 2003-2012. Since this time, birth rates have either dropped slightly or have plateaued. As of January 2023, there were 137 fewer reception children on roll compared to January 2017.

Of the three main drivers of the increase in the demand for primary school places that occurred over the previous decade: a rising birth-rate, high levels of inward-migration and large-scale housing development, only the latter still appears to be a major factor in West Northamptonshire. Primary projections forecasts indicate that there will be a decrease in the total number of pupils attending a primary school over the next 5 years, by around 3%, should current trends continue.

The latest birth rate data (taken from GP registration data) shows a 2% increase in births in 2022 compared to the previous year) and could suggest a change in the recent pattern and if that continues and the surge in house building across West Northants continues the reduction in primary school place provision would start to increase again in the coming years.

SEND

West Northants continue to see increase in demand for assessment and a significant increase in approved EHCPs. The forecasts suggest that SEND Numbers for special schools and SEND units will continue to grow. As with other areas the growth trend is showing 10%.

As a result, in 23/24 there will be a review of their structure and additional resources to enable statutory duties to be met, to ensure demand is managed and most of all ensure children's needs are met.

Partnership working with SEND is pivotal and this is an area which continues to be developed and strengthened. The new co-produced SEND and Alternative Provision Strategy helps to identify and

agree the priorities for the local area partnership for 2023-26. The OFSTED/CQC SEND Inspection is expected during 23/24 and inspection readiness will be key.

In WNC, there are plans to open more than 600 specialist SEND education places in the next 3 years and further work is ongoing around further provision to ensure needs of children with SEND are met.

11. The results of any audits or surveys in 2022-23

11.1 Internal audit

Audits undertaken in 2022/23 covered strategic and operational reviews for the Trust, and the summary includes audits of support services provided to the Trust. We can provide assurance that the Trust has established adequate, appropriate, and effective controls which help ensure that risks are being managed and objectives achieved.

The role of internal audit is to provide an opinion to the Trust, through the Finance, Resources and Audit Committee, on the adequacy and effectiveness of the internal control system to ensure the achievement of the organisation’s objectives in the areas reviewed. The annual report from internal audit provides an overall opinion on the adequacy and effectiveness of the organisation’s risk management, control, and governance processes, within the scope of work undertaken by Internal Audit. The basis for forming our opinion is as follows:

- An assessment of the range of individual opinions arising from risk-based audit assignments contained within internal audit plans that have been reported throughout the year.
- This assessment has taken account of the relative materiality of these areas and management’s response to agreed actions.
- Management investigation and response to issues raised from fraud investigations.

The annual audit and statement of assurance for FY22/23 was discussed at NCT FR&A committee in August ‘23 where the Chief Internal Auditor concluded that they could give satisfactory assurance that a sound system of internal control was in place at the Trust. The FR&A committee agreed they would accept the audit opinion once they received further assurances on the opinion given. The FRA subsequently met again in September ’23 and received an update and further assurances on the position from the incoming Interim Chief Internal Auditor and the trust’s Director of Resources. Based on this update the FR&A committee are now satisfied with the professional opinion and assurance level given by the previous Chief Internal Auditor for the financial year 22/23.

Internal audit has provided satisfactory assurance that there is a sound system of internal control, designed to meet the Trust’s objectives, and that controls are being applied consistently.

It is recognised that the level of audit coverage, including the number of risk-based audits specific to the Trust, is important for assurance purposes and steps are in place to further increase the number of audits delivered in 2023/24.

List of Audits

Progress of internal audit review of 2022/23 (as at September 2023)

Audit	Audit Status	Assurance Rating		
		Control Environment	Compliance	Org Impact
2021/22 – Plan; 2022/23 Assurance				

Audit	Audit Status	Assurance Rating		
		Control Environment	Compliance	Org Impact
Services - Foster Care and Special Guardianship Payments	Final Report	Good	Good	Minor
Services - Placement Contract Management	Final Report	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Moderate
WNC - IT Systems Security - Carefirst System	Final Report	Limited	Satisfactory	Moderate
Key Financials - Payroll	Final Report	Good	Substantial	Minor
WNC - Services - Social Care Transport	Final Report	Satisfactory	Limited	Major
2022/23 – Plan and Assurance				
Overarching Safeguarding Arrangements	Final Report	Good	Good	Minor
Corporate Parenting - Leaving Care s24	Final Report	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Minor
Corporate Governance Framework (incl Ofsted Improvement Plan Monitoring)	Draft Report	Good	Good	Minor
Social Work Workforce	Final Report	N/A – Briefing Note Report - no ratings issued.		
Fostering Service (In-house Independent Fostering Agency)	Draft Report	N/A – Interim Report issued – no ratings issued further work planned for 2023/24.		
Sustainability – corporate parent role		Removed		
MTFP and budget management		Removed		
ICT – network infrastructure security		Removed		
ICT – privileged access control		Removed		
WNC Service Audits				
IT Disaster recovery	Complete	Limited	Limited	Moderate
IT Cyber security	Complete	Limited	Limited	Major
Payroll Transaction Testing	Complete	Good	Good	Minor

11.2 Self Evaluation

The self-evaluation for 2022 was reviewed by the ADCS regional improvement and innovation alliance in summer 2022, by Ofsted during the full ILACS in October 2022 and the social care annual conversation in 2023. A refresh of the annual self-evaluation will be completed for October 2023.

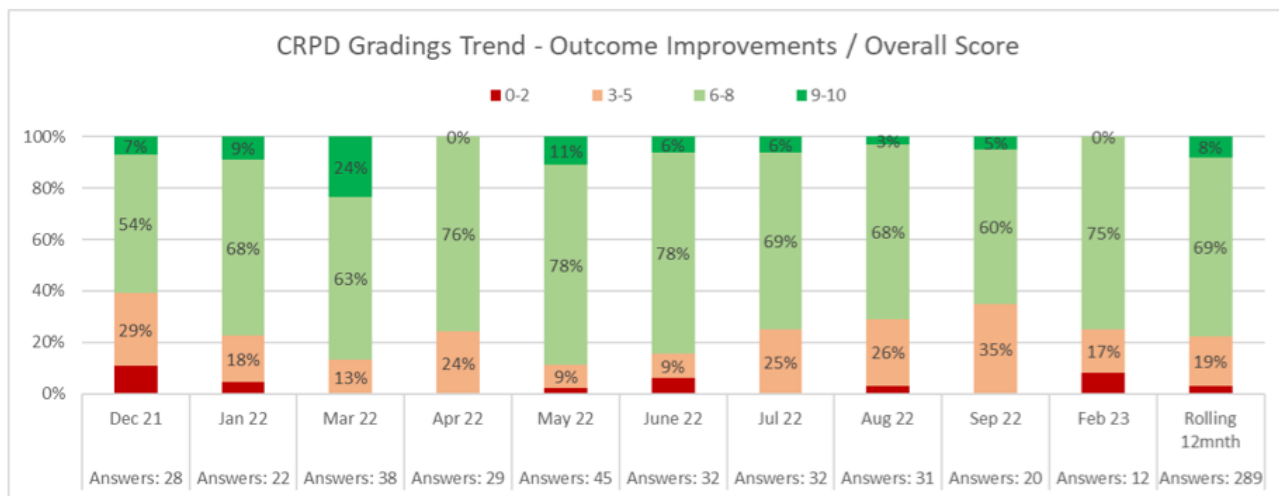


Full SEF ILACS 2022
final.pdf

11.3 Quality assurance of our practice with children and families

As part of our quality assurance framework, we undertake regular audits of children's cases. These are completed as a reflective discussion with the child's practitioner focused on the impact made for the child. These are known as 'collaborative reflective practice discussions' (CRPDs) and the results are reviewed at our monthly Quality Assurance Board, chaired by the Chief Executive. The graph below shows the overall experience of the child and impact of our work with them from our audited cases on a scale of 0 –10 (where 10 means the child is safe and happy, enjoys good health and wellbeing, and their outcomes show they are resilient and fulfilling their potential, and 0 means the child is not safe and healthy, has low resilience, and are not fulfilling their potential). 77% of CRPDs undertaken over 12 months up to the end of March 2023 were scaled at 6 and above out of ten for

overall outcomes. Other quality assurance activity undertaken by NCT includes thematic audits, Practice Weeks, practice observations and participation in peer and multi agency practice reviews.



11.4 Equalities surveys

NCT carried out its annual Equalities Survey in September 2022 to gauge the response of our workforce to new measures introduced to support more equitable and inclusive approaches to working. Feedback is also sought from our Equalities Forum on a six-weekly basis. Results include:

- On a scale of 0-10, where 0 is unsupported and 10 is fully supported for diversity and inclusion needs, the average ranking for 7.54.
- 68% feel that equality, diversity and inclusion has become more of a priority since we became NCT.
- 37% of respondents identified as belonging to an underrepresented or disadvantaged group.
- 63% work directly with children, young people and families.
- 45% of respondents have a role which involves managing others.
- 51% say we're at Cultural Pre-Competence and 34% say we're at Cultural Competence on the Cultural Competency scale.

11.5 Leadership Development Programme

All line managers in NCT have participated in the 9 month NCT Leadership Development programme in 2021/22. Review sessions have taken place in 2022/23 to reflect on the journey of the child through our system, our practice models and processes and leadership styles. NCT has also supported 30 colleagues to participate in nationally funded Pathways programmes for social care leadership, and 5 colleagues to participate in the Staff College's Black and Asian Leadership Initiative and Women in Leadership programmes.

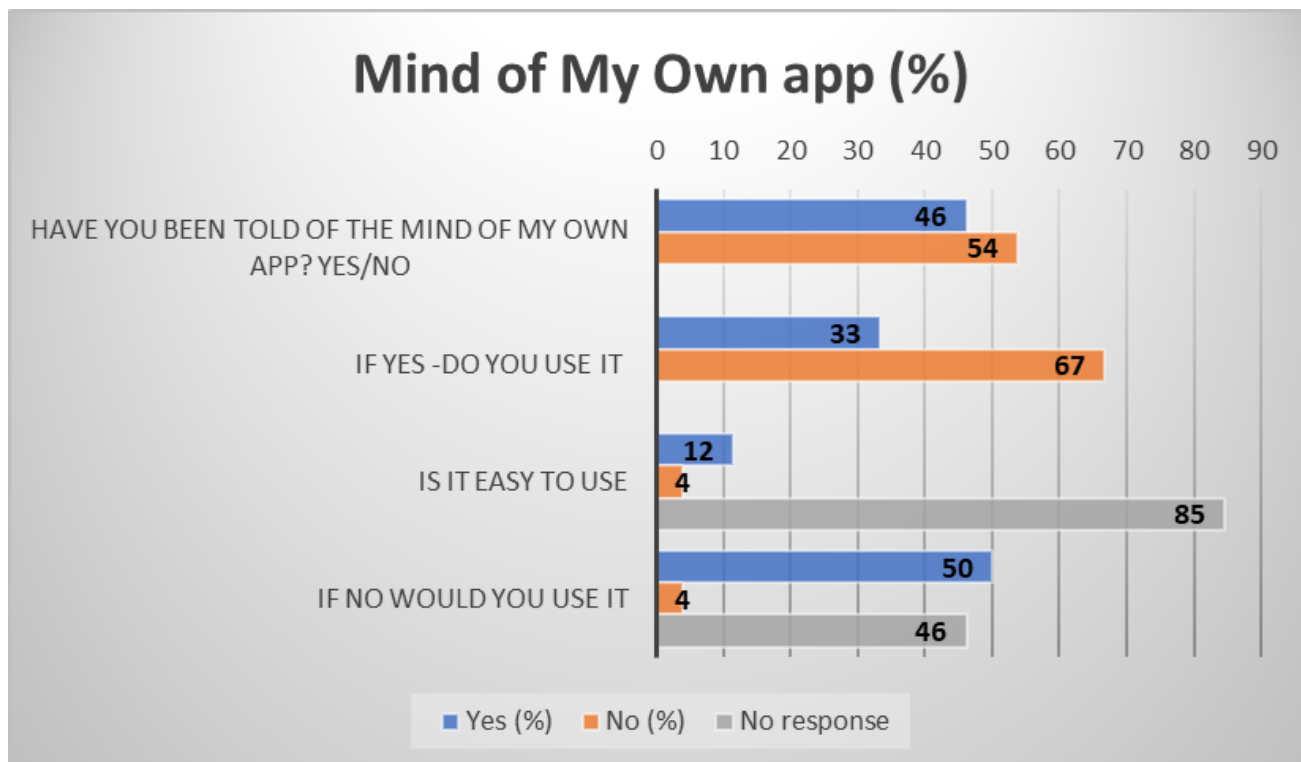
11.6 Surveys of children and young people

Children in care reviews

IROs have made effective use of a range of approaches to engage with young people, using various IT platforms. During the reporting period Apr 2022 to Mar 2023 there was a 15% increase to 54% of children and young people attending their review compared to the previous year. Overall, 82% of children and young people were able to either attend or share their views with the IRO prior to, or at their review enabling the young person's voice to be more clearly heard and giving them the opportunity to actively partake in the decision-making about their life. All IROs have a one-page profile and children and young people have fed back that they find these profiles beneficial as they help to make the first meeting more informal. IROs update and send their one-page profiles to children and young people prior to their first review and new IROs are required to complete their profile upon appointment.

Mind of My Own

26 young people responded to our survey on Care Plans in May 2022. The following chart shows their views on the Mind of My Own app.



Usage of the MoMO app declined in the early half of 2023. A working group has been established to relaunch the app, and an increase in usage – particularly by children – is being seen. Some of the promotional activities have included promotional leaflets and flyers distributed at the Children in Care awards, promotion by the Participation team and a new ‘train the trainer’ scheme to encourage use among colleagues.

Young people receiving support from Youth Offending Service

During 22/23, 81 young people provided their views in a questionnaire, a 17% increase on the previous year. Case workers received an average score of 9.22 on a scale from 1-10 – up from 9.1 the previous year. 93% said they found their case worker ‘very supportive’, and 91% said their case manager ‘totally’ did what they said they would – up from 76% last year.

The gender breakdown of the feedback was 84% male respondents and 16% female respondents. The ethnicity breakdown was 1.3% Asian, 5.1% Black, 10.3% mixed ethnicity and 83.3% white respondents.

11.6 External and peer reviews

The following reviews were undertaken in 2022/23:

- YOS Peer Review
- Exploitation thematic Peer Review
- Peer Review of NCT’s commissioning
- DfE Advisor review of assurance arrangements between the NCT, WNC and NNC
- DfE Advisor review of NCT’s quality assurance and performance management
- LGA review of Corporate Parenting
- LGA second Insight report into Northamptonshire Children’s Trust arrangements

The findings and recommendations of these reviews will need to be considered. NCT will provide a realignment report to inform the Contract Sum discussions in 2023/24. The report will set out what will be required to support services on West and North locality basis, to support two inspections and to deliver good quality children's services.

11.7 Significant Complaints, Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews (CSPRS) and Serious Incidents

No complaints were received during 22/23 that met the significant complaints threshold. 7 serious incidents occurred in 2022/ 23 and reported to the national panel. One CSPR was published between 01.04.22-31.03.23: Ref102 Child Ba, published 8 March 2023.

[Child Ba - Child Safeguarding Practice Review - Northamptonshire Safeguarding Children Board \(northamptonshirescb.org.uk\)](http://northamptonshirescb.org.uk)

12. The outcomes of any Rectification Plans

As per Schedule 6 (Performance Framework) of the Service Delivery Contract, NCT must produce a Rectification Plan where Performance Failure has not been resolved at the Formal Stage of the Escalation process. There were no Rectification Plans requested during the 2022-23 contract year.

13. High level review of general funding available for Councils

NCT received grant funding of £14,076,000 in 2022/23. Grant funding is generally paid to the Councils and is passported to NCT as contract income and contract variation income.

North Northamptonshire was awarded £4m Family Hub programme funding for 2022-25.

14. Risk register

The NCT Risk register risks are categorised in 3 categories, each of which a Director is responsible for, Corporate, Social Care and Finance and Operations. The Register is updated quarterly by risk owners, and then a covering report highlighting key changes and issues for discussion, along with the register is reviewed at PPQ Committee and NCT Board.



NCT Strategic Risk Register - April 2023

15. The outcome of any regulatory inspections

Ofsted Visits of Children's Social Care April 22 – March 23

Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services, October 2022

North Northamptonshire [50200024 \(ofsted.gov.uk\)](https://www.ofsted.gov.uk/inspections/50200024)

West Northamptonshire [50200026 \(ofsted.gov.uk\)](https://www.ofsted.gov.uk/inspections/50200026)

Judgment: *Requires Improvement to be Good*

A full inspection of Children's Social Care took place during 3rd-14th October 2022. The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families, the experiences and progress of children who need help and protection and the experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers were all graded as Requires Improvement to be Good resulting in the overall effectiveness for both Councils being judged as Requires Improvement to be Good, this was a welcomed improvement from the previous grading in 2019 of Inadequate.

Ofsted saw significant improvements in our Children's Social Care Services over the last 2 years. Inspectors observed the significant shift in culture the Trust has made to one that is now of high support and kindness. As an organisation we put children and young people at the heart of all we do and again Ofsted noted. Ofsted also rightly found areas that we can improve on which is captured in our Improvement Plan, see Section 9.

Independent Fostering Agency Inspection – February 2023

[50211704 \(ofsted.gov.uk\)](https://www.ofsted.gov.uk/inspections/50211704)

Judgement: Inadequate

On becoming a Trust, we had to register our fostering service as an independent fostering agency (IFA). Our IFA had its first inspection in October 2021 with the outcome Requires Improvement to be Good. [50174779 \(ofsted.gov.uk\)](https://www.ofsted.gov.uk/inspections/50174779)

The second Inspection took place 6-10 February 2023 with the outcome of Inadequate. While this wasn't the outcome we anticipated, we fully accepted the findings and recommendations of the report.

A service improvement plan is in place with agreed team objectives, targets, and timescales for completion. We have worked with our foster carers, children, young people and partners to develop this plan to improve the service so that it is the best it can be to meet the needs of our children and young people.

Children's Home Inspections

Home	Last Full inspection date	Grading	Monitoring visit	Comments
Thornton House URN 2608872	11th January 2023	<i>Requires improvement to be good</i>	<i>Improved effectiveness</i>	<i>Opened Jan 2020</i> <i>Interim inspection</i> 9 March 2022
Phoenix House URN 2608892	7th February 2023	<i>Good</i>	20th-21st October 2020	<i>Opened Feb 2020</i>
Welford House URN 2608968	30 April 2019 October 2021 15th November 2022	<i>Good</i> <i>Good</i> <i>Good</i>	24 Feb 2021	<i>Interim Inspection</i> 4 March 2020
Raven House URN 2615067	April 2019 July 2021 11-12 Aug 2021 9th August 2022	<i>Good</i> <i>Good</i> <i>Good</i> <i>Good</i>	22-23 Sep 2020 - 12 Nov 2020 -	<i>The assurance visit resulted in a restriction notice from 28 September which was lifted 20 Dec 2020.</i>
Arnold House URN 2616670	2-3rd July 2019 17 -18 May 2022	<i>Requires improvement to be good</i> <i>Good</i>	17 June 20 22 July 20 13-14 October 20 26 Jan 21 Jun 21 Nov 29th, 2022	<i>N/A</i>

16. Any proposed changes to the SDC

The following will be considered as part of the annual review in 2023/24:

- Development of contract sum 2024/25
- Review of assurance procedures and KPIs to be undertaken between NCT, NNC and WNC during annual review period
- Review of SLAs within the Support Services Agreement, including:
 - re-costing by the Councils as the current SLAs are based on an uplift on the original costs identified prior to the inception of NCT
 - a service level agreement for the supply of transport following disaggregation of the countywide transport support service

17.Strategic Direction

Looking ahead to 2023/24, NCT's primary focus continues to improving experiences and outcomes for children and families who need help; whether that is targeted early help, youth offending or statutory social care support. NCT wants children to be able to remain within the care of their families when this is safe and in the best interests of the child. When a child is not able to remain in the care of their families, NCT want children to receive good quality care that meets their needs. NCT wants all children to thrive and be able to live safe, be safe; fulfil their potential; develop resilience and enjoy good health and wellbeing.

Since the inception of NCT, children's services have improved from 'Inadequate' to 'Requires Improvement to be Good'. This has been achieved in the context of the establishment of NCT, WNC and NNC as new organisations; a global pandemic; a continued national shortage of social workers; a national crisis in children's placements market; cost of living and inflation increases and increasing demand and complexity of need (See Appendix 5). NCT's priority is to keep improving and go on to deliver good and outstanding services for children. NCT's Improvement Plan and Independent Fostering Agency's Improvement Plan will continue to guide progress, along with external scrutiny though Ofsted focused visits and inspections of children's homes and NCT's independent fostering agency in 2023/24.

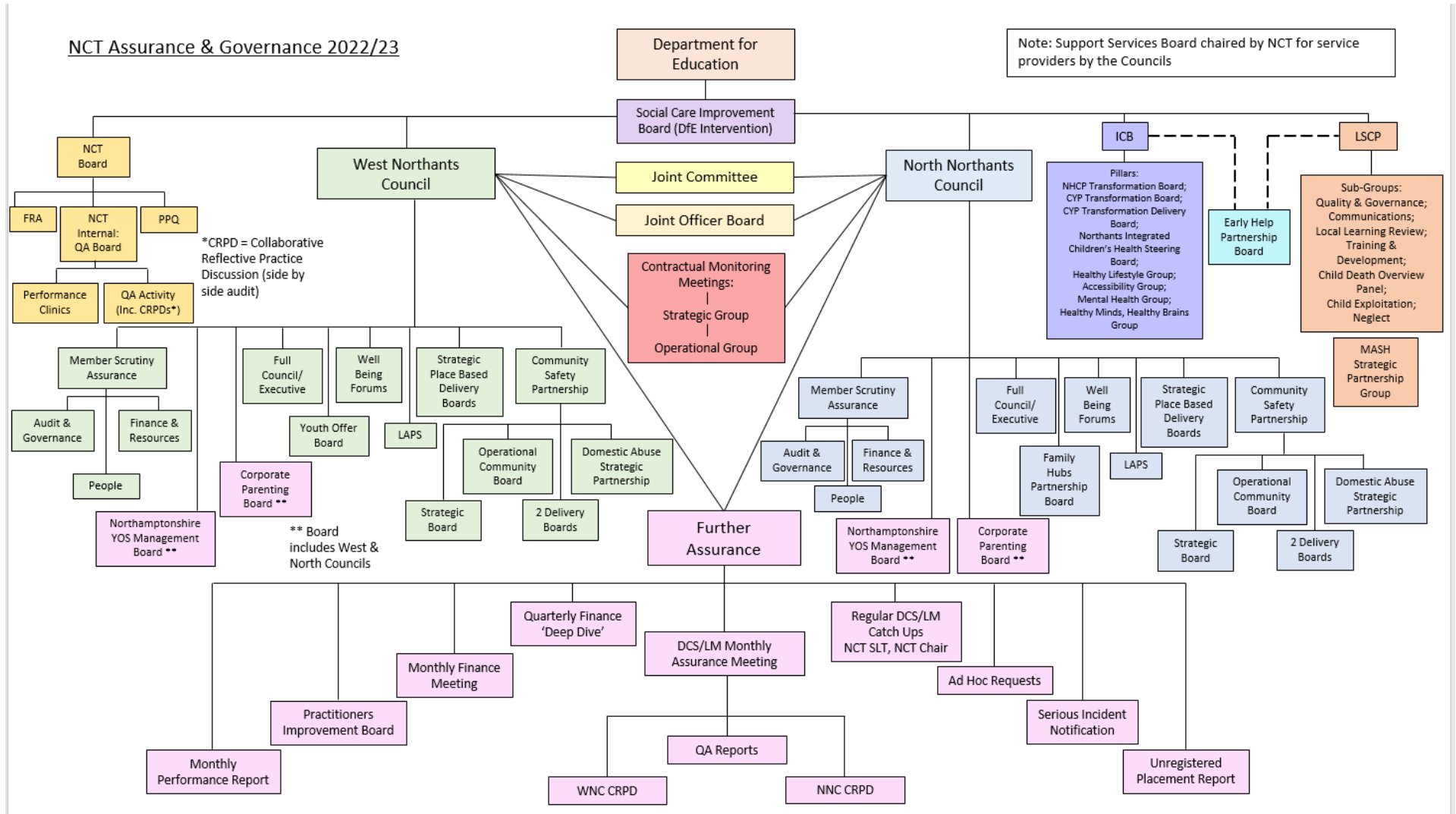
The most significant challenges for 2023/24 are likely to be managing demand, including reducing referrals to children's social care when families do not require a statutory intervention; and increasing costs of delivering services, including the cost of placements that can meet the needs of children. Key to addressing demand will be implementing changes to the 'front door' following a peer review to be completed in Q2 of 2023/24. Key to ensuring that children are cared for in placements that can best meet their needs and provide the best value for money is the continuation of the Circle to Success programme in 2023/24.

The financial challenges faced for children's services and the rest of the public sector are likely to increase during 2023/24. Whilst the government is proposing changes intended to improve the national workforce and placements situation, these will take some time to have impact. NCT, alongside the Councils and other statutory partners, will continue to seek to make the best use of resources and achieve value for money in the challenging national and local financial context. This includes delivering savings, managing budgets effectively and highlighting where budgets are out of step with demand.

The external reviews completed in 2022/23, particularly the DfE Advisor's review of assurance arrangements between the NCT, WNC and NNC; DfE Advisor's review of NCT's quality assurance and performance management and the LGA's second Insight report into Northamptonshire Children's Trust arrangements, have provided helpful reflection and recommendations for effective delivery of children's services in the Northamptonshire context. NCT will work with the Councils to agree and implement actions arising from these reviews.

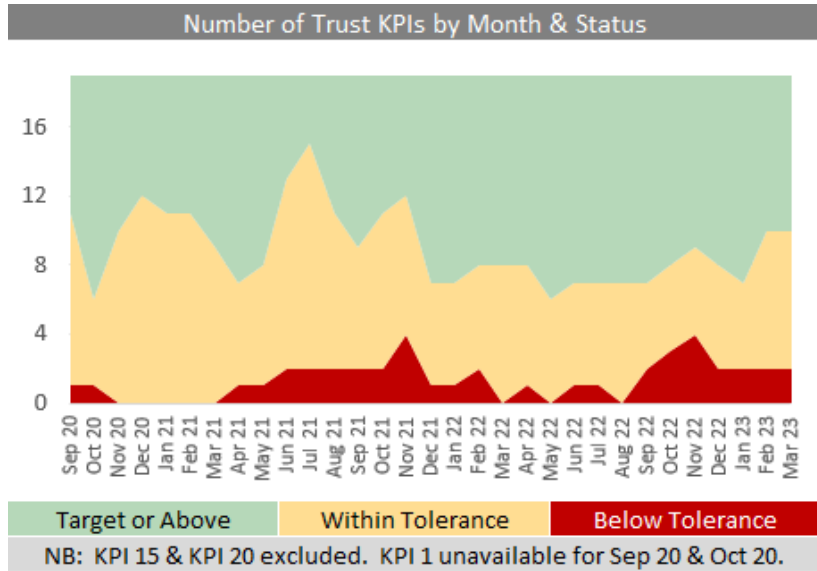
Above all else, NCT will continue to keep children, young people and families at the heart of all we do – in every action we take and every decision we make. NCT will live out the commitment our children asked us to make to them – *What we do today affects your tomorrow, we promise to walk side by side with you.*

Appendix 1 – NCT Assurance and Governance

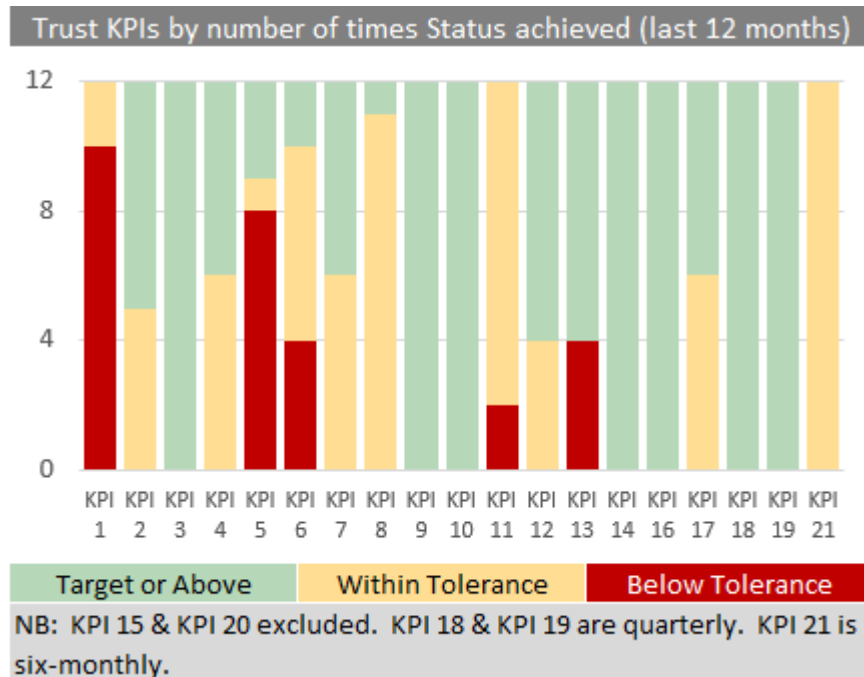


Appendix 2 – 2022/23 Performance against KPI's

Overview of KPI Performance



May 2022 was the period where NCT delivered the best performance against the KPI's where 13 KPIs were *At Target or Above*, 6 *Within Tolerance* and none *Below Tolerance*.

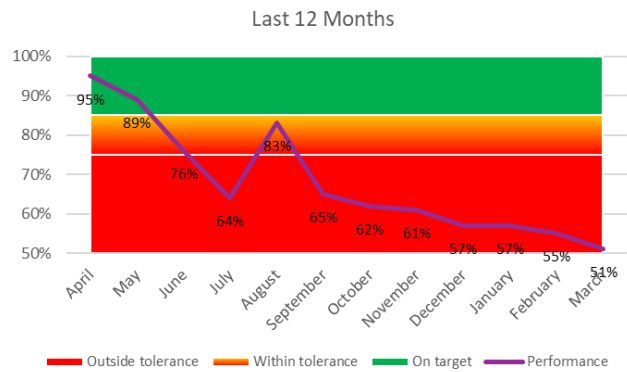
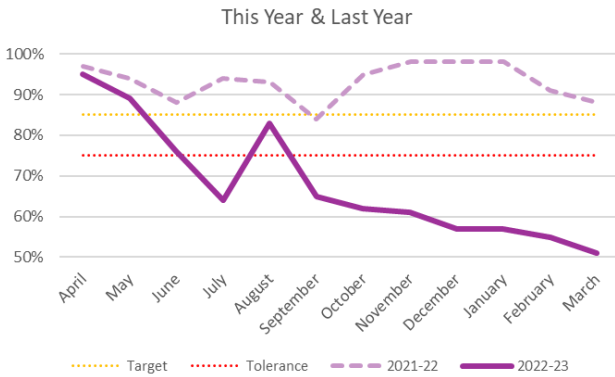


KPI's 18, 19, 20 & 21 are reported quarterly or bi-annually.

Individual KPI Performance

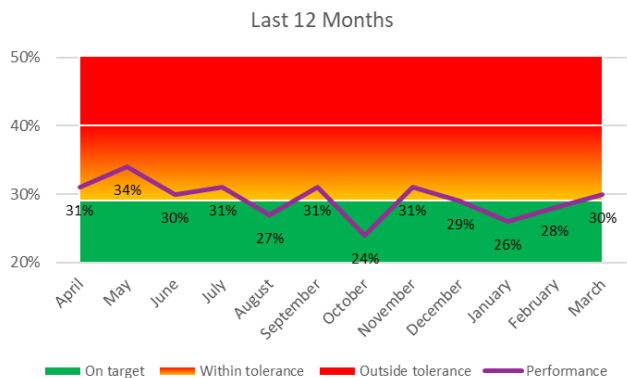
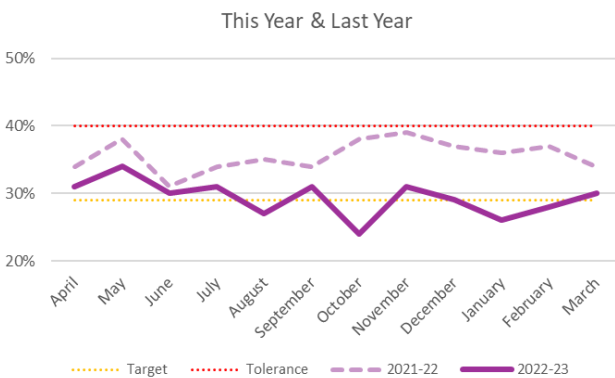
KPI 1 - % all referrals with a decision within 2 working days

2022/23 Overview

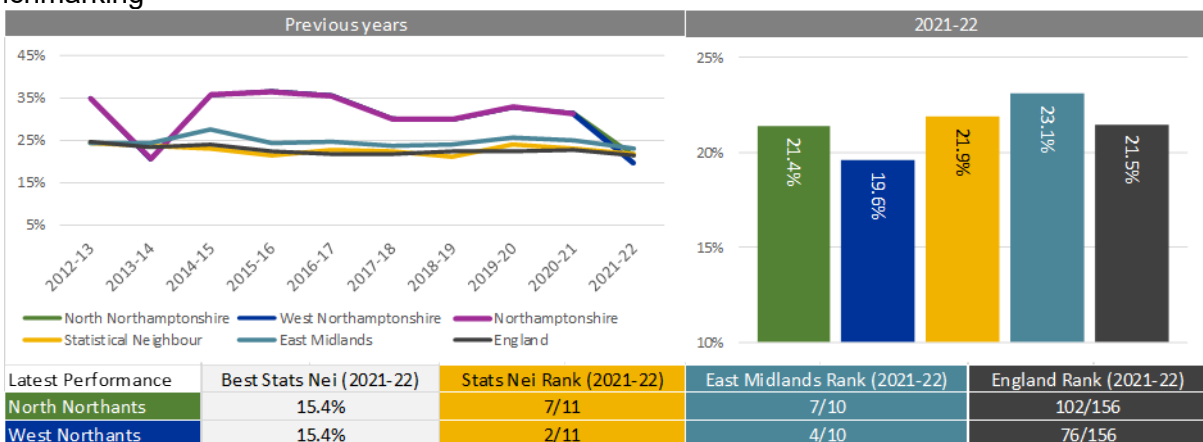


KPI 2 - % referrals with a previous referral within 12 months

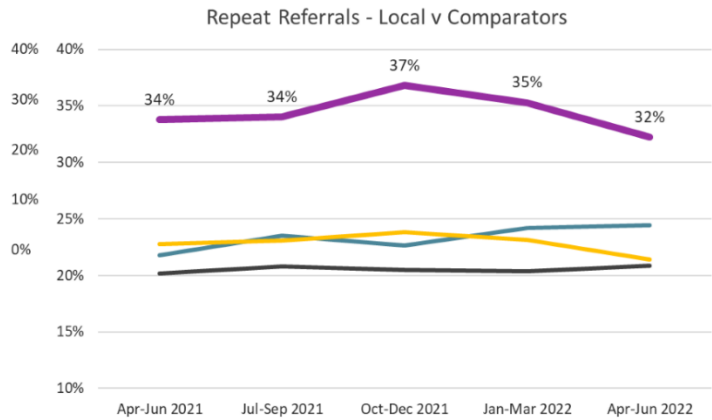
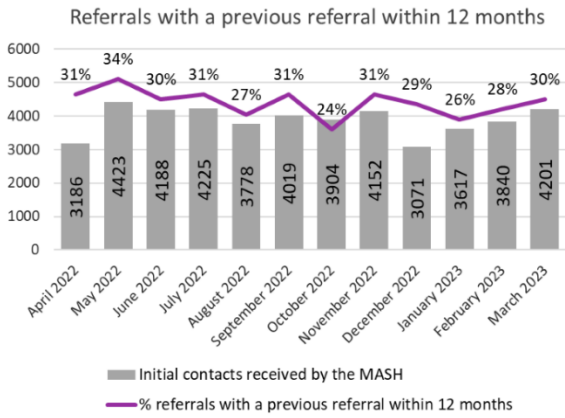
2022/23 Overview



Benchmarking

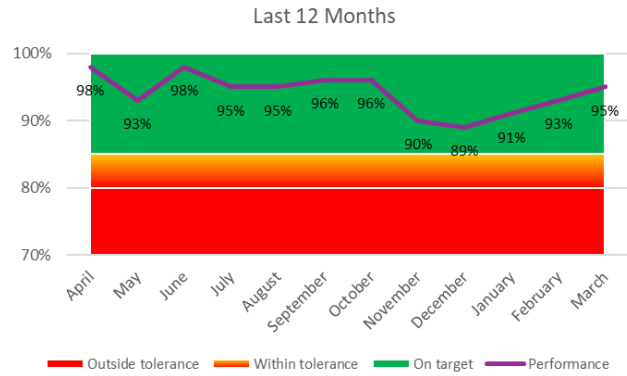
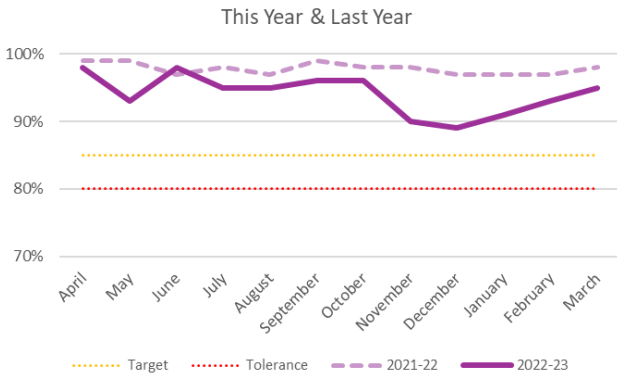


Contextual data

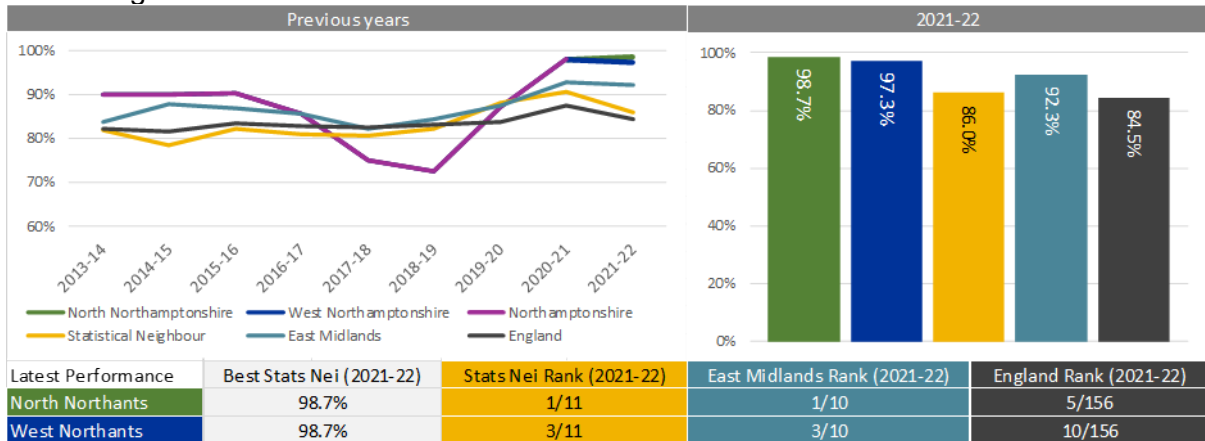


KPI 3 - % Single Assessments authorised within 45 working days

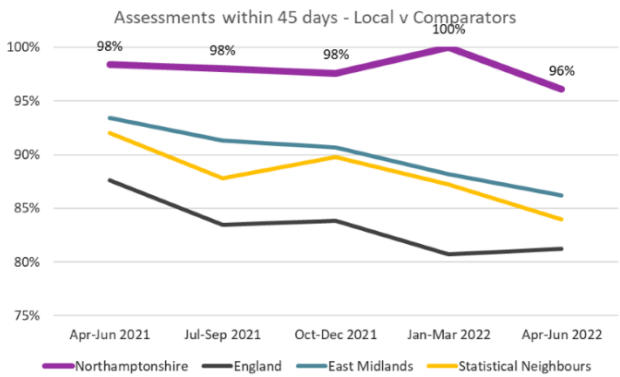
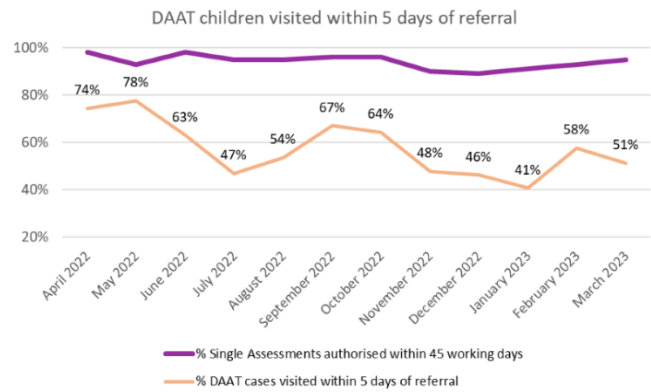
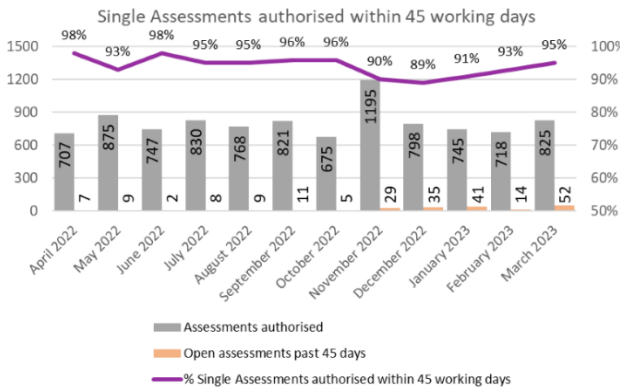
2022/23 Overview



Benchmarking

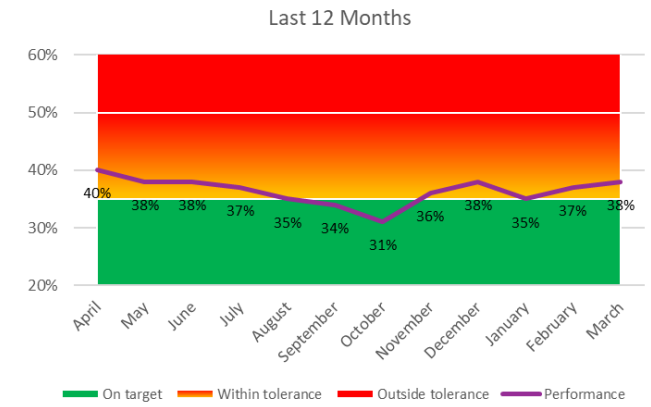
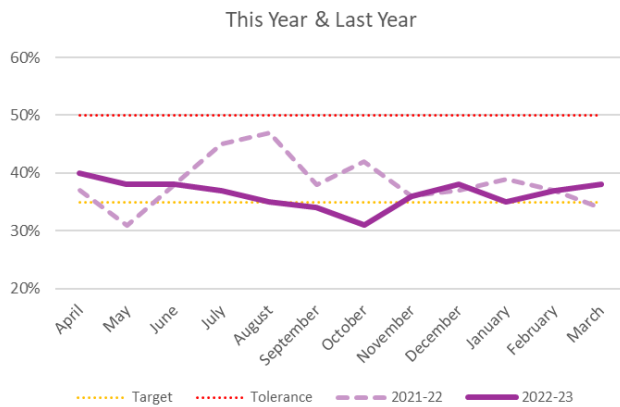


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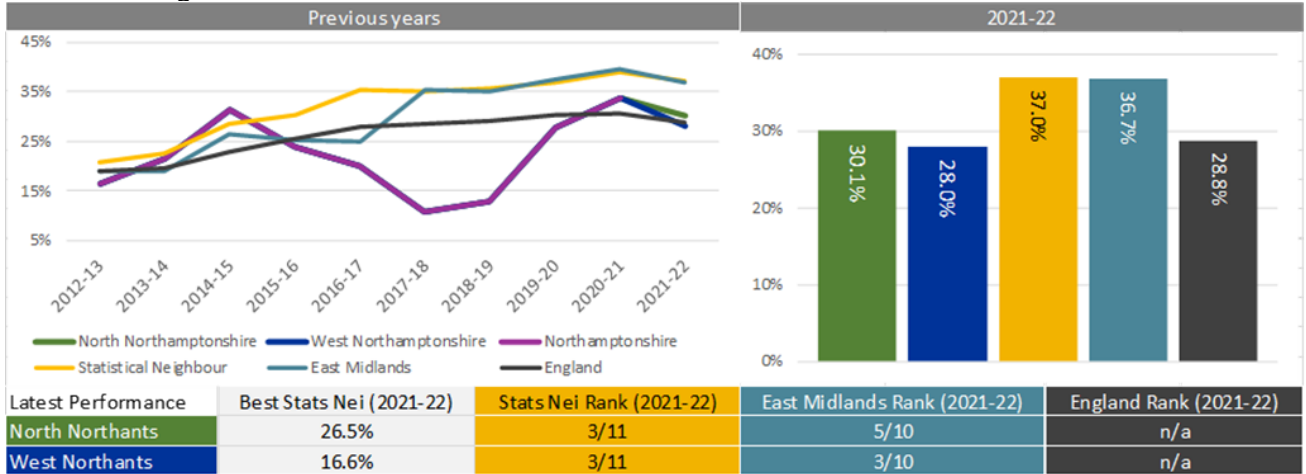


KPI 4 - % Single Assessments closing with no further action

2022/23 Overview

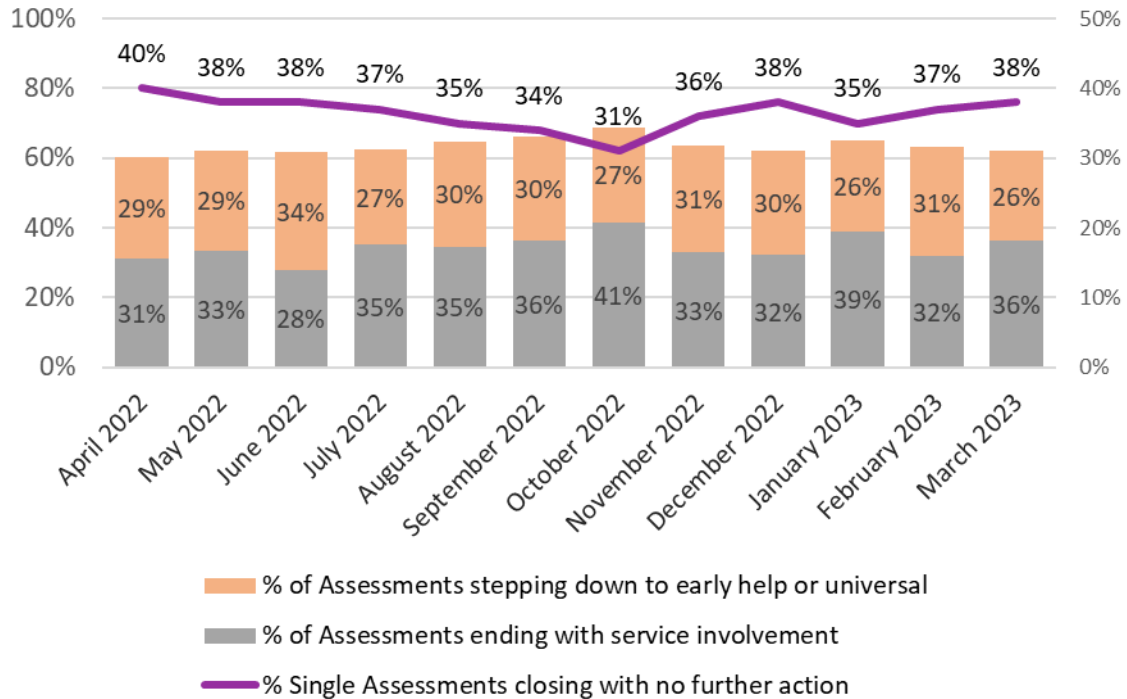


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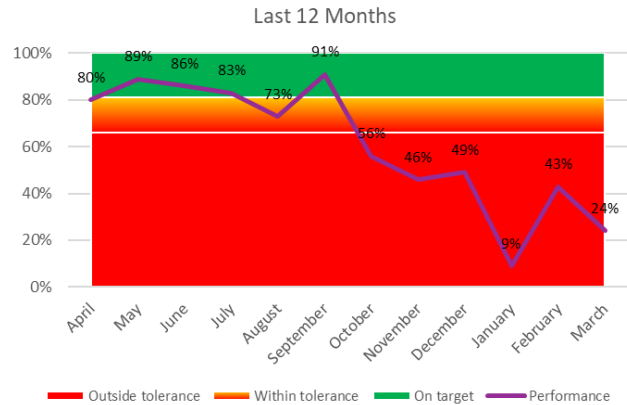
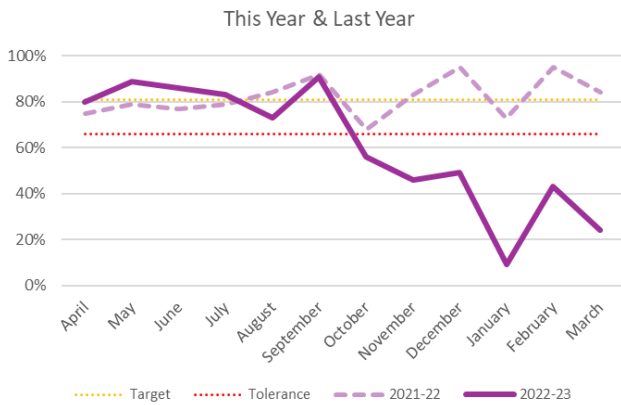
Contextual data

Single Assessments closing with no further action

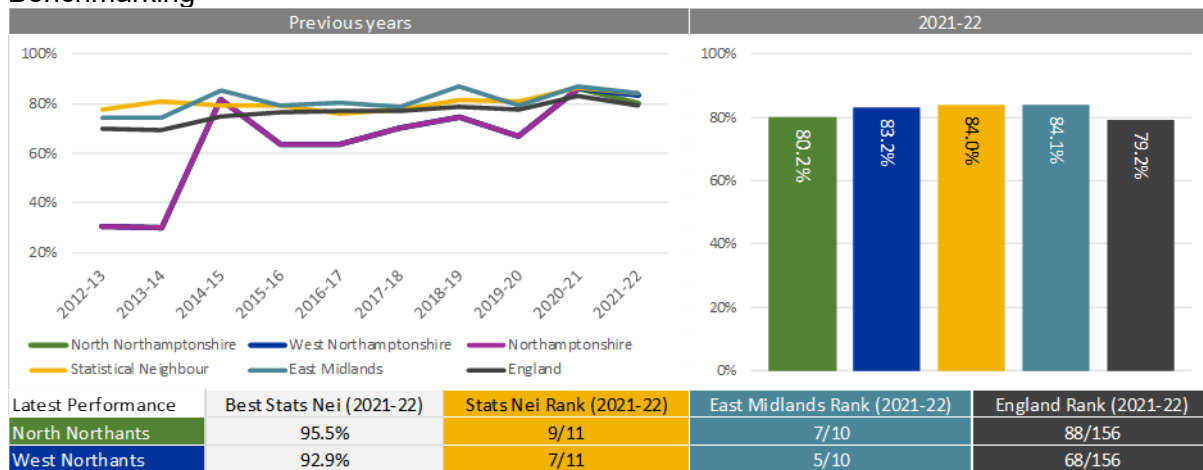


KPI 5 - % Initial Child Protection Conferences held within 15 days of a strategy discussion being initiated

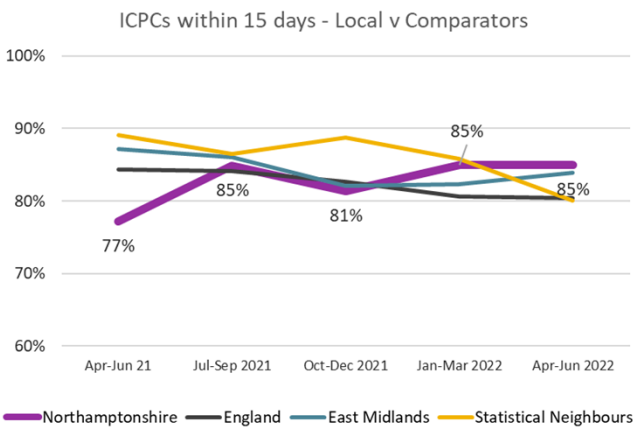
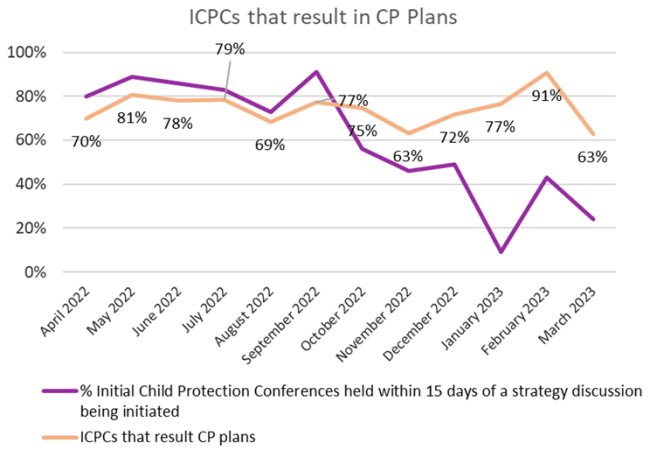
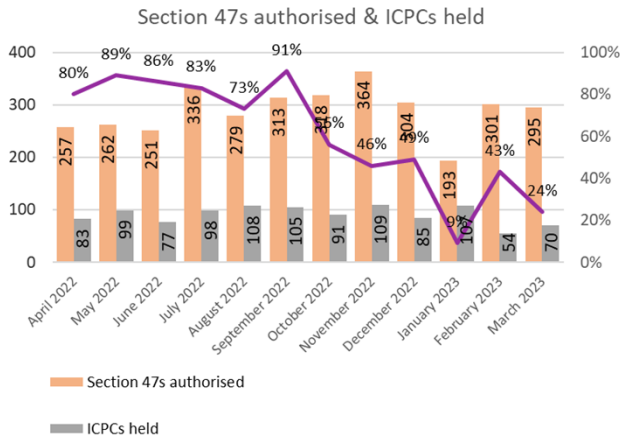
2022/23 Overview



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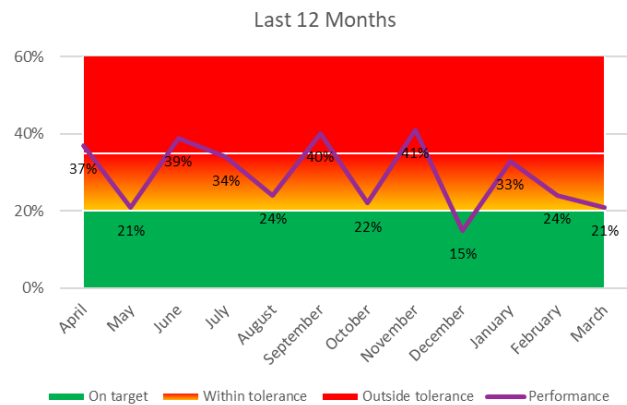
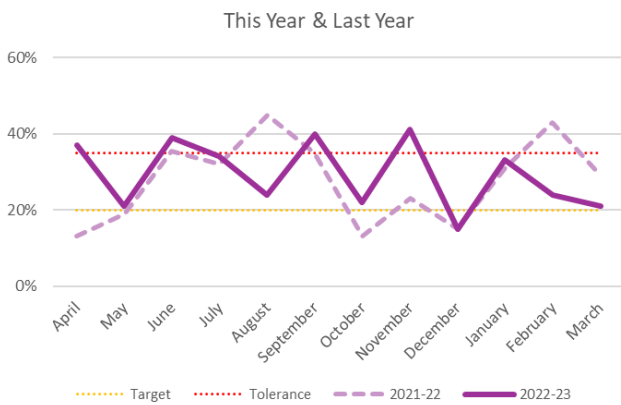


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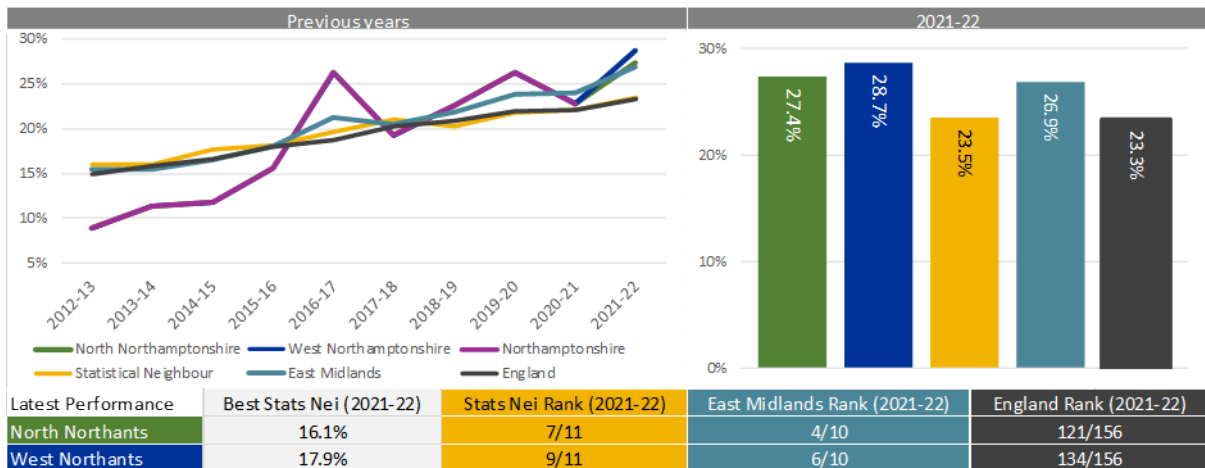


KPI 6 - % children that became the subject of a Child Protection Plan for the second or subsequent time

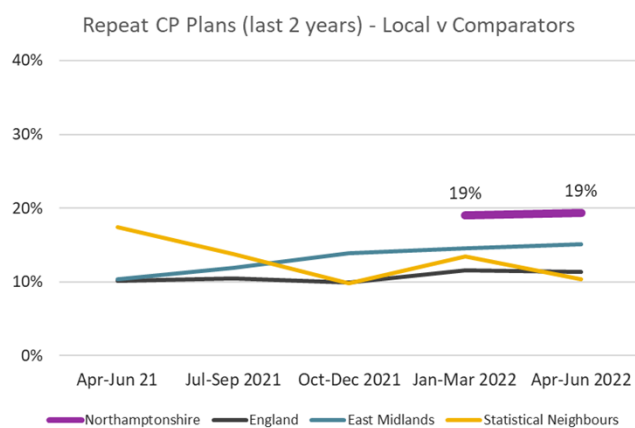
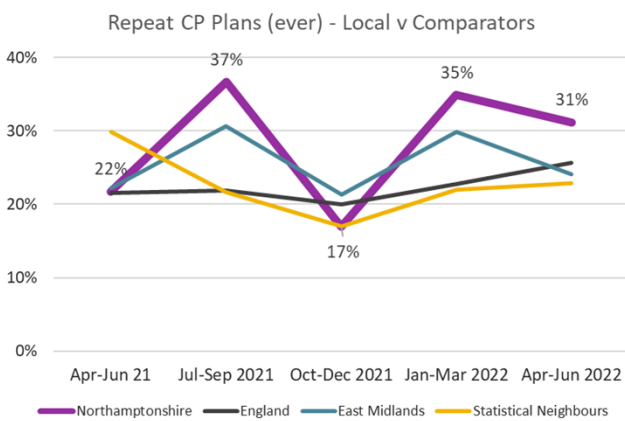
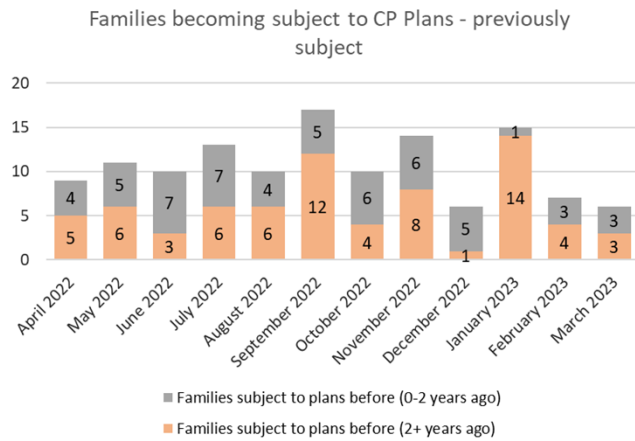
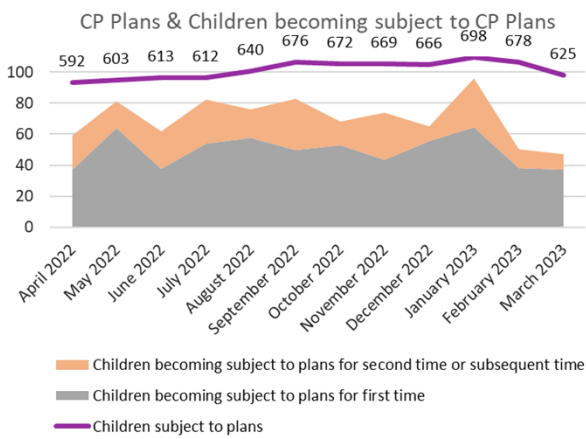
2022/23 Overview



Benchmarking

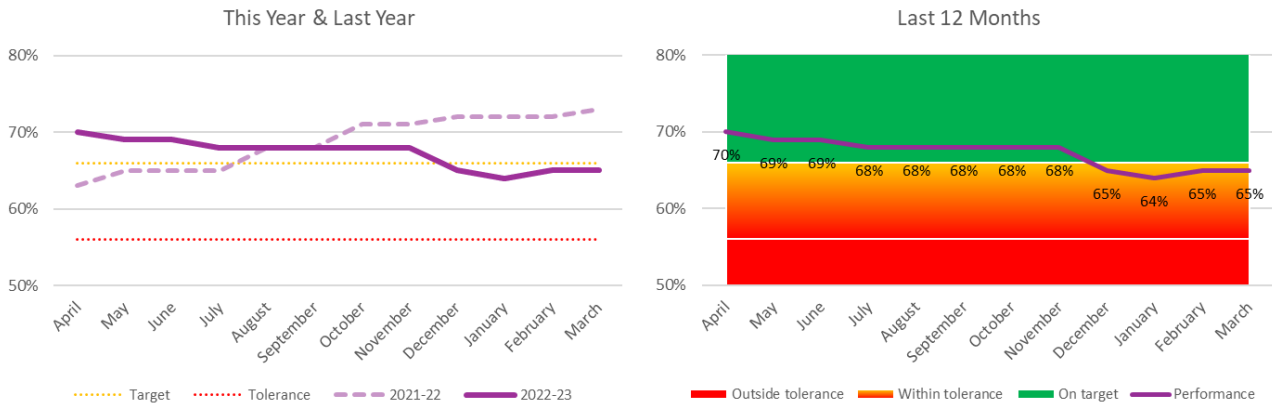


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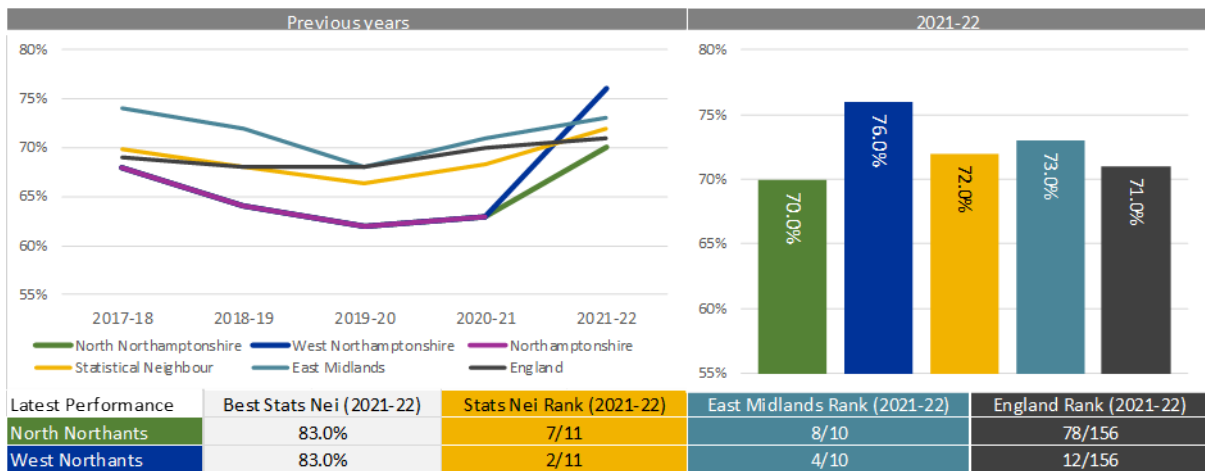


KPI 7 - % children in care 2.5 years or more who have been in the same placement for 2+ years/placed for adoption

2022/23 Overview

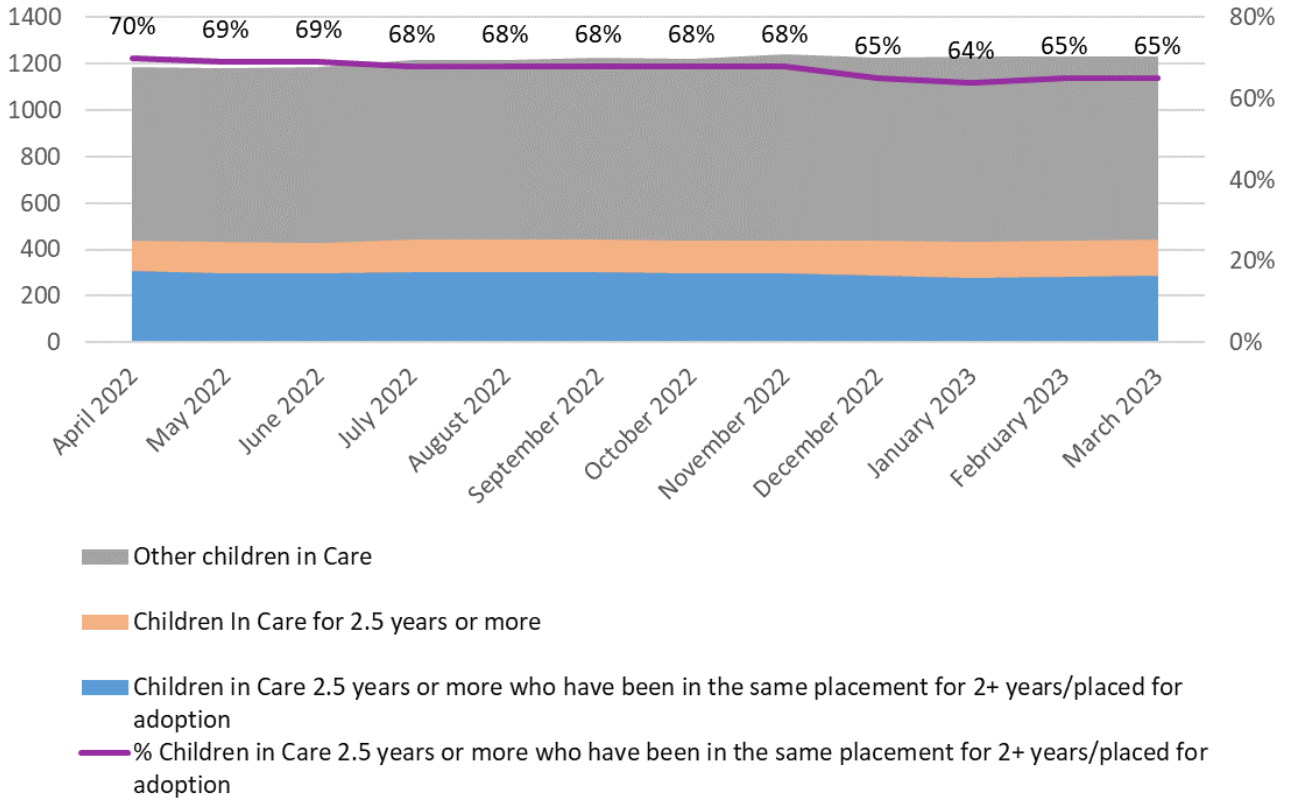


Benchmarking



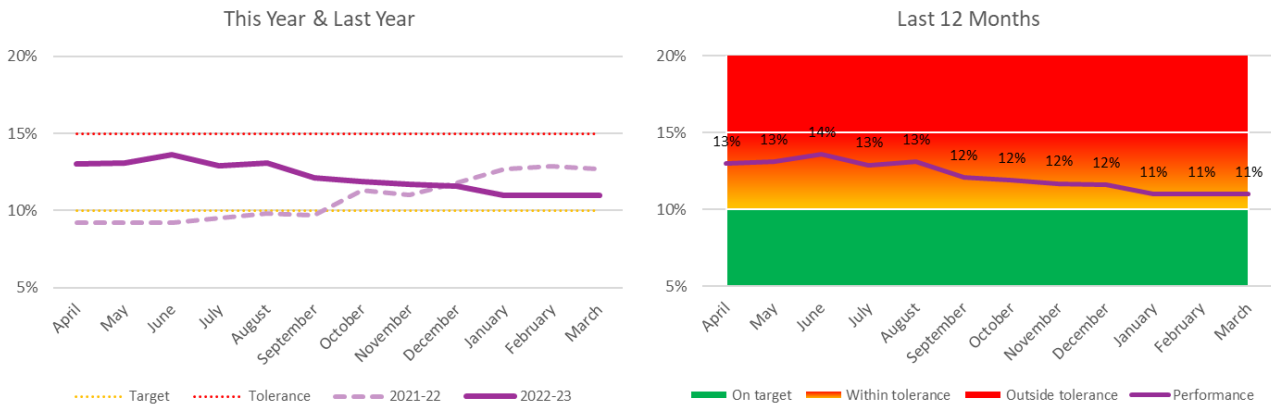
Contextual data

Children in Care for 2.5 years or more who have been in the same placement for 2+ years/placed for adoption

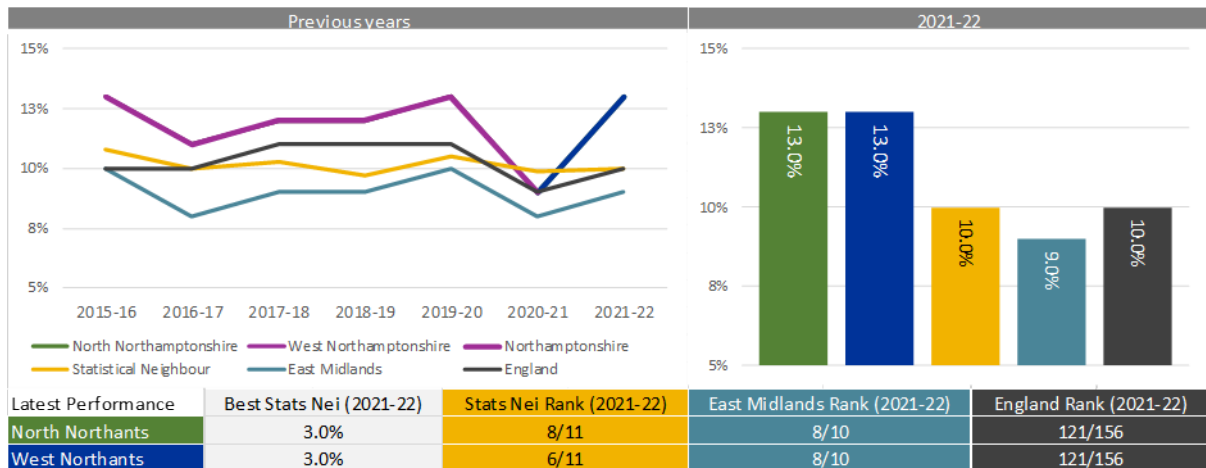


KPI 8 - % Children in Care with three or more placements in the previous 12 months

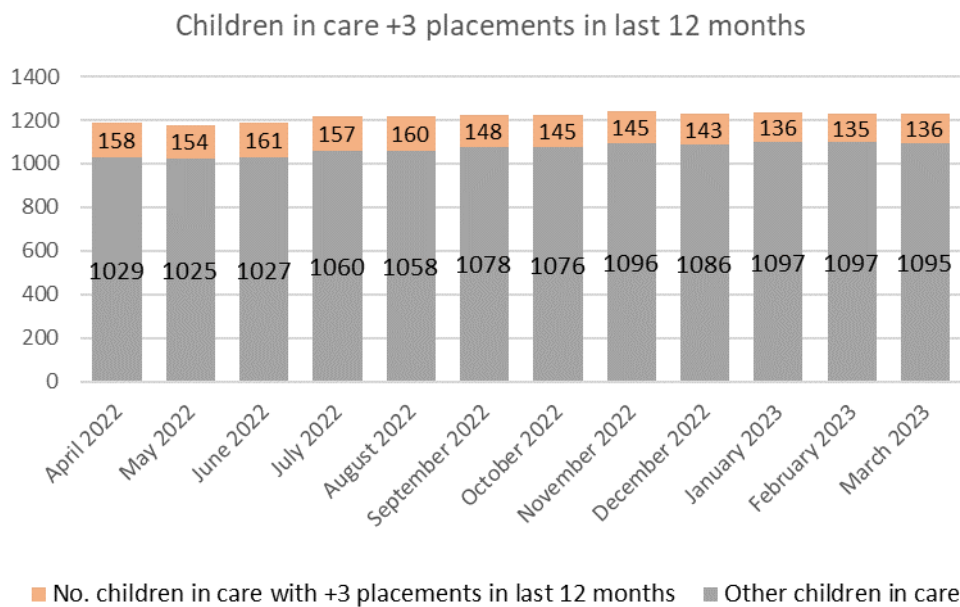
2022/23 Overview



Benchmarking

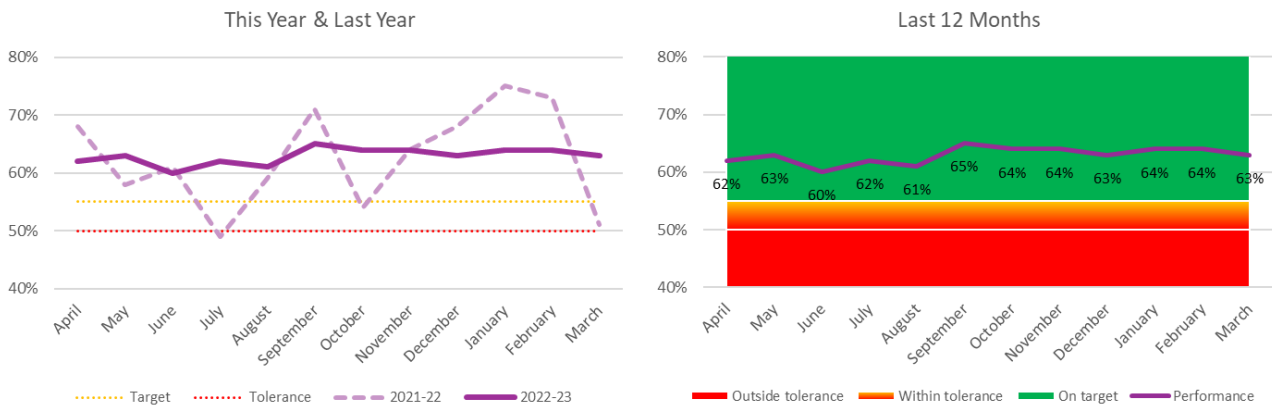


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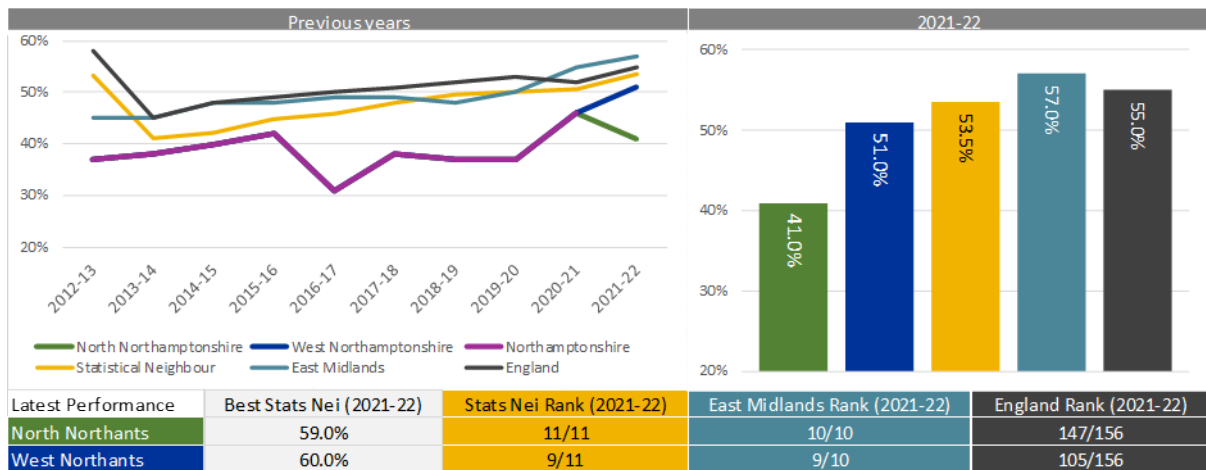


KPI 9 - % young people aged 17-21 in employment, education or training who were looked after when aged 16

2022/23 Overview

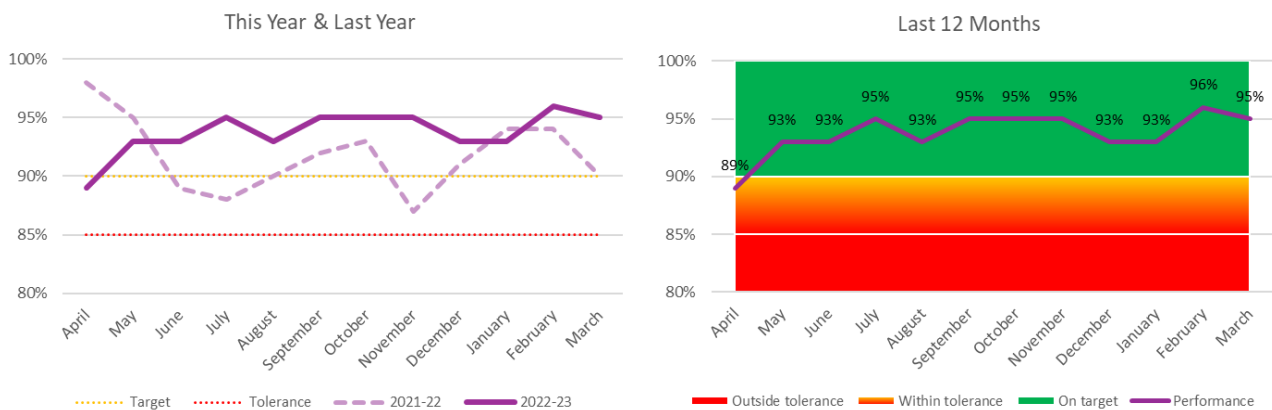


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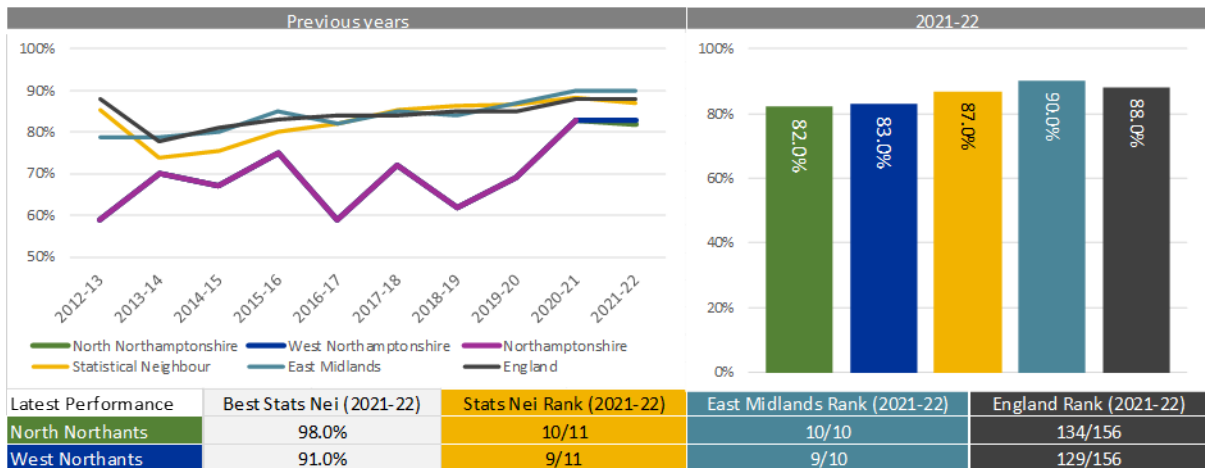


KPI 10 - % young people now aged 17-21 and living in suitable accommodation who were looked after when aged 16

2022/23 Overview

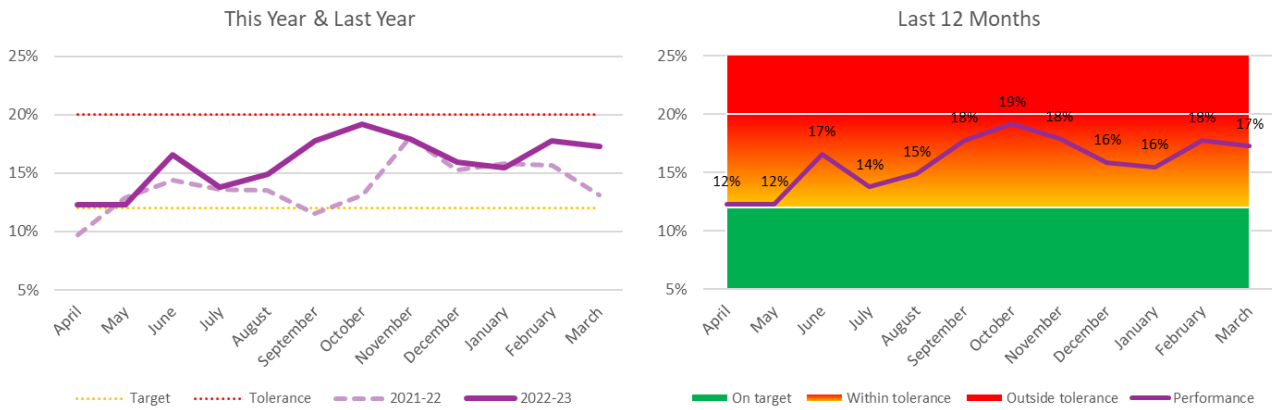


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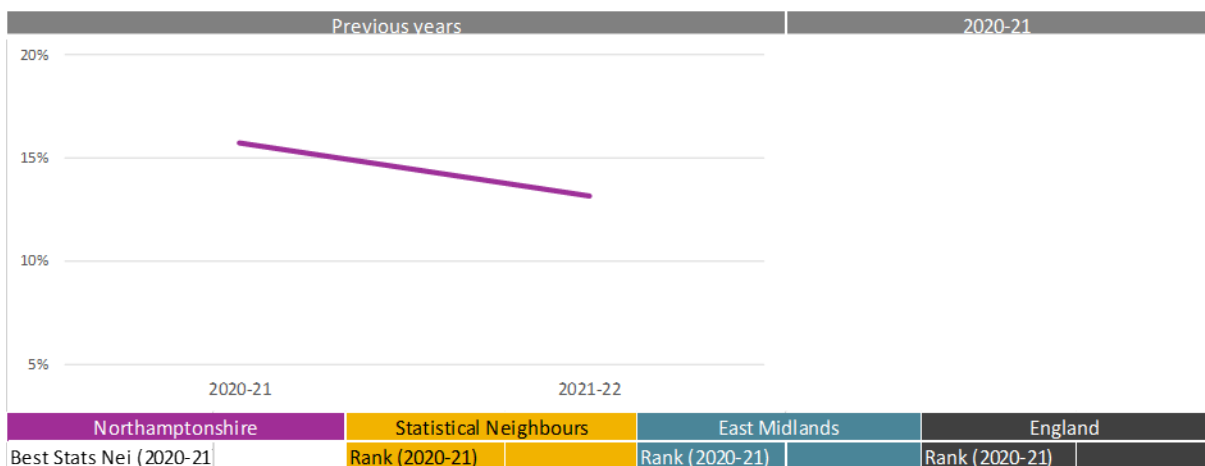


KPI 11 - % qualified social workers with caseloads above target

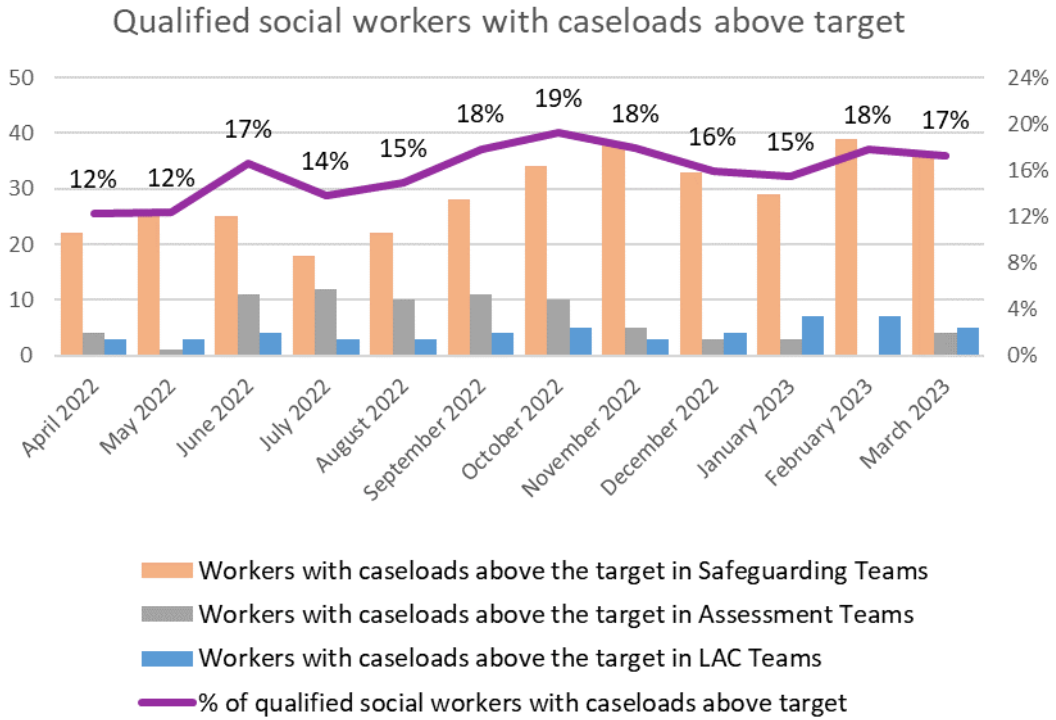
2022/23 Overview



Benchmarking

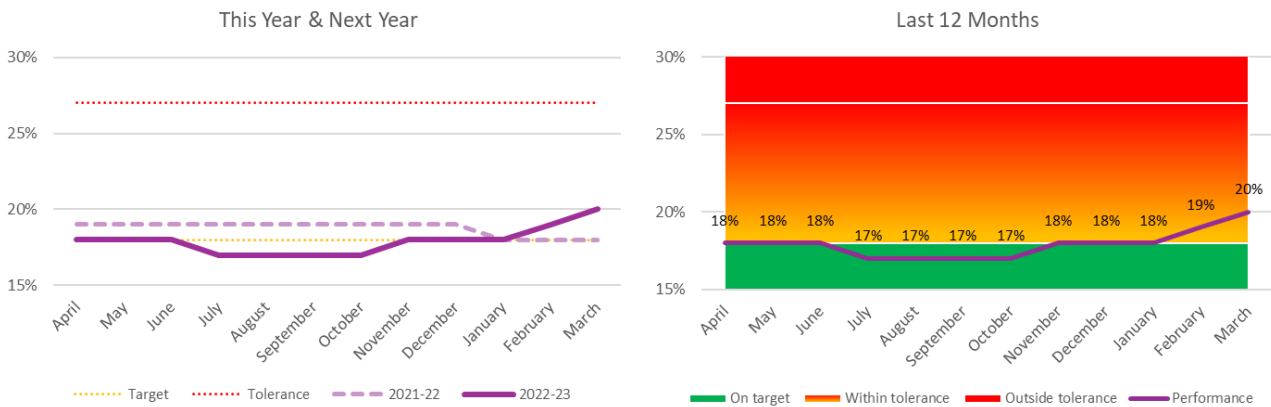


Contextual data

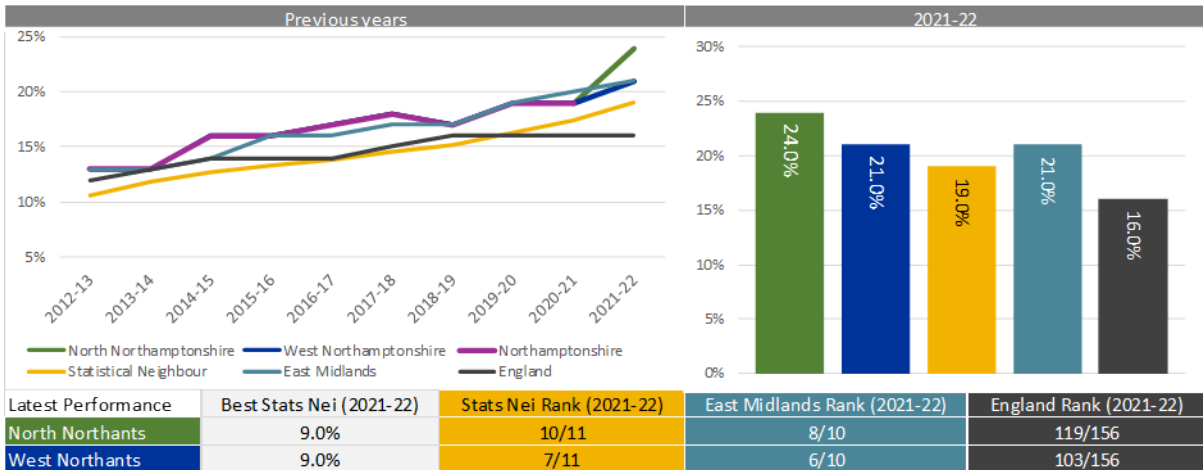


KPI 12 - % of children placed more than 20 miles from their homes, outside LA boundary

2022/23 Overview

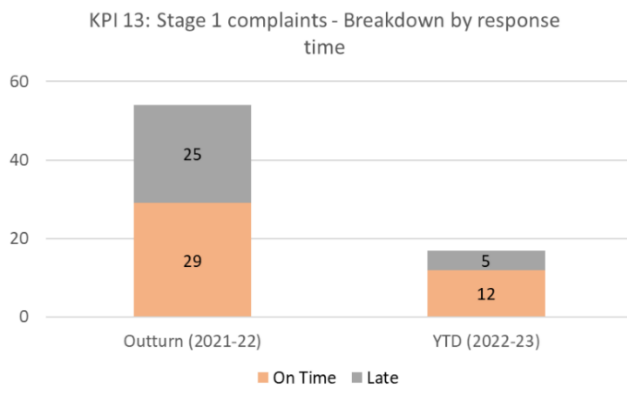
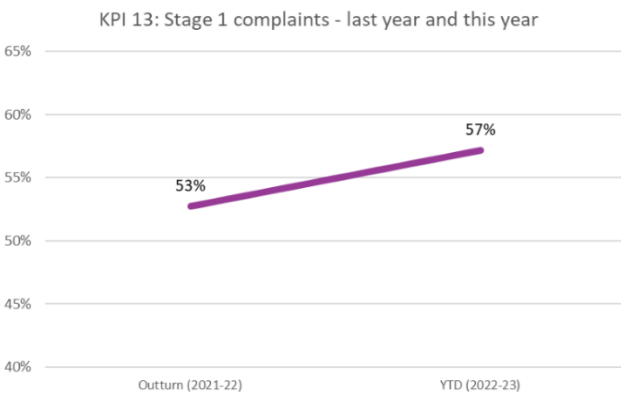
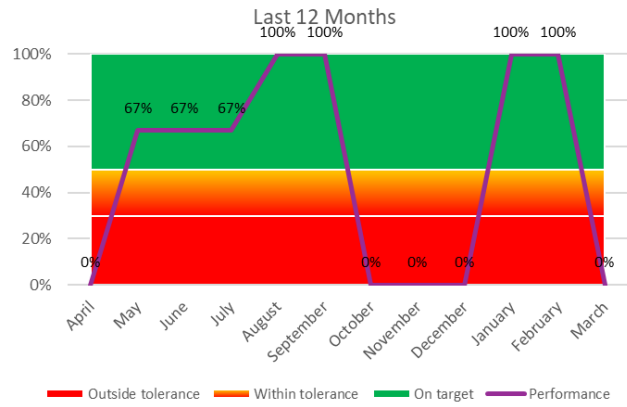
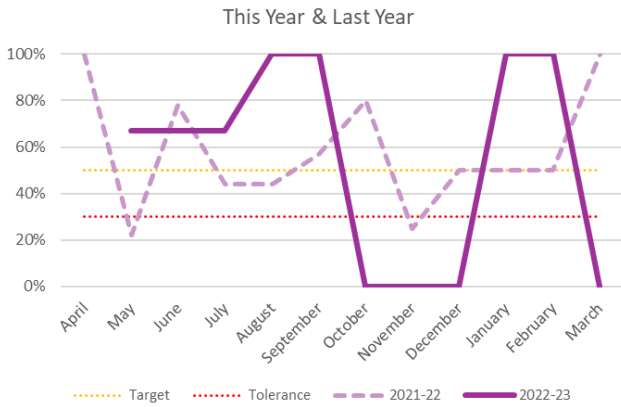


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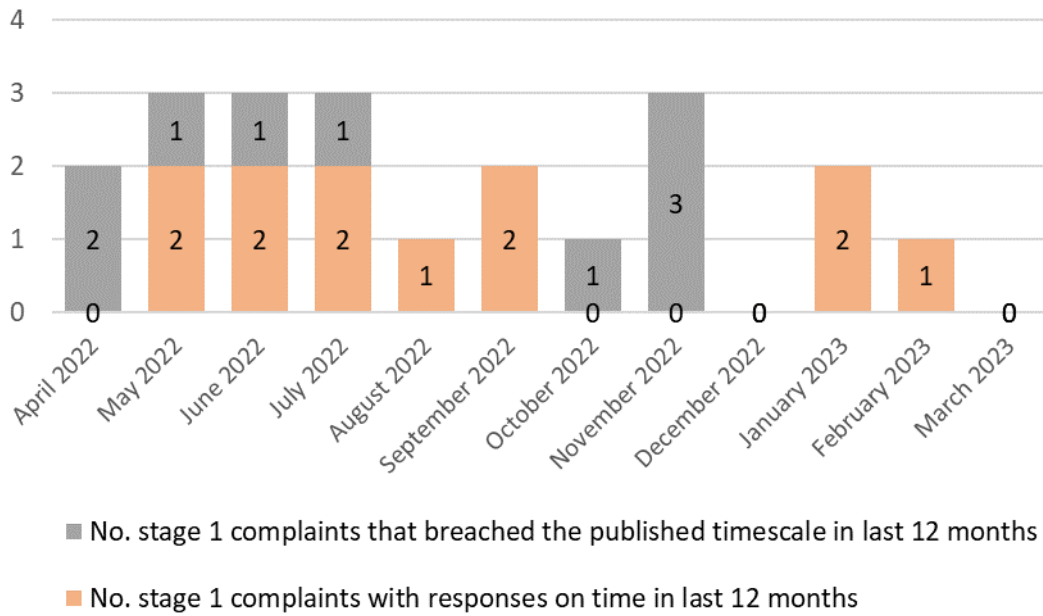


KPI 13 - % stage 1 complaints responded to within 10 working days

2022/23 Overview

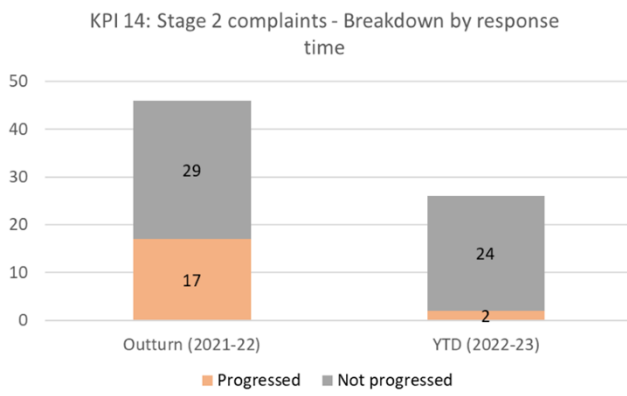
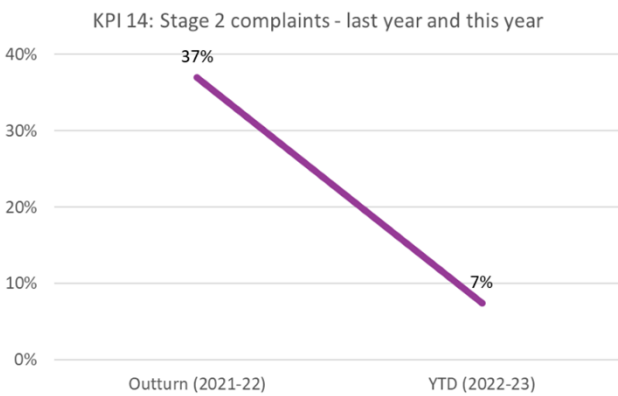
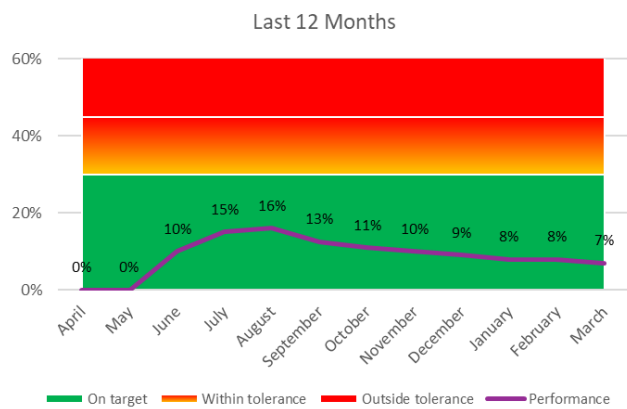
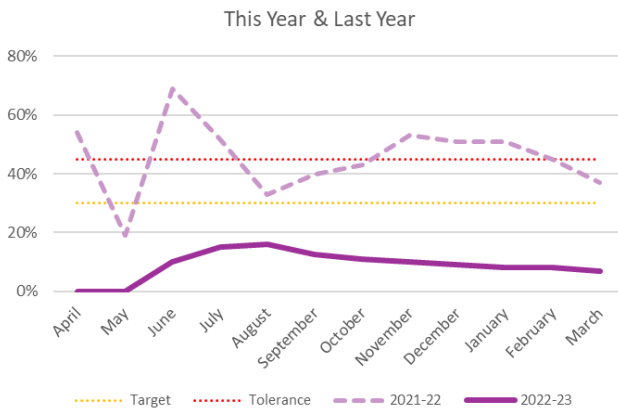


Stage 1 complaints in the last 12 months



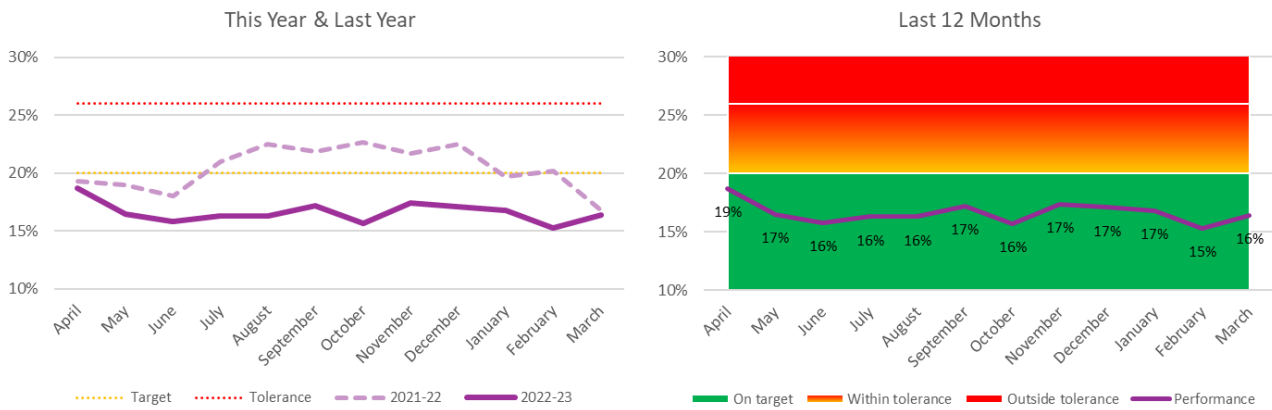
KPI 14 - Stage 2 investigations as a % of stage 1 complaints received within the year

2022/23 Overview

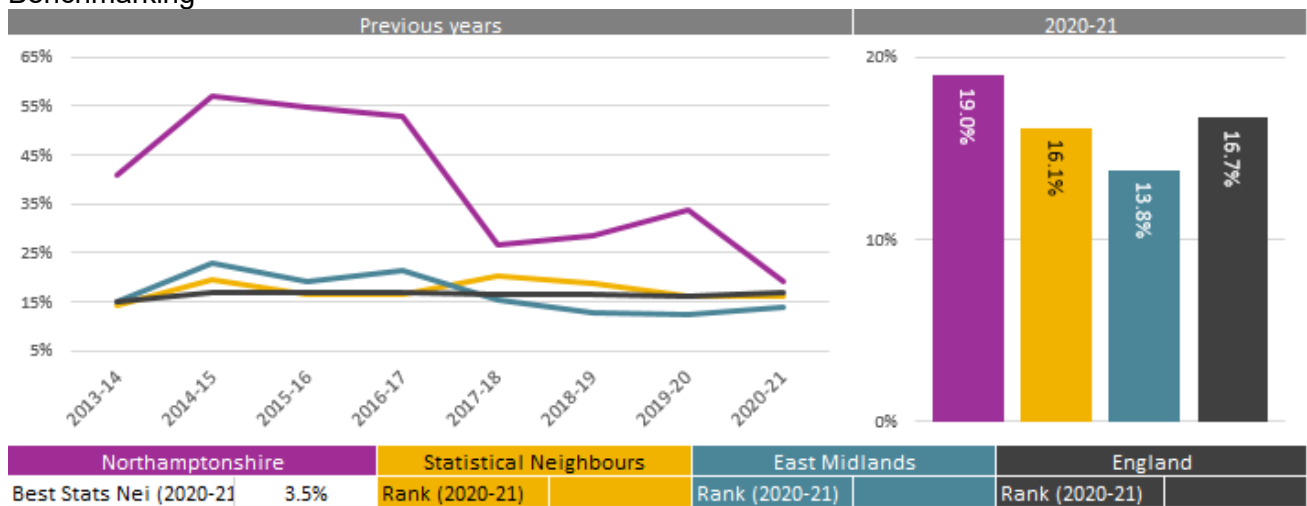


KPI 16 - % social worker vacancies

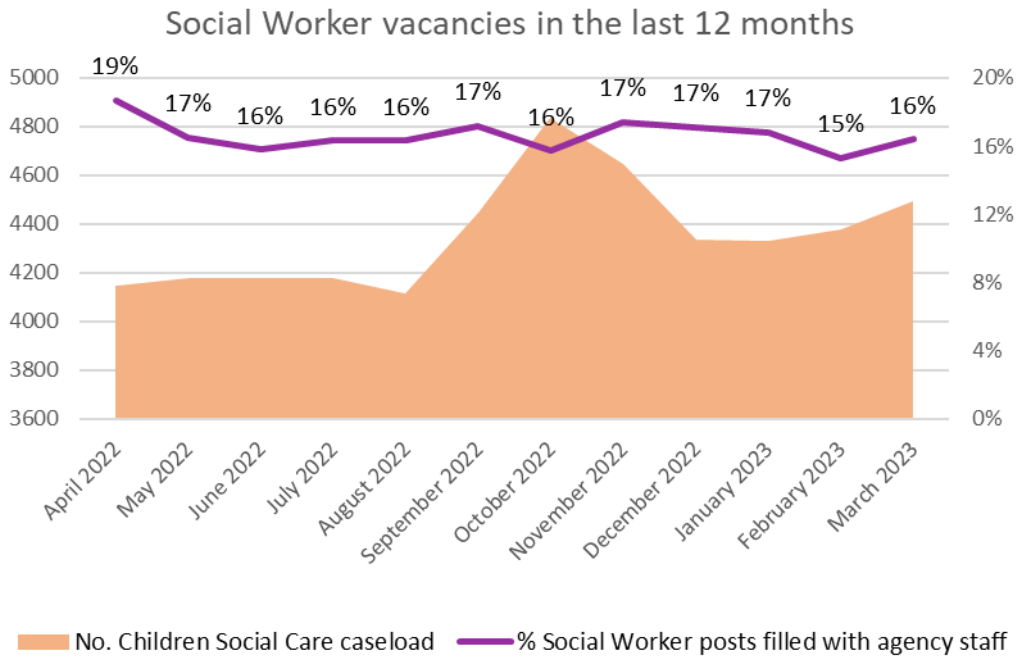
2022/23 Overview



Benchmarking

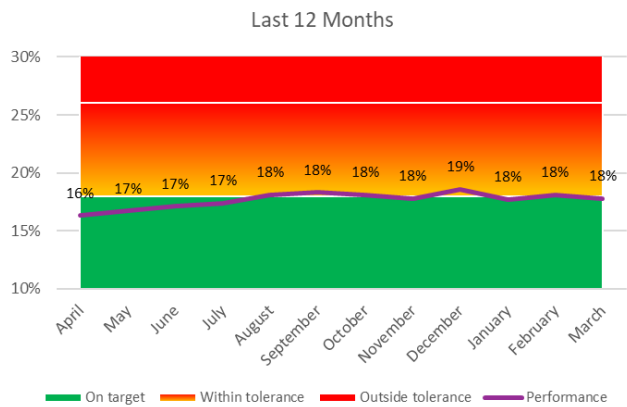
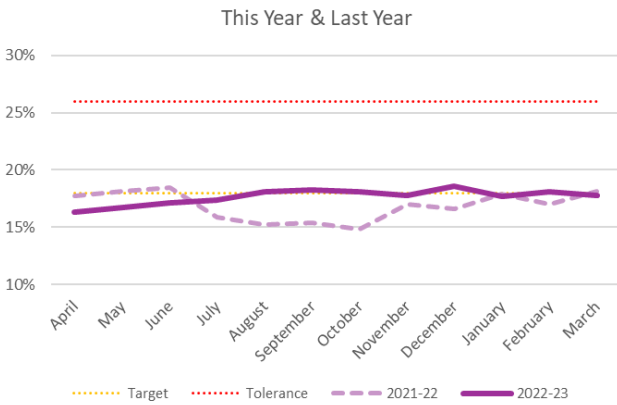


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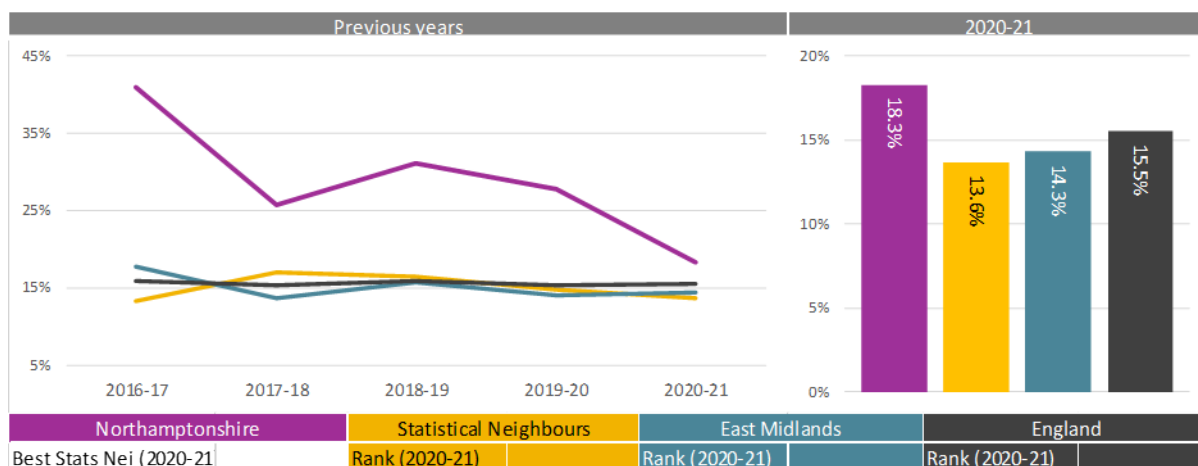


KPI 17 - % Social Worker posts filled with agency staff

2022/23 Overview

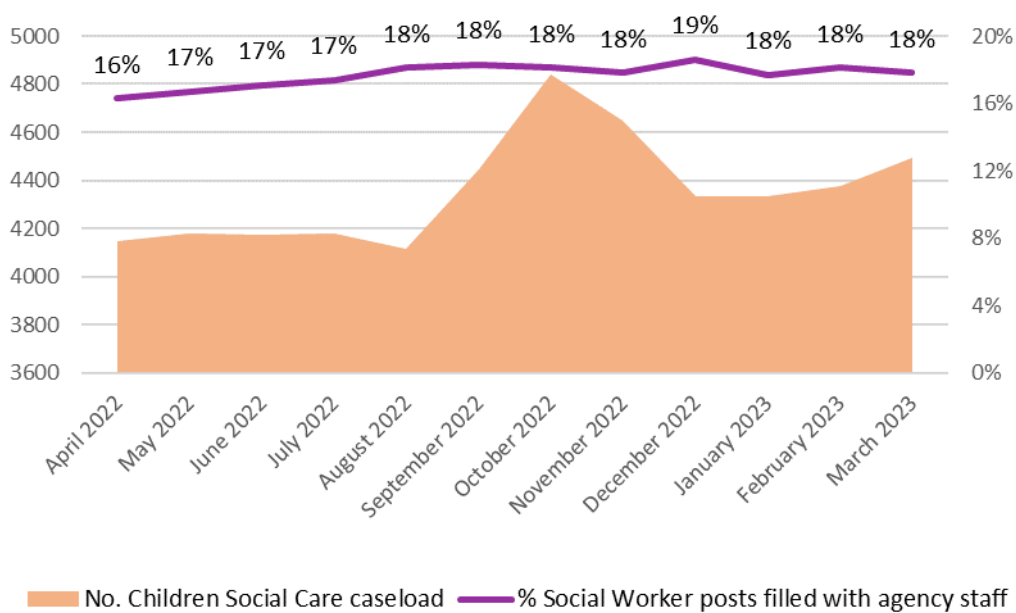


Benchmarking



Contextual data

Social Worker vacancies filled with agency staff in the last 12 months

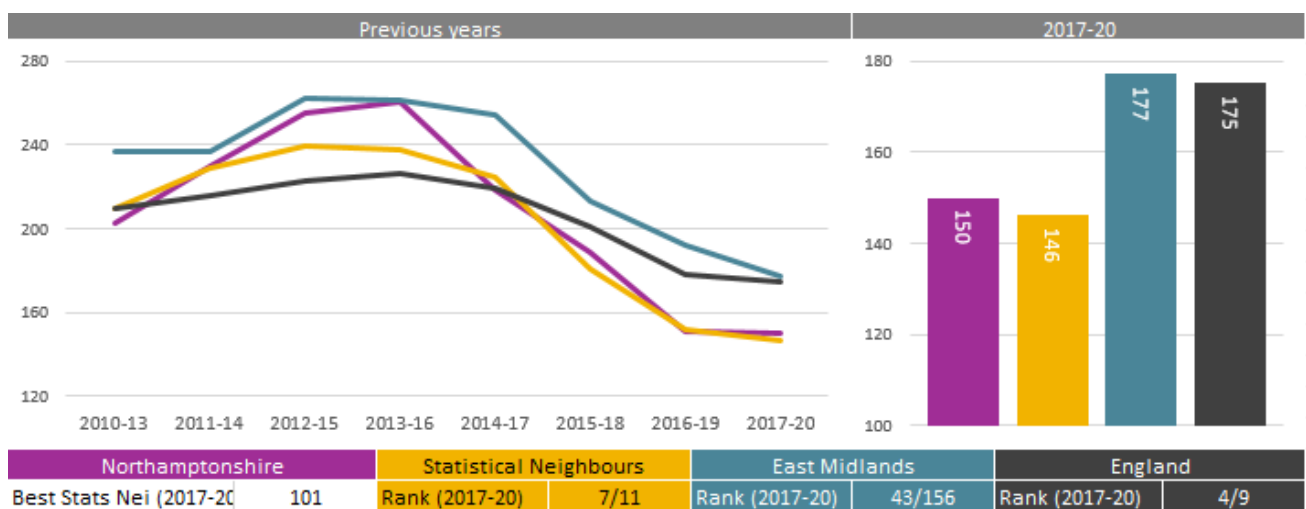


KPI 18 - Average time between the LA receiving court authority to place a child for adoption and deciding on a match

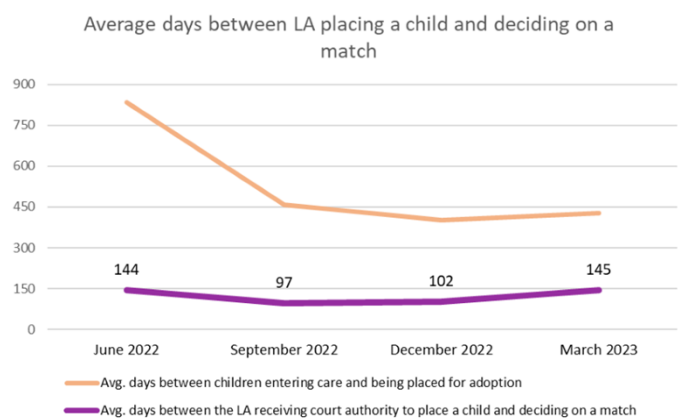
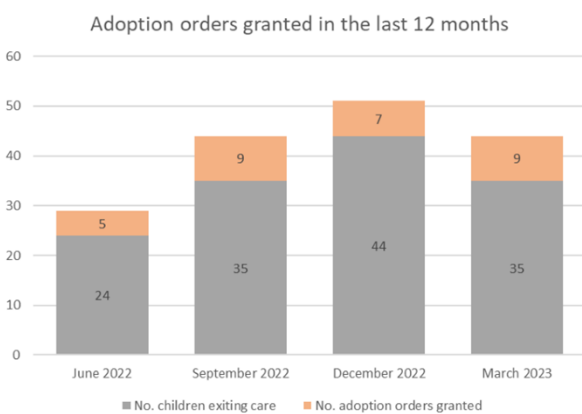
2022/23 Overview



Benchmarking

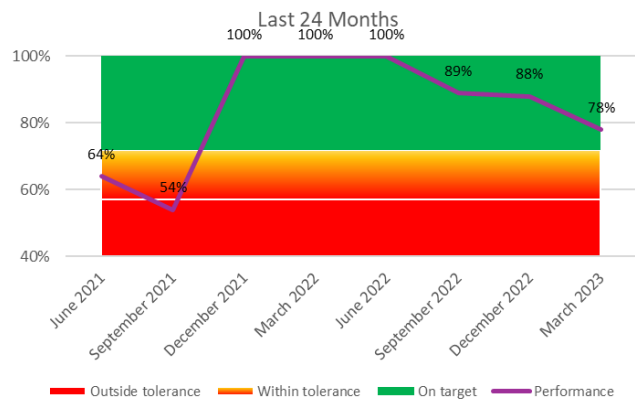
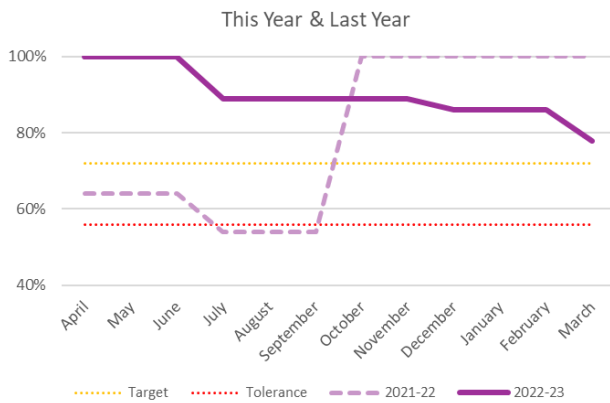


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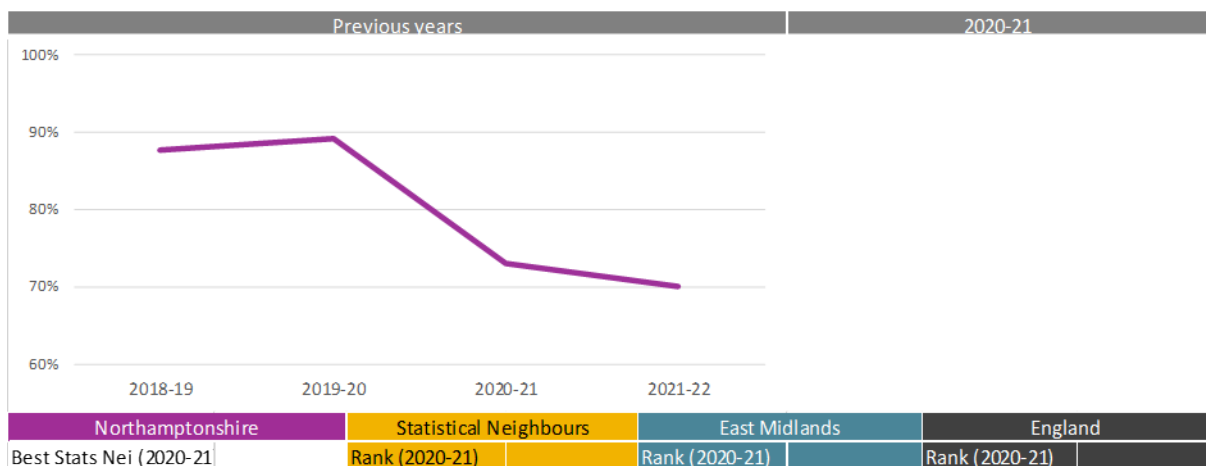


KPI 19 - % children in care placed for adoption within 12 months of an agency decision that they should be adopted

2022/23 Overview

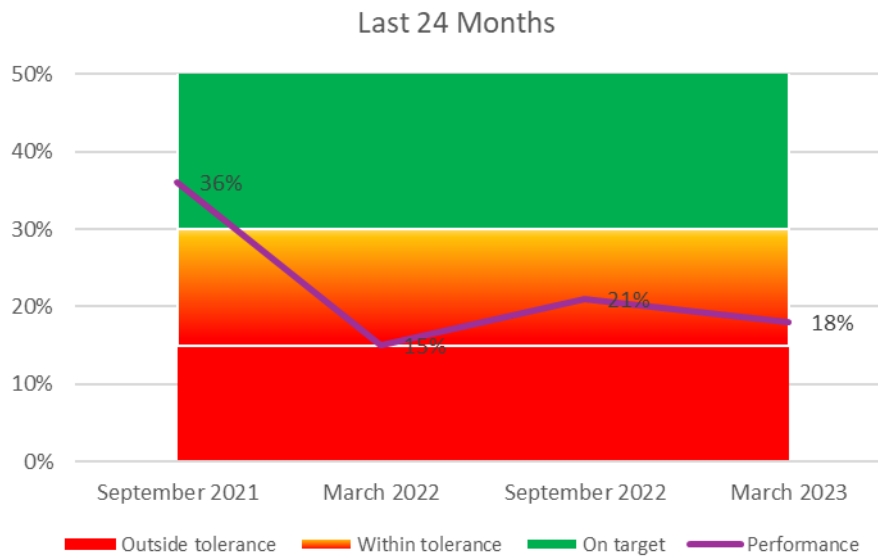


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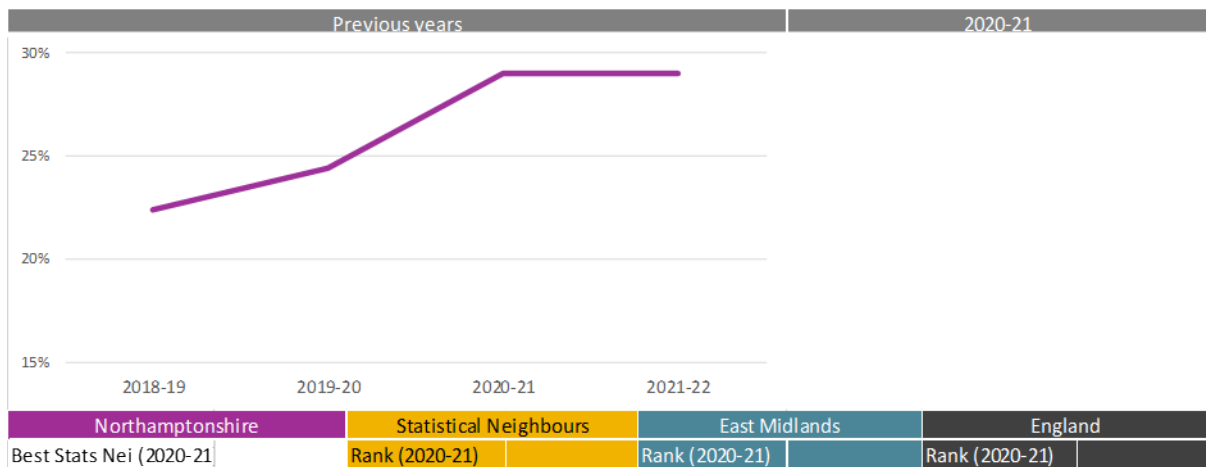


KPI 21 - % children leaving care due to permanence (Special Guardianship Order, adoption, residence order)

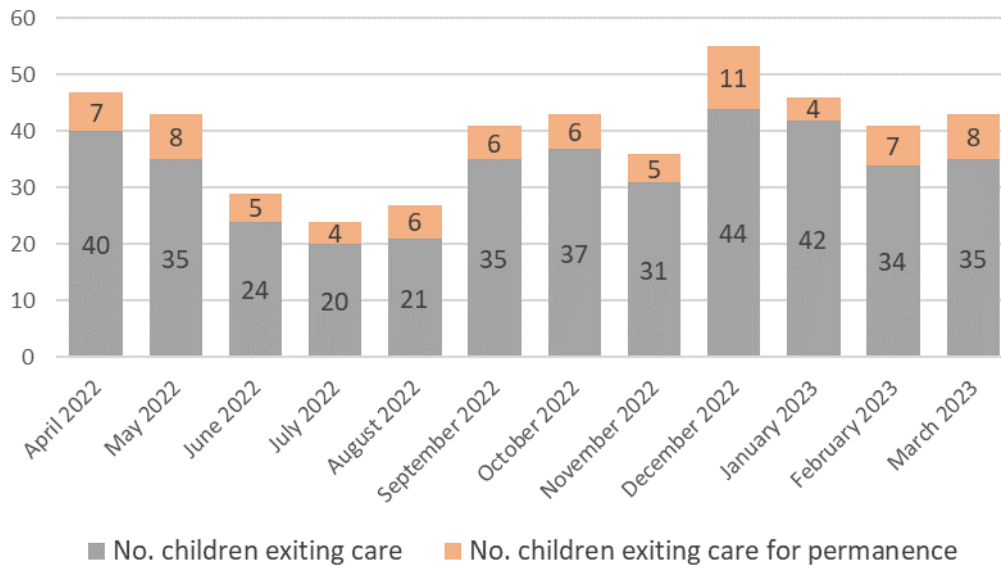
2022/23 Overview



Benchmarking



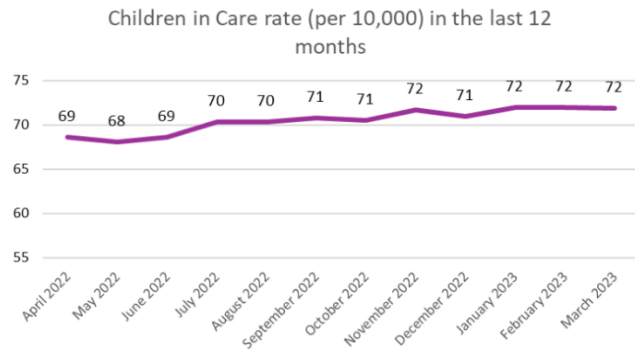
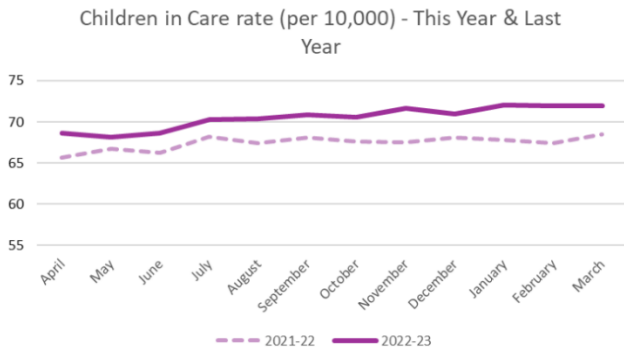
Children leaving care due to permanence



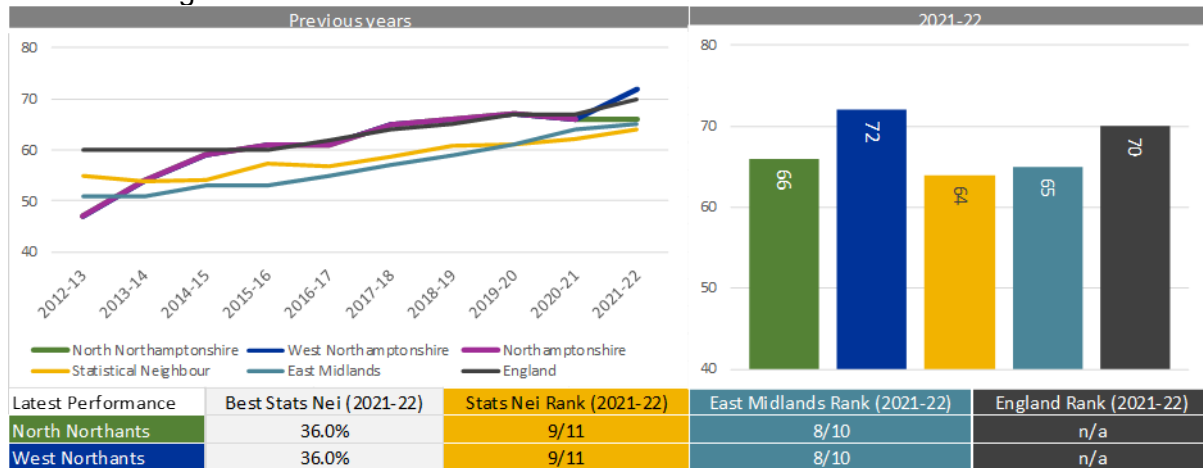
Appendix 2 – Supporting data analysis and NCT Performance Scorecard as at March 2023

Children in Care

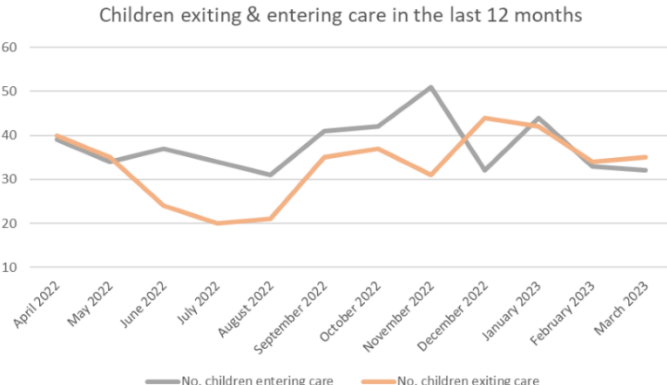
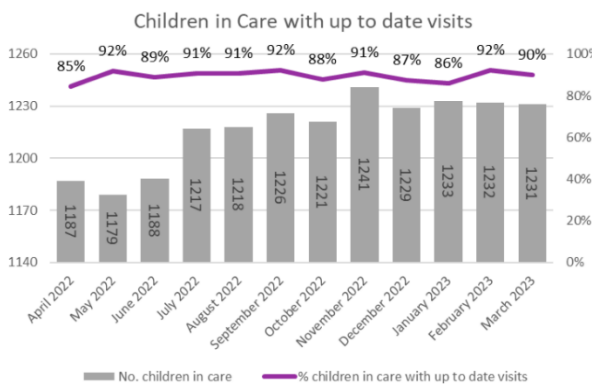
2022/23 Overview



Benchmarking

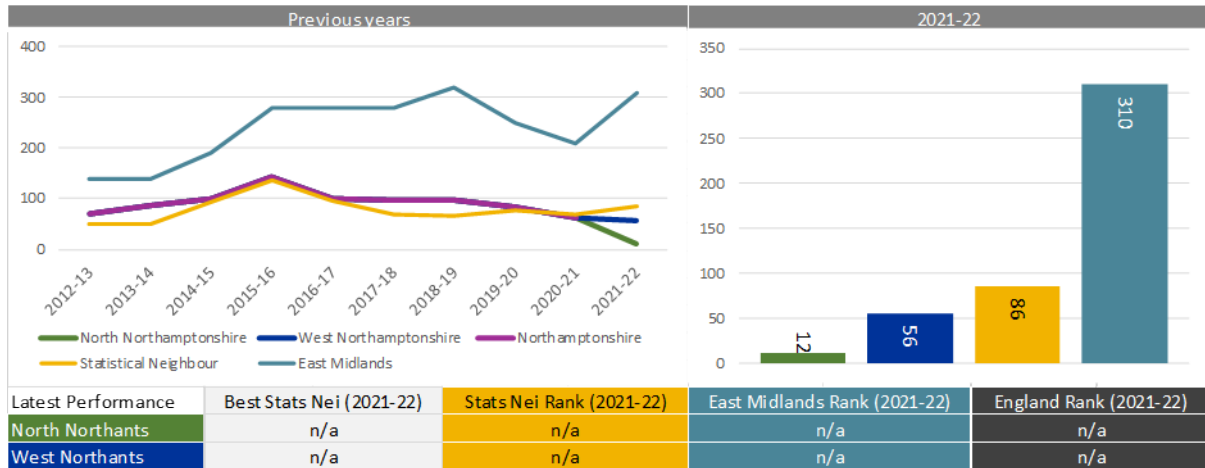


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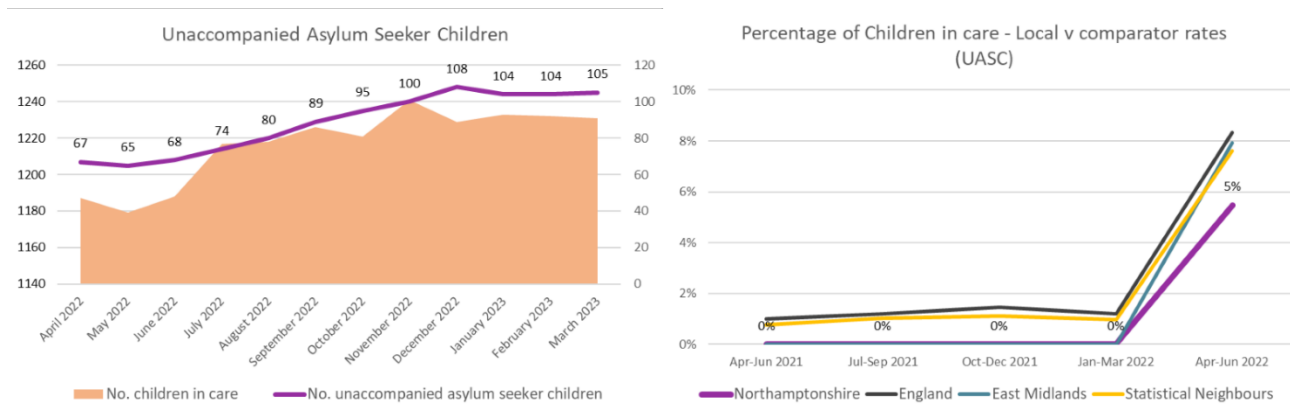


Separated Children

Benchmarking

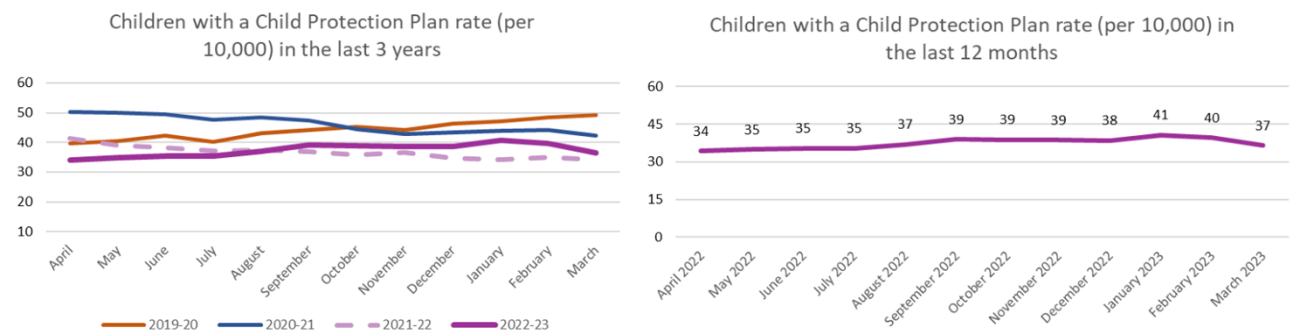


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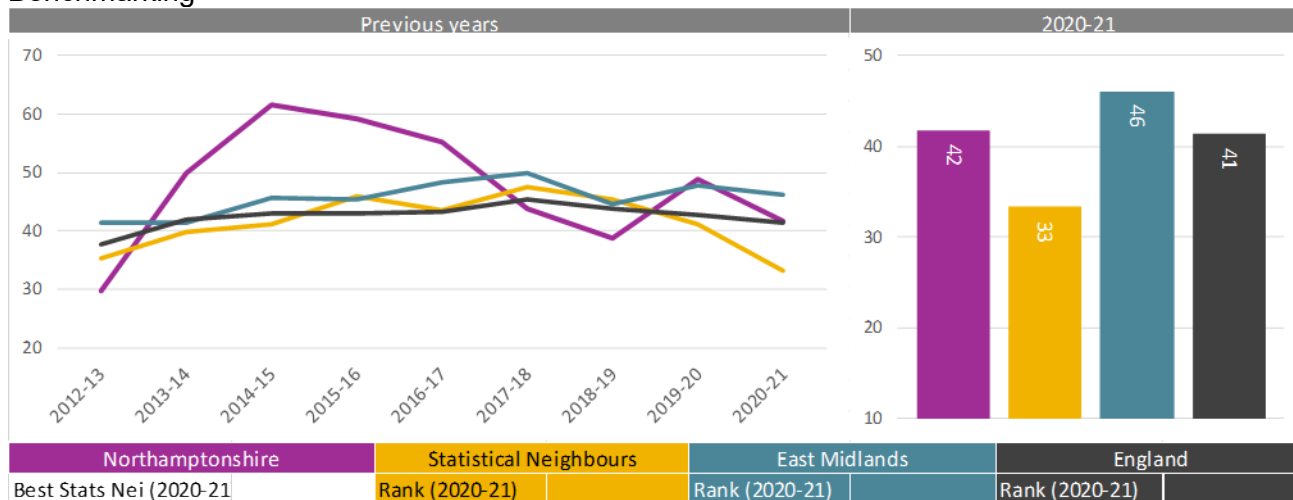


Child Protection Plans

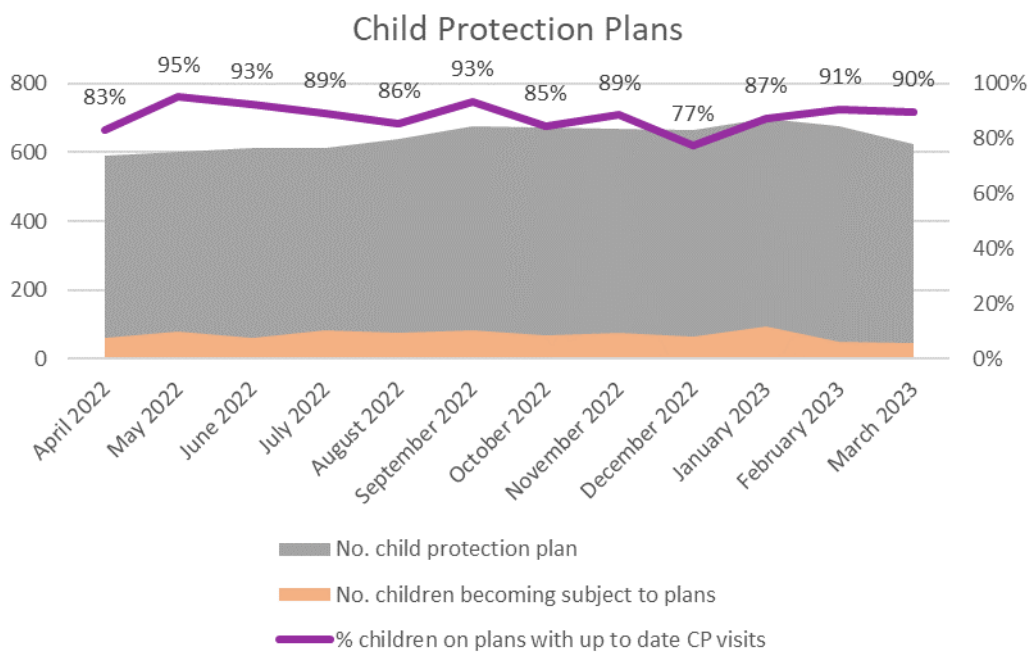
2022/23 Overview



Benchmarking

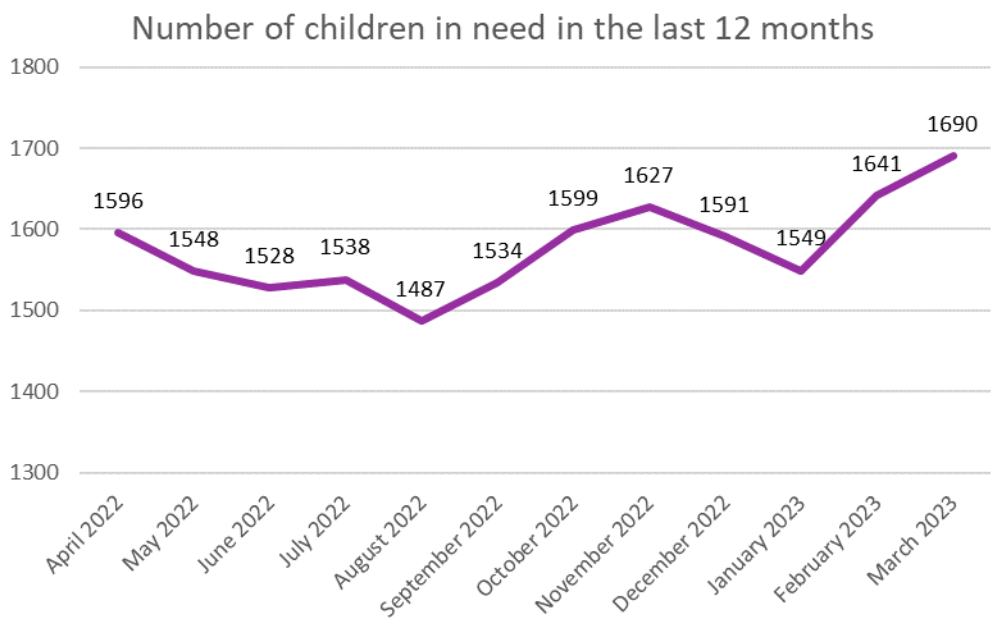


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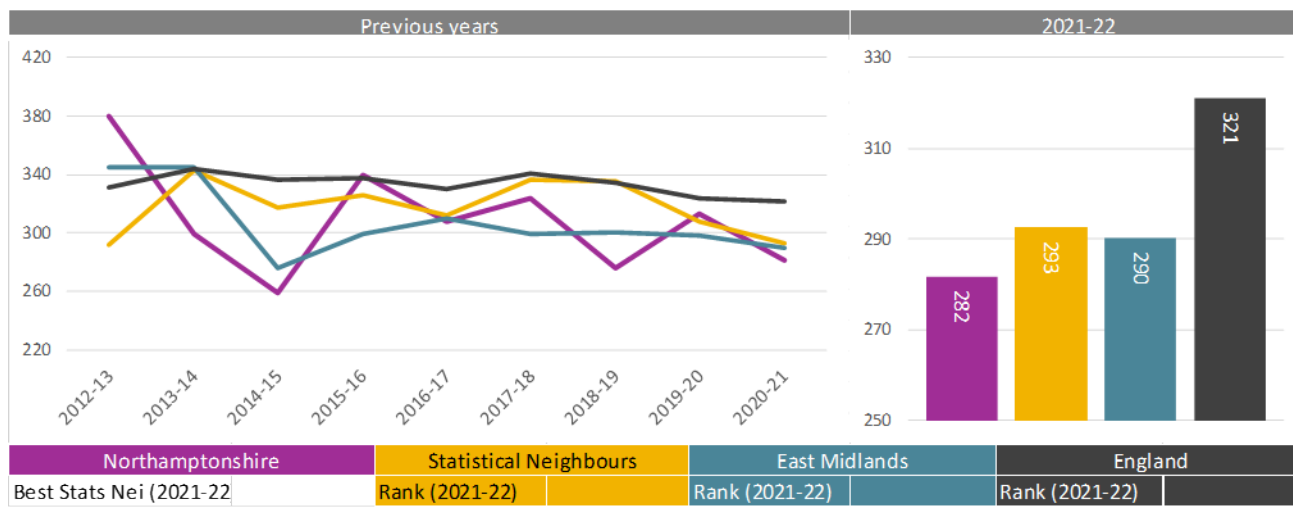


Children in Need

2022/23 Overview

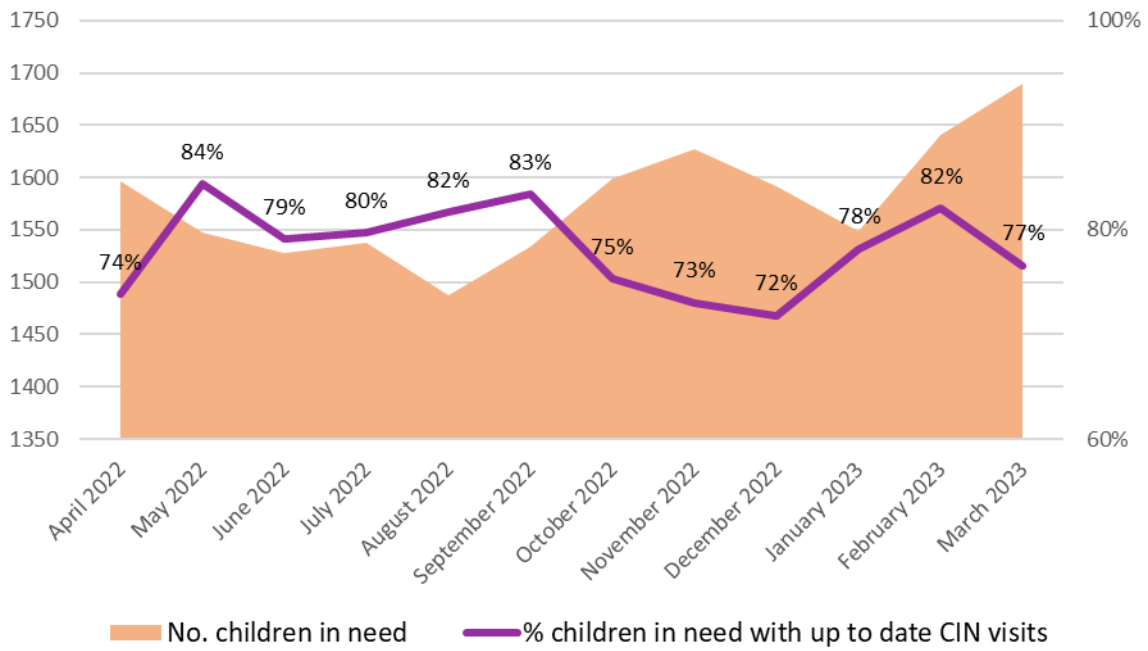


Benchmarking



Contextual data

Children In Need with up to date CIN visits



NCT Scorecard as at end March 2023



NCT Scorecard Mar
23.pdf

Appendix 4 – Support services KPIs

ID	KPI	Target	Q1 Outturn	Q2 Outturn	Q3 Outturn	Q4 Outturn	2022/23 Outturn
Web							
WEB02	% uptime of Northamptonshire Children's Trust website	99.00%	100.0%	100.0%	99.7%	99.8%	99.9%
WEB04	e-forms should have a customer rating of at least 3.5 out of 5. Any form with a lower rating will be reported back to the service for review	3.5	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00
Payroll & HR Transactions							
PHRT01	Accuracy of underpayments for all employees paid monthly (based on fully completed and accurate forms being received by the published deadlines processed by the 2nd line Payroll Control Team)	99.00%	100.0%	99.7%	99.9%	99.8%	99.8%
PHRT02	% of standard forms processed in time for the monthly payroll, where these are received fully completed by the published deadline (Starter requests, Leaver requests, Written statement of particulars)	98.00%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
PHRT03	% of starter request forms processed in time for the monthly payroll, where these are received fully completed by the published deadline (includes Agency and internal movers)	98.00%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
PHRT04	% of leaver request forms processed in time for the monthly payroll, where these are received fully completed by the published deadline (includes Agency and internal movers)	98.00%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
PHRT06	% of written statement of particulars processed within SLA	98.00%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Payroll & HR Helpdesk							
PHRHD01	% of incidents resolved within SLA (where SLA is the Helpdesk Priority / Resolution matrix)	70.00%	86.4%	83.8%	85.6%	95.4%	87.8%
PHRHD05	% of abandoned calls	<10%	7.1%	2.6%	0.0%	0.0%	2.4%
Learning & Development							
LD01	% of delegates rating that the training session was of a 'direct value to my work' was recorded as a 3 or above	95.00%	99.3%	98.8%	98.0%	100.0%	99.0%
Complaints							
New	Stage 1 complaints acknowledged and assigned by Complaints team within 48 hours of receipt	95.00%	94.4%	100.0%	97.1%	100.0%	97.9%
Customer Services							
CUS01	Proportion of customer calls answered	95.00%	94.7%	95.9%	97.4%	97.4%	96.4%
CUS02	Speed of response within 1 minute (service level)	80.00%	72.1%	79.2%	88.0%	86.2%	81.4%
CUS03	Call abandonment rate	<10%	5.0%	4.1%	2.5%	2.6%	3.5%
Procurement							
PROC01	% of procurement exercises completed to agreed target completion date	95.00%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	No Activity	100.0%

ID	KPI	Target	Q1 Outturn	Q2 Outturn	Q3 Outturn	Q4 Outturn	2022/23 Outturn
Property Services - West							
PROP01	% of reactive maintenance calls assessed within agreed priority timescales	90.00%	90.1%	95.7%	96.1%	96.7%	94.7%
PROP02	% of reactive maintenance tasks completed within priority timescales	90.00%	100.0%	95.7%	92.6%	92.8%	95.3%
PROP03	% of statutory compliance tasks completed within required timescales	100.00%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
PROP04	% of planned maintenance tasks completed within planned timescales	90.00%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Property Services - North							
PROP01	% of reactive maintenance calls assessed within agreed priority timescales	90.00%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
PROP02	% of reactive maintenance tasks completed within priority timescales	90.00%	86.8%	93.0%	83.6%	90.0%	88.4%
PROP03	% of statutory compliance tasks completed within required timescales	100.00%	87.4%	100.0%	96.0%	96.2%	97.4%
PROP04	% of planned maintenance tasks completed within planned timescales	90.00%	84.6%	94.4%	94.7%	Not Reported	90.3%
Payments & Direct Payments							
PDP01	% of weekly compliant inputting and authorising processed	90.00%	99.6%	99.9%	98.7%	99.3%	99.4%
PDP02	% of compliant Direct Payment contracts	85.00%	91.3%	92.8%	100.0%	100.0%	96.0%
PDP03	% of overpayments processed within 10 working days	85.00%	100.0%	97.4%	88.5%	97.6%	95.9%

ID	KPI	Target	Q1 Outturn	Q2 Outturn	Q3 Outturn	Q4 Outturn	2022/23 Outturn
Accounts Payable							
AP01	% of HMRC compliant commercial supplier invoices registered on ERP within 5 working days of receipt into Accounts Payable	95.00%	100.0%	99.7%	99.4%	99.9%	99.7%
AP02	% of undisputed commercial supplier invoices paid within 30 days	95.00%	98.1%	98.5%	95.4%	98.5%	97.6%
AP03	% of undisputed commercial supplier invoices paid within terms	85.00%	89.0%	87.1%	84.7%	90.9%	87.9%
AP04	% of fully completed supplier requests processed within 3 working days receipt	95.00%	99.0%	100.0%	98.7%	100.0%	99.4%
Income							
INC02	% of income allocated in 7 days	60.00%	100.0%	82.8%	95.3%	91.7%	92.4%
INC01	% of income allocated in 30 days	95.00%	100.0%	100.0%	99.1%	99.5%	99.7%
Finance Helpdesk							
FOHD01	% of all reported incidents resolved within the agreed service standard set for the helpdesk priority	70.00%	94.6%	93.0%	88.0%	87.7%	90.8%
FOHD05	% calls abandoned	<10%	12.3%	13.6%	9.5%	3.8%	9.8%
Insurance							
INS01	% of claims recorded on management system and acknowledged to claimant or department within 5 working days	90.00%	100.0%	No Activity	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
INS02	% of decisions on liability claims made and communicated to claimant in accordance with civil procedure rules (as per targets) excluding where the % of decisions on liability claims made and communicated to claimant in accordance with civil procedure rules (as per targets) excluding where the Insurance service has made a written request for evidence to the relevant service area and no reply has been received within required deadlines	95.00%	No Activity	100.0%	100.0%	No Activity	100.0%
INS03	% of cases where a full response was provided for non-complex underwriting enquiries (i.e. enquiries not requiring third party referral) within 5 working days	90.00%	No Activity	No Activity	No Activity	No Activity	No Activity
IT Services							
IT01	% Incidents Resolved within agreed performance standard thresholds in terms of response and resolution times	90.00%	92.0%	93.8%	92.0%	90.1%	92.0%
IT02	% Requests Resolved within agreed performance standard thresholds in terms of response and resolution times	90.00%	93.2%	91.6%	94.3%	89.9%	92.2%
New	% of calls abandoned	<10%	14.2%	8.0%	8.4%	3.0%	8.4%
IT04	Loss of IT systems (at least 72 hours) occurring	0 Incidents	1	3	2	2	8
Business Systems							
BS01	% of business-critical incidents raised via the Helpdesk regarding the ERP system responded to within one working day	95.00%	No Activity	No Activity	No Activity	No Activity	No Activity
BS02	% of non-critical incidents raised via the Helpdesk regarding the ERP system responded to within three working days	95.00%	97.6%	98.1%	97.1%	98.0%	97.7%
BS03	% of change requests raised via the Helpdesk regarding the ERP system considered and responded to within five working days	95.00%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Appendix 5 – National context

Increasing pressure on budgets following the pandemic

[CIPFA performance tracker, 2023](#) reports on the impact of Covid and trends in children's services spending, and found that LAs spent £11.1 billion on children's social care in 2021/22, a 41% rise in real terms compared to 2009, while the children's population grew by less than 10% over the same period.

Rising need and complexity

[County Council network report](#): reports that in 2021-22 (the year after three national lockdowns) 30 out of 36 county local authorities overspent on their budgets by £317m. In total, four in five county local authorities – or 83% – overspent on their children's services budget in 2021-22. Nationally, all 151 councils with children's services responsibility overspent by £946.5m. Faced with this spike in demand, most councils in county areas have had little choice but to overspend on their children's services budgets to protect young people. Therefore, the forecasting of pressures in children's services is extremely challenging both within NCT and across the country.

[Safeguarding Pressures Phase 8 \(2022\)](#) showed that there was an overall increase in safeguarding activity between 2019/20 and 2021/22, reflecting greater complexity of needs, despite an initial reduction in referrals linked to lockdowns in the early stages of the Covid-19 pandemic. More children who were not previously known to social care services were presenting at a later stage, with greater levels of need and higher risks, and as a result, more children were immediately becoming subjects of child protection plans or care proceedings. Between 2019/20 and 2021/22, the number of early help assessments rose by 16%, the number of children in need increased by 4%, and the number of section 47 enquiries increased by 8%

The [Independent Review of Children's Social Care, 2022](#) found that only 56% of the increase in the numbers of children in care since 2013 could be explained by population growth and an increase in the number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children arriving. It found that children are staying in care for longer, with 12% fewer children leaving care in 2021 than in 2016. It estimated that, without implementation of the proposed reforms, total spend on children's social care is likely to rise to just under £12bn in 2024/25. Full roll out of the reforms will not be seen until 2025/26 at the earliest.

[Family Justice Observatory Deprivation of Liberty \(DoL\) data, 2023](#) between July 2022 and May 2023, the national DoL court issued 1217 applications across 153 different LAs, for a total of 1142 children. 53.8% of children subjected to a DoL order in July and August 2022 were placed in at least one unregistered setting in the first six months of the order being granted. This indicates "a lack of suitable regulated provision for children experiencing risk of criminal exploitation, emotional difficulties, behaviours that were a risk to others, and self-harm risks.". Over a six-month period, over 90% did not experience any relaxation to deprivations of their liberty.

Placement market

[Competitions and Markets Authority review of the children's social care placements market, 2022](#) described the challenges facing LAs, concluding that there are significant problems in how the placements market is functioning in England. There are not enough placements of the right kind, in the right places, which means that children are not consistently getting access to care and accommodation that meets their needs. The largest private providers of placements are making materially higher profits and charging materially higher prices than would be expected from a functioning market. Some of the largest private providers are carrying very high levels of debt which creates a risk that disorderly failure of highly-leveraged firms could disrupt placements. "The UK has sleepwalked into a dysfunctional children's social care market. This has left local authorities hamstrung in their efforts to find suitable and affordable placements in children's homes or foster

care.”. The short-notice closure of the Outcomes First Group demonstrated the impact that mass exit of such providers could have.

[S251 Data Outturn, 2022](#) reported that in 2021/22, LA gross expenditure on children and young people's services was £11.9 billion. £3,672 million was spent on in-house and independent fostering and children's homes placements in 2020/21. This is an increase from £2,670 million in 2015/16, or 37.5% (not real terms). The corresponding increase in the number of children in care was 14.8%. Private residential placement costs increased the most, by 90.56%, while LA placement costs increased by 18.78%

[Children's Home Association's State of the Sector Survey 2023](#) highlighted the private sector's approach to formal procurement and tendering, with over a third not engaging with formal processes (twice as many as in 2021) and half of all providers selectively considering which tenders to bid for. 22% of all providers also reported choosing to leave a commissioned framework in the last year, all of whom experienced no negative consequences following the decision (up from 17% in 2022).

Regulatory regime for supported accommodation

[Demand and Capacity of Homes for Children in Care \(CCN, LIIA, Newton, 2023\)](#) found that between 2019 and 2022, the number of young people living in supported accommodation increased by 21.3%. While demand is growing, only 81% of existing placements are expected to register as per the new registration requirement, with almost 20% put off by cost and reputational risk, meaning a potential fall in capacity of 3,676 beds across England. This increased demand coupled with inflation and administrative burdens from the new regulations is predicted to add £368m to LA spend on supported accommodation by 2026/27

Workforce

[The Independent Review of Children's Social Care, 2022](#) estimated the additional cost of employing agency staff at approximately £26,000 per worker per year (53% of the average social worker salary), indicating a loss of over £100 million per year. DfE data (2023) shows that the agency social worker rate increased from 16% in 2021 to 18% in 2022, with 13% more agency social workers in total in 2022. Safeguarding Pressures Phase 8, (2022) reported that 44% of respondents stated that there was never or rarely sufficient social workers in the right places to effectively support children, resulting in greater risk for children and families, higher caseloads and increased waiting lists and delays.

Children's social care pressures

- Growth in child poverty/cost of living crisis - regional statistics summarising the latest data on local child poverty after housing costs ([End Child Poverty Coalition, 2023](#)). Between 2015 and 2020, it was estimated that 8.1% of children entering care was linked to rising child poverty ([NIHR, 2021](#))
- Lack of sufficiency of placements and rising costs/profitteering from private companies ([CMA, 2022](#))
- Impact of the supported accommodation reforms ([CCN, LIIA and Newton, 2023](#))
- Rising numbers of UASC through the national transfer scheme, and lack of funding for UASC care leavers ([Safeguarding Pressures Phase 8 \(2022\)](#))

Mental health pressures

- Growth in demands for mental health support ([NHS Digital, 2022](#))
- Inadequate children's mental health services including a reduction in tier 4 beds and a lack of shared accountability with health partners ([CYPMHC, 2023](#))
- High costs of unregistered placements for children with the most complex needs/increase in DoLs ([Nuffield Family Justice Observatory, 2023](#))

Workforce pressures

- Social workers – agency workforce issues highlighted in the [ADCS response to the Child and Family Social Worker Workforce consultation](#)

Source: ADCS

Appendix 6 – NCT Annual Internal Audit Report 2022/23

Internal audit: Annual report and statement of assurance 2022-23 on the following 5 pages

1. Summary of Internal Audit 2022-23

1.1 This report details the work undertaken by internal audit for Northamptonshire Children’s Trust (the Trust) and provides an overview of the effectiveness of the controls in place for the full year. Internal Audit has been provided to the Trust via a service level agreement with West Northamptonshire Council (WNC) Internal Audit Service.

1.2 2022-23 was a challenging year from an audit perspective, with a large proportion of activity relating to audits initiated as part of the 2021-22 plan outstanding, following the issue of the annual audit report for 2021-22. These were reviewed and delivered by BDO, an external provision partner. The 2022-23 plan was also reviewed, and 4 audits removed to prioritise impactful audits, leaving 5 audits which were delivered by the WNC audit team.

1.3 5 audits relating to the 2021-22 plan were issued as final reports in 2022-23; the working papers for these audits have been reviewed to ensure that sufficient 2022-23 evidence was covered, and they could be included in the 2022-23 opinion.

1.4 The 5 audits delivered as part of the 2022-23 plan were supported by 4 audits relating to WNC services provided to the Trust. The insourcing of the WNC audit team has led to delays in the delivery of audits, and the completion of the plan has been challenging, with 2 audits at draft report stage awaiting management response at the time of this report.

1.5 Appendix A details the outcome of the audits delivered, with a summary in the table below.

Audit	Audit Status	Assurance Rating		
		Control Environment	Compliance	Org Impact
2021/22 – Plan; 2022/23 Assurance				
Services - Foster Care and Special Guardianship Payments	Final Report	Good	Good	Minor
Services - Placement Contract Management	Final Report	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Moderate
WNC - IT Systems Security - Carefirst System	Final Report	Limited	Satisfactory	Moderate
Key Financials - Payroll	Final Report	Good	Substantial	Minor
WNC - Services - Social Care Transport	Final Report	Satisfactory	Limited	Major
2022/23 – Plan and Assurance				
Overarching Safeguarding Arrangements	Final Report	Good	Good	Minor
Corporate Parenting - Leaving Care s24	Final Report	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Minor
Corporate Governance Framework (incl Ofsted Improvement Plan Monitoring)	Draft Report	Good	Good	Minor
Social Work Workforce	Final Report	N/A – Briefing Note Report - no ratings issued.		
Fostering Service (In-house Independent Fostering Agency)	Draft Report	N/A – Interim Report issued – no ratings issued further work planned for 2023/24.		
Sustainability – corporate parent role		Removed		
MTFP and budget management		Removed		
ICT – network infrastructure security		Removed		
ICT – privileged access control		Removed		
WNC Service Audits				
IT Disaster recovery	Complete	Limited	Limited	Moderate
IT Cyber security	Complete	Limited	Limited	Major

Audit	Audit Status	Assurance Rating		
		Control Environment	Compliance	Org Impact
Payroll Transaction Testing	Complete	Good	Good	Minor
ERP Gold IT User Access Controls	Complete	Good	Good	Minor

2. Executive summary – Head of Audit opinion

2.1 The role of internal audit is to provide an opinion to the Trust, through the Finance, Resources and Audit Committee, on the adequacy and effectiveness of the internal control system to ensure the achievement of the organisation's objectives in the areas reviewed. The annual report from internal audit provides an overall opinion on the adequacy and effectiveness of the organisation's risk management, control, and governance processes, within the scope of work undertaken by Internal Audit. The basis for forming our opinion is as follows:

- An assessment of the range of individual opinions arising from risk-based audit assignments contained within internal audit plans that have been reported throughout the year.
- This assessment has taken account of the relative materiality of these areas and management's response to agreed actions.
- Management investigation and response to issues raised from fraud investigations.

2.2 We can provide **satisfactory assurance** that there is a sound system of internal control, designed to meet the Trust's objectives, and that controls are being applied consistently.

Assignment	Audit Status	Assurance Rating			Recommendations			Key findings / Comments
		Control Environment	Compliance	Org Impact	E	I	S	
2021/22 – Plan; 2022/23 Assurance								
Services - Foster Care and Special Guardianship Payments	Final Report	Good	Good	Minor	0	0	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New/ceased Foster Care and Special Guardianship Orders (SGO) payments, overpayments and one-off discretionary expenses had sufficient supporting evidence. The system design could be improved by reviewing the policies and procedures. It can further be strengthened by including who prepared the reconciliation. Policies and procedures relating to Foster Care and SGOs have not been reviewed within a timely manner or version control is missing. The payment run reconciliation has no information in relation to who has completed and reviewed leading to risk of lack of adequate audit trail, segregation of duties and accountability.
Services - Placement Contract Management	Final Report	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Moderate	0	5	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence of a best match form and approval in line with the Scheme of Delegation. Evidence of invoice review against IPA's, sample checking of payments and evidence of final review and approval for payments. No placement review and approvals panel. No formal IPA or documentation for in-house fostering placements Processes for best match forms not completed due to the recent back log. Review of monthly placement management reports found there is no documented action plan detailing actions to be completed and expected completion dates
IT Systems Security - Carefirst System	Final Report	Limited	Satisfactory	Moderate	4	2	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The system is outdated and not user friendly, which creates duplication and inefficiencies. Roles and responsibilities in relation to the system support management have not been clarified and confirmed to ensure the most effective and efficient use of resources. Current arrangements for user access are duplicated. Changes to user accounts are not proactively notified by the relevant managers. Business continuity planning and back up arrangements were not documented.

Assignment	Audit Status	Assurance Rating			Recommendations			Key findings / Comments
		Control Environment	Compliance	Org Impact	E	I	S	
								<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There are limited improvements that can be made to make the system more user friendly and compatible with the modern technology. There are easy to complete online forms. Security declaration and CareFirst training are being completed and supporting evidence is in place. There are documented data entry procedures. The system is regularly backed up and backups are checked and confirmed.
2022/23 – Plan and Assurance								
Overarching Safeguarding Arrangements	Final Report	Good	Good	Minor	0	2	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Job descriptions should be reviewed and updated as required. Develop a robust system of monitoring and reporting to evidence training takes place in respect of Rapid Reviews and Children Safeguarding Practice Reviews Consider making safeguarding training mandatory for all NCT staff
Corporate Parenting – Leaving Care s24	Final Report	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Minor				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Transition to Adulthood (Leaving Care) – Financial Policy and Guidance should be revised and approved at an appropriate level. The Operational Group should be specifically tasked with investigation of the reasons for and setting up corrective action to bring Pathway Plan KPIs back in line. Management should ensure that required service improvements arising from the Collaborative Reflective Practice Discussion Review Practice Week have been or are being actioned.
Corporate Governance Framework (incl Ofsted Improvement Plan Monitoring)	Draft Report	Good	Good	Minor	0	4	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Key policies had not all been published, and some appeared to not be up to date or include adequate version control.
Social Work Workforce	Final Report	N/A – Briefing Note Report issued						<p>Strategic level review</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Workforce Development Strategy demonstrates a focus on leadership, manager support of staff and initiatives for recruitment and retention. Further review of how the workforce is using the strategy and how it is embedded required

Assignment	Audit Status	Assurance Rating			Recommendations			Key findings / Comments
		Control Environment	Compliance	Org Impact	E	I	S	
Fostering Service (In-House - Independent Fostering Agency)	Draft Report	N/A – Interim Report issued – further work planned.			0	1	0	Scope amended and agreed with management after consideration of Ofsted report. Focus on replacement content management system: development of specification and controls until new system in place. Further work planned for 2023/24.
West Northamptonshire Council provided services								
IT Disaster recovery	Complete	Limited	Limited	Moderate	0	7	0	Management action plan in place
IT Cyber security	Complete	Limited	Limited	Major	10	3	0	Management action plan in place
Payroll transaction testing	Complete	Good	Good	Minor	0	1	3	Management action plan in place
ERP Gold IT user access controls	Complete	Good	Good	Minor	0	2	0	Management action plan in place
Removed audits								
Sustainability – corporate parent role	Removed							
MTFP and budget management	Removed			Included in 2023/24 plan				
ICT – network infrastructure security	Removed							
ICT – privileged access control	Removed							

Northamptonshire Children's Trust Independent Fostering Agency

Annual Report 2022 – 2023



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1. Introduction

This is a report on the performance of the Northamptonshire Children's Trust (NCT) Independent Fostering Agency in line with the National Minimum Standards (2011) and Statutory Guidance.

It provides details of NCT's Independent Fostering Agency activity from 1st April 2022 to 31st March 2023 and sets out plans for service development until 31st March 2024.

This annual report should be read in conjunction with the Independent Fostering Agency Statement of Purpose.

The Independent Fostering Agency had its second Ofsted inspection in February 2023 and the overall judgement of our service is 'Inadequate'.

The observations and findings of the Inspectors have framed the ongoing improvement plan for the Fostering Service, where areas of practice and delivery of service needs to be focused and the following areas have been identified:

- An effective electronic recording system.
- Consistent recording and practice which clearly evidences risk and response to this.
- Children being seen by SSWs and meaningful discussion had with the child.
- Quality supervision of foster carers.
- Quality supervision of SSWs and Practice Managers.
- Safeguarding practices and knowledge of the staff working within the Fostering Service needs to be improved.

The service has produced a service improvement plan, with agreed team objectives, targets, and timescales for completion. Progress against the action plan is reported back to the senior leadership team and NCT's governance board. Following the Inadequate judgment received as a result of the full SCCIF Inspection undertaken from the 6th to the 10th February 2023, the Fostering Service remains subject to three Compliance notices issued by OFSTED, with a monitoring visit undertaken on the 11th April providing some assurance of the steps already taken by the Agency to address the arising areas of concern and deficit in practice.

The service has a clear understanding of what is required in relation to the key areas of improvement and continues to have very high ambitions to ensure foster carers receive training, support, and consistent effective supervision to enable them to offer the highest quality of care to children and that our children's voices are very clearly heard and children are regularly seen by the foster carers' supervising social workers.

2. Our Vision, Service Structure and Function

Northamptonshire Children's Trust base locations



The Independent Fostering Agency delivers the statutory Fostering functions for both North and West Northamptonshire. As such they are centrally based in Northampton but can work from other local offices.

The Strategic Manager with responsibility for the Fostering Service also holds responsibility for NCT VAA (Voluntary Adoption Agency) and Children's Homes and the Assistant Director has oversight of the Corporate Parenting Service within which the Fostering Agency sits. Both Strategic Manager and Assistant Director operate across the two unitary councils.

Our overarching aim is to provide secure and loving homes to children in need of foster care and to support those children and their families as long as this is needed.

The service shares the key aims and objectives of Northamptonshire Children's Trust (NCT) in believing that all children and young people have the right to be healthy, happy, and safe; to be loved, valued, and respected; and to have high aspirations for their future.

We want all children to have secure relationships with family, friends, and carers, be eager, excited, curious, and engaged in learning, have self-confidence, be able to co-operate and communicate socially, and have the best possible health and development.

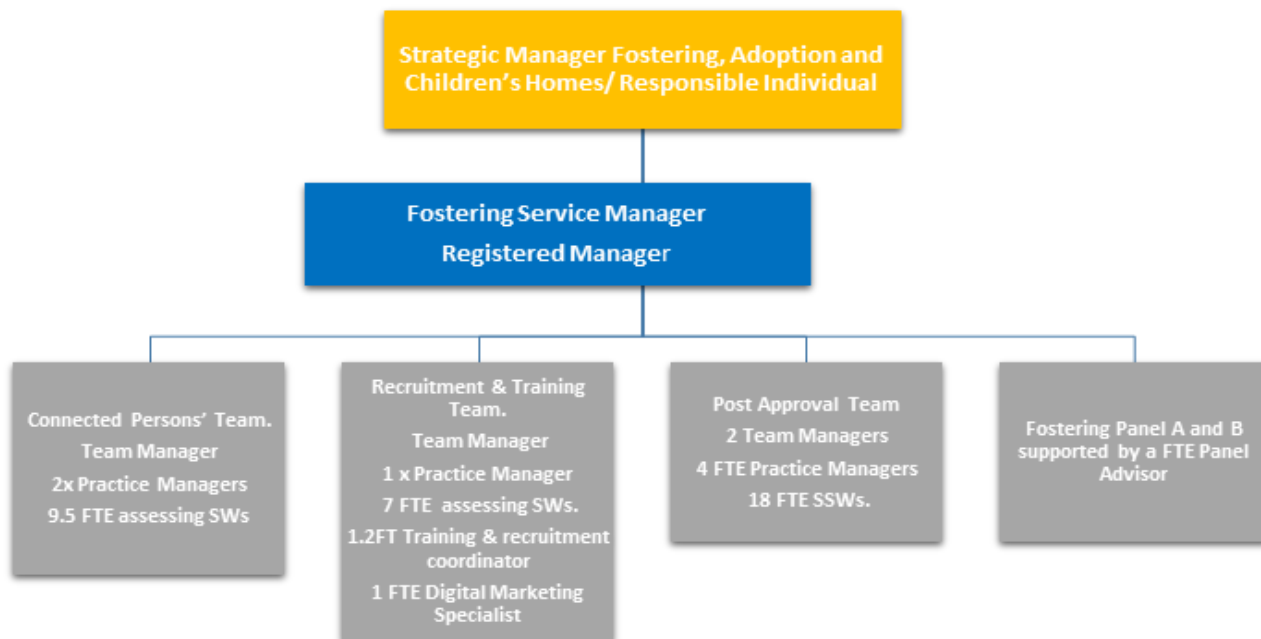
Our Vision:



Children, Young People and Families at the heart of all we do -
in every decision we make and every action we take.



3. Staffing



Additionally, a further specialist SSW post has been agreed for the Recruitment and Training Team to specifically supervise and support our cohort of Resilience foster carers. Recruitment activity to this position is ongoing.

NCT’s Independent Fostering Agency comprises of four fostering teams:

- Recruitment, Training and Assessment team
- Post Approval teams x 2
- Connected Persons’ team

The teams undertake statutory functions of assessment, approval, supervision, support, training, and development, safeguarding and review of foster carers. All fostering teams work in partnership with the Duty and Assessment, Safeguarding and Children in Care (CIC) Services to ensure children’s care plans are progressed with minimum delay and children are provided with the best possible in-house care. Supervising social workers and practice managers attend placement planning, permanency planning and placement stability meetings, CIC reviews and all other relevant statutory and non-statutory meetings for children.

The Independent Fostering Agency seeks to build positive relationships with professionals providing a ‘team around the child’ approach, ensuring partners work to best meet children’s needs. A fostering duty system operates daily to support the function of the NCT’s Placement Management Service, who are responsible for sourcing placements both internally within Northamptonshire and externally, by identifying internal foster placements and emergency carers. A duty team manager provides management oversight of placement activity. Additionally, a second duty worker supports the duty telephone response to foster carers on a daily basis. The Fostering Duty Hub are based together to provide a consistent managerial oversight.

Northamptonshire Children’s Trust Independent Fostering Agency provides a range of short term and permanent placements with foster carers who have a diverse range of skills and experience.

4. Summary of the service developments and challenges 2022/23

Key developments during 2022/2023

Whole service

- Improved our data set for managers to monitor performance in relation to statutory compliance. Reporting systems have been reviewed and an interim recording system has been introduced to ensure compliance can be effectively monitored. Redeveloped recruitment pipeline data and monthly performance meetings to drive assessment performance and recruit more foster carers.
- Review of existing policy and practice documents, practice guidance and 'HOW TO' guides written for all key practice changes or updates and to support new ways of working. These are shared with the relevant stockholders as appropriate, to include our foster carers and independent panel members when relevant.
- An incumbent registered manager remains in post to provide stability for the service and lead the necessary improvements and high aspirations for the service.
- Whole Service development days continue to be held on a quarterly basis with staff to be clear of the vision and expectations, to ensure all team members understand the importance of their role and how they can most effectively work together to achieve the continuing improvements of the service. These days provide an opportunity for review and implementation of new policy and practice as well as guest speakers to enhance the wider learning across all of the Fostering Services. Within this year, guest speaker topics have included 'The voice of the child' delivered by a care experienced adult, MBAM training delivered by our clinical psychologist, specialist 'Parent and Child' training as well as a SCCIF framework development workshop.
- Bi-monthly meetings continue to be held between the management team, panel adviser and panel chairs have been established supporting the ongoing development of the professional relationship between the panel and the agency.
- All managers have participated in Leadership and management training with positive impact on practice and culture. Focused on enabling managers to empower each other, staff, children and families and build positive culture.
- Signs of safety (SOS) training has been provided to managers and staff and this strengths-based and empowering practice model continues to be embedded, we have several SOS champions within the service to support this area of practice development. Further workshops in respect of the SOS model for foster carer's daily recordings are planned into this next financial year to further embed this practice.

Recruitment

- Streamlined forms for recruitment, through to assessment and support, including Matching, Placement planning documents, Safe care documents, Risk assessment templates have been revised and or introduced.
- The Digital Marketing Specialist role is now embedded in NCT's Communications team and supports Fostering recruitment.
- Re - shaped our front door approach and appointed a recruitment coordinator to ensure enquiries are followed up within 24 hours.
- Further developed a 'step down' pathway from Residential Care to Fostering through the Resilience scheme, which provides support to children to 'step down' from residential care and 'break the cycle' of children experiencing multiple placements moves. We now have 6 approved Resilience foster carers with 5 young people currently in place.
- Continued to develop joint and emergency viability assessments when undertaking Connected Carers Assessment, which has supported timely decision making, and has seen an increase in initial viability assessments being undertaken prior to placement of the children.

Training and support

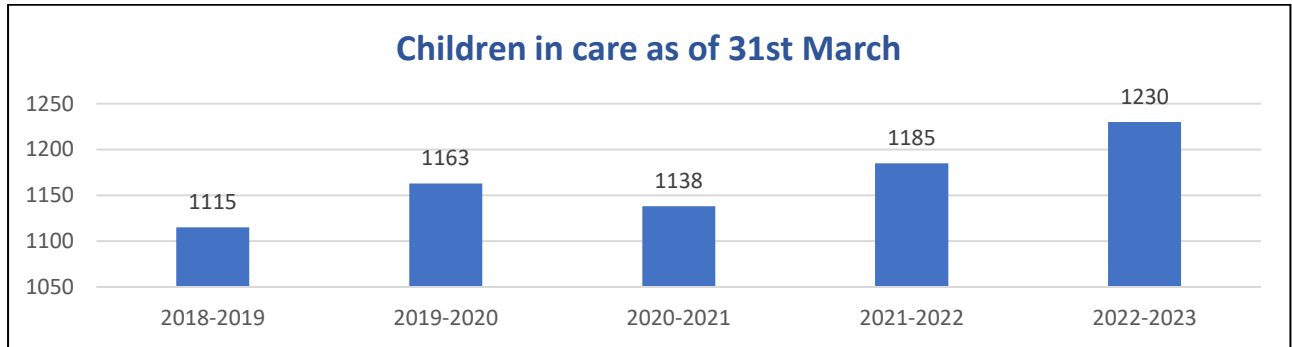
- Approaches to retention continue to be developed, including exit interviews and the use of retention meetings with foster carers who are thinking of leaving, and a clear pathway for engagement with foster carers who are 'on hold' to enable them to return to fostering in a timely manner.
- Managers' retention visits to foster carers remain an ongoing requirement of our carer retention and quality assurance framework.
- Continue to further embed the Public Health funded fostering project. The aim of this project is to develop the skills and knowledge of supervising social workers and foster carers in understanding the emotional needs of children who have experienced abuse and neglect developing therapeutic parenting techniques. It facilitates the commissioning of therapeutic interventions for children and carers, with the aim of improving mental health outcomes for children and to improve placement stability as well as specialist training social work staff working within the Fostering Service such as Dyadic Developmental Practice (DDP).
- Clinical Psychologist role is embedded, and staff are benefitting from specialist advice and guidance. Individual consultations have been offered to foster carers to support them in their fostering journey, especially in consideration of blocked care and achieving placement stability.
- Foster carers continue to have funded access to the National Association of Therapeutic Parenting. This provides foster carers with access to training, webinars and networks of support with a focus on therapeutic approaches.
- The training provided to foster carers has been reviewed; there are plans to expand on existing training opportunities, and others have been introduced or re-introduced following foster carer feedback.

Key challenges during 2022/2023

- We have a high number of beds on hold (49 beds on 31st March 2022 compared to 8 the previous year).
- Recruitment & retention of foster carers. There has been a slight increase in resignations of foster carers, and we have recruited fewer households than in the previous year. This appears, anecdotally, to be in line with the experience of other Local Authorities and Fostering Agencies. Further exploration of the current situation around recruitment and retention nationally is needed to fully understand how NCT's Fostering Agency fared in comparison to others and what we can do differently to address sufficiency issues.
- Information Systems: The data required for the fostering service to monitor progress has continued to improve during this year but remains an area of significant challenge. We cannot use the Care First recording system to accurately collect data on the various approval details or vacancies, manage payments easily and accurately or provide adequate data on carers subject to concerns or complaints. Individual children's records have been created within TEAMS but remain vulnerable to corruption and are not able to 'talk' to any of the other systems that the Fostering Service is currently using which makes managerial oversight and tracking of actions/ practice clumsy.
- Staff recruitment has been a significant challenge for the majority of this financial year, however, this is now an improving picture.
- We have a high number of children living within family and friends' arrangements, standing at 119 fostering households caring for 174 children. A task and finish group has carried out a review and a whole systems approach has been taken in relation to changing the culture and ways of working to make sure Special guardianship is encouraged where appropriate and in line with the children's needs. This remains a targeted focus of the Fostering Service. Dedicated workshops for all social work practitioners have been jointly delivered by the Fostering Service and the post order team who are responsible for SGO support.
- To continue to progress and work within all elements of the improvement plan to address the points raised within the compliance notices. This will include regular review and Quality Assurance activity, self-evaluation and reporting to both NCT's SLT and monitoring visits from OFSTED. Ongoing policy and practice review will continue to inform the Improvement plan.

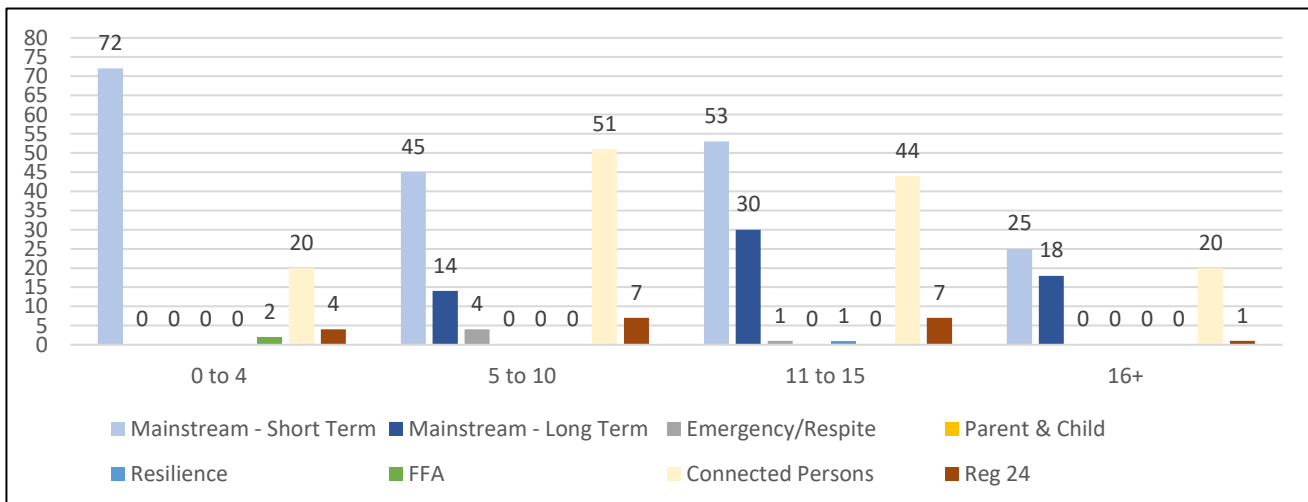
5. **The Children We Care For**

The graph below shows a snapshot of the number of children in care figures over the last 4 years. This graph shows a decrease in the year 2020 – 2021, anecdotally considered to be in part due to the COVID pandemic conditions but a significant rise for last year and this year. Not only does the continued rise in children in care create increased sufficiency pressures, but there is also the churn in children in care population during the year which can create pressure with seasonal increase in demands for fostering placements.



Children living with in house foster carers categorised by age groups

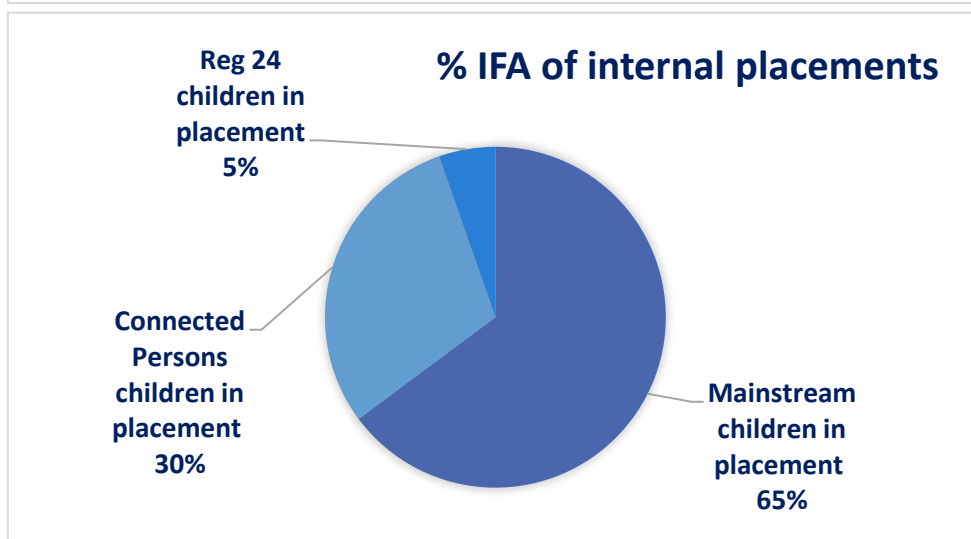
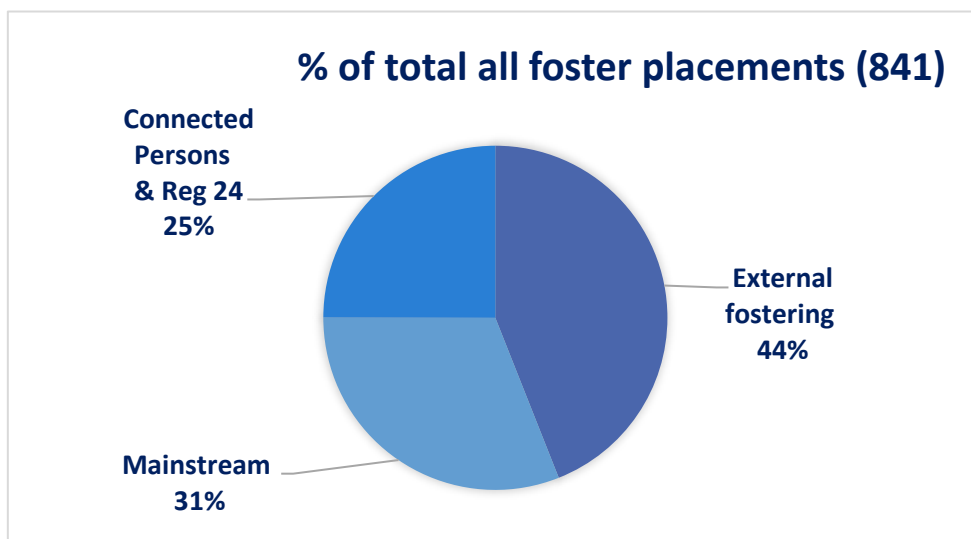
Approval	Age Groups			
	0 to 4	5 to 10	11 to 15	16+
Mainstream - Short Term	72	45	53	25
Mainstream - Long Term	0	14	30	18
Emergency/Respite	0	4	1	1
Parent & Child	0	0	0	0
Resilience	0	0	1	0
FFA	2	0	0	0
Connected Persons	20	51	44	20
Reg 24	4	7	7	1
Total	98	121	136	64



As last year, demand for placements for children aged 11+ remains high with 11–15-year-olds consistently being the largest group of children living in in-house foster homes.

Proportion of children living in internal and external foster placements

Fostering breakdown	Number of Children placed in foster care	% of LAC 1227	% of total all foster placements (841)
External fostering	370	30%	44%
Mainstream	261	21%	31%
Connected Persons & Reg 24	210	17%	25%
	841	69%	33%



Of the 841 Northamptonshire children who were living in foster care during this period, 261 children are placed with internal Mainstream foster carers (31%), 210 children placed with Connected person's carers (25%) with this figure including those children living with carers granted temporary approval under REG 24.

Whilst this is positive, there remains a significant number of children (370) living with foster carers approved by independent fostering agencies (44%).

Anecdotally these children have tended to be older in age, sibling groups or children with additional needs. Finding fostering families for these children remains a priority and recruitment and marketing activity continues to focus on recruitment of foster carers able to offer homes to these children.

6. Recruitment and Assessment of Foster Carers

On March 31st 2023, there were 209 Mainstream fostering households, Connected Persons' fostering approved households and 'Regulation 24' temporarily approved fostering households.

Current Fostering Households	Data as of 1st April 2022	Apr -22	May -22	Jun -22	Jul -22	Aug -22	Sep -22	Oct -22	Nov -22	Dec -22	Jan -23	Feb -23	Mar -23	Total
Households on hold		1	1	1	3	3	2	4	4	5	6	4	5	
Positive ADM		0	2	2	0	3	0	3	2	3	2	0	2	19
Closed Households		0	-5	-4	-2	-2	-4	0	0	-1	-3	-2	0	-23
Count of Approved Households		213	213	210	208	206	207	203	206	208	210	209	207	209

18 new foster carer households were recruited, 16 less than the previous year. Anecdotally, this remains a positive position in an ever increasingly challenging market in which to recruit foster carers across the sector.

Across this reporting period, 13 fostering households have closed, with 3 of these being through the action of the Agency and 'Termination of Approval.' 10 of these have been through the carers change in circumstances and a decision to retire or resign from fostering altogether. There have been no instances within this reporting period where foster carers have chosen to resign from NCT's Fostering Service but chosen to continue their fostering career with another fostering agency.

Our net position at year end was -4 households.

The number of approved foster carers has not kept up with demand in the sector, which has had an increase of around 3% in the number of children coming into care over the last 12 months in Northamptonshire.

Below shows the number of enquiries, approvals and de-registrations (for reporting purposes, this the term used to include all foster carer closures for resignation, retirement and at the Fostering Service's instigation) over the last three years:

Enquiries	Approvals	De-Registrations
20/21: 397	20/21: 37	20/21: 29
21/22: 252	21/22: 34	21/22: 32
22/23: 170	22/23: 18	22/23: 13

Description	Mar-21	Mar-22	Mar -23
Number of Initial Enquiries received	397	252	175
Number of Initial Visits undertaken	145	85	72
Households invited to apply following positive visit	109	50	45
% of Households invited to apply from initial enquiries received	27%	20%	63%

From 1st April 2022 to 31st March 2023, we have:

- Received a total of 175 enquiries. This resulted in 72 initial visits (41%). Of these initial visits, 45 (63%) converted to a Registration of Interest (ROI), it is at this stage that Statutory Checks commence (Stage 1)
- This is a decrease of 77 enquiries for the same period in the previous year. Discussions in regional and national fostering recruitment groups have noted a continued drop in enquiries across the sector during this time period.
- The conversion rate from enquiry to approval of in-house foster carers is 10.5%. This is slightly less than the conversation rate achieved in 2021/2022 of 13%, though above the national of approximately 9% and the East Midlands region of around 6 - 7%.

In 2022/2023, 29 households withdrew from the assessment process (25 at stage 1, 4 at stage 2). The Fostering Service seeks to progress Stage 1 and Stage 2 of assessment of applicant foster carers concurrently which will mean that applicant households can be well progressed in Stage 2 of assessment before all of their Stage 1 checks are returned and reviewed as satisfactory. This does present a risk of late closures to assessment.

The stage 1 closed for the following reasons:

- A change of circumstances or change in family dynamics/work commitments meant that fostering was no longer viable/possible for them – this included 1 household needing to take on a caring responsibility for a relative, 4 where health needs changed within the assessment timeframe and 8 where fostering no longer fitted in with their lives due to job changes or changes in other personal circumstances.
- 1 household's immediate family members were not supportive of the application to foster and withdrew due to this.
- 7 stage 1 assessments were ceased by the Fostering Service: 5 noted that those applying were not suitable for the fostering role. 2 further households had major changes in their circumstances.

Of the stage 2 closures, 2 applicants were not suitable (one of these was a resilience applicant) and this was determined through late return of Stage 1 checks, and 2 had changes in their personal/family circumstances. Within this reporting period, the process for the review of applicants at Stage 1 has been undertaken.

Unavailable beds and Occupancy rate

We have seen a slight decrease this year in our unavailable beds (see table below) from 27% to 25%. During 2021 the reporting on unavailable beds was changed to align with Ofsted codes and descriptions. This has meant that the different reasons for beds not being able to be occupied is able to be reported more accurately. Foster Carers who are either placed 'on hold' by the Fostering Service (usually due to the carer being the subject of an allegation and investigation) or foster carers who place themselves 'on hold' at their request are regularly kept under review.

As detailed below, non-available beds are also kept under review, correct as of 31st March 2023:

This ensures that ensure maximum placement sufficiency is maintained. The vast majority of the 97 beds not available as detailed below arise from a foster carer having one bedroom but having terms of approval to care for one child or two if siblings. When a single child is placed in that bedroom, reporting details a 'lost' bedroom space which, in reality, was only available if the placement had been for two siblings who are able to safely share a bedroom.

Households on hold	5
Total number of approved places including exemptions	391
Filled Places	262
Occupancy rate	67%
Non available beds	97
Non available beds rate	25%
Vacant beds	16
Vacant beds rate	4%

Our Recruitment strategy and marketing campaigns

The Digital Marketing Specialist remains in post and supports all elements of our 'mainstream' recruitment activity, including to our specialist Resilience foster carer scheme.

A variety of marketing approaches are used including digital, social media channels, radio, as well as a range of outdoor engagement to promote fostering for Northamptonshire Children's Trust. The Lead Member and chair of the Corporate Parenting Board along with staff and foster carers within the organisation remain very supportive in promoting fostering within their networks.

We have an Annual Fostering Communications and Marketing Plan that has had input from the whole of the Fostering Service and offers a breakdown of digital marketing strategies, community-based activities, printed marketing, and the budget allocated to each of these. Different types of fostering are planned to be promoted on various weeks throughout the year. The duration and amount of advertising planned for each scheme is based on the sufficiency needs identified by the Independent Fostering Agency and analysis of referrals for children's placements received into the team. *Please see the separate Marketing and Recruitment Activity report.*

The Fostering Service continues to employ the talents of a specialist Digital Marketing Recruitment Specialist to support with:

- Recruitment Campaigns
- Targeted activity across the year to raise the Fostering Service's profile to include the use of
 - Facebook
 - Twitter
 - Google Ads
 - LinkedIn
 - Social Media campaigns
 - Dedicated NCT Fostering Service webpage
 - Partnership working with other Local Authorities
 - Exploring partnerships with other local companies
 - 'Face to Face' and engagement activity locally across Northamptonshire.
 - Event planning

Brand

This year, we wanted to create a 'brand' and a uniformed look, so each type of fostering had their own tag line under the 'step up' brand.

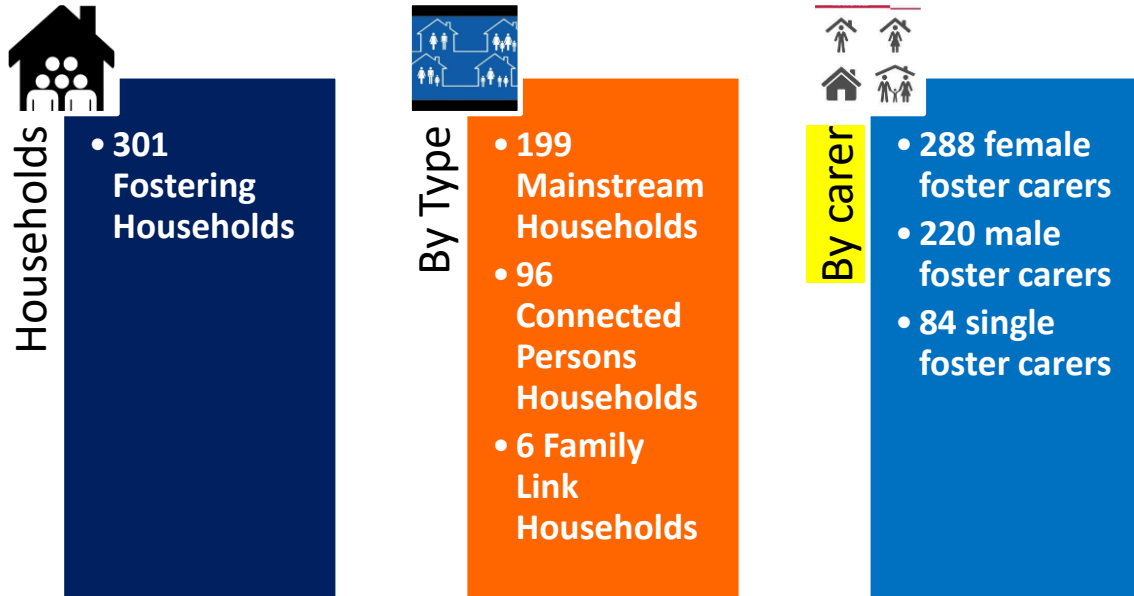
- Mainstream – Step up and make a difference
- Siblings – Help us to take steps together
- Emergency – Could you step in when I need you
- Resilience – Help us take steps into adulthood
- Parent and child – Supporting both big and little steps
- Family Link – Could you step in and support our family

2022/23 advertising examples



7. Post Approval Support and Supervision

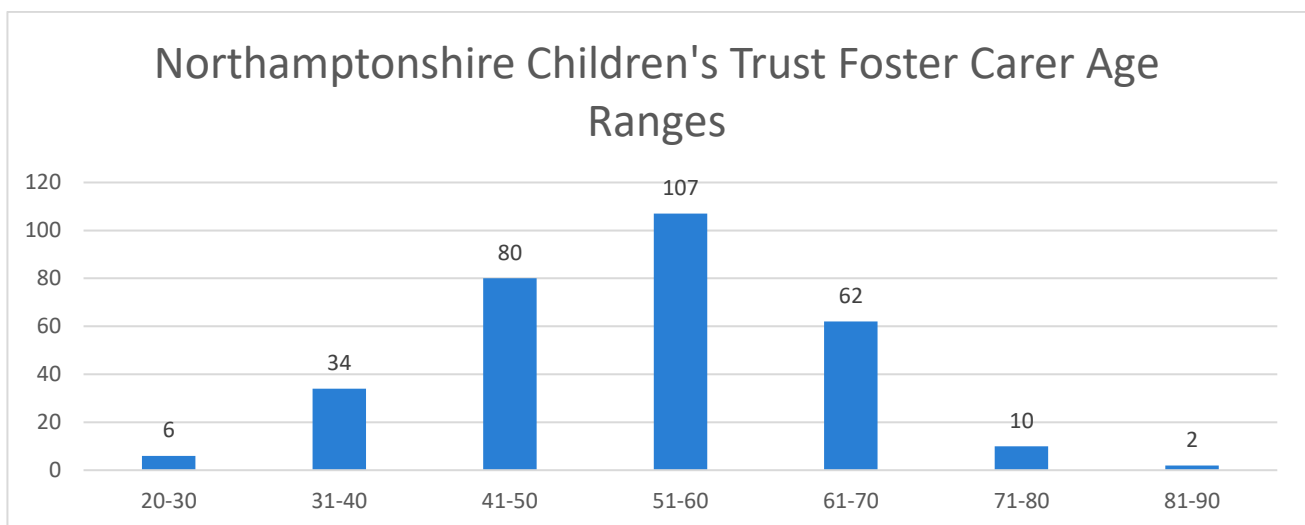
As of 31st March 2023, we had:



Single-carer households accounted for less than one third (28%) of all households.

Our foster carers come from a wide range of age groups, with our youngest carers aged between **20-30** and our oldest carers aged between **81-90**.

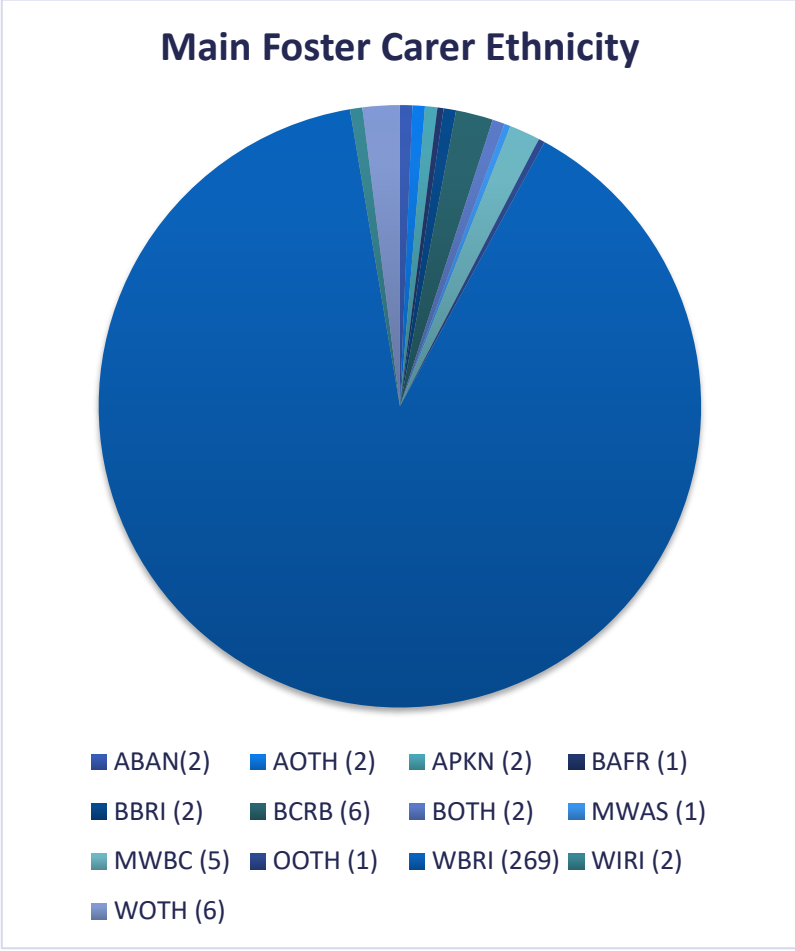
Most of our foster carers are aged between **51-60 (36%)**. This is slightly below national figures (**40%**).



Our foster carers come from a wide range of different cultural and ethnic backgrounds including:

- Bangladeshi
- Indian
- Pakistani
- African
- African Caribbean
- Chinese
- Irish
- Black British
- White British
- Asian British
- White European

and foster carers from mixed heritage backgrounds. Most of our foster carers identified as White British.



On 31 March 2023, in line with previous years, most foster carers were White British (89%). This also correlates with the overall demographic of our looked after population also being White British. This means that we are predominantly able to place child in households where their cultural and heritage identity are met and where we may have placed children with foster carers of a different cultural ethnicity and heritage to themselves, we have considered what other support, such as additional training or access to specialist hair or skin care, can be put in place for both the children and their foster carers in this scenario.

There are 8 Households with same sex Foster Carers.

The average time our Foster Carers have been with us is 6 years 1 months.
The current longest serving Foster Carer has been with us for 42 years and 4 months

NCT’s Independent Fostering Service continues to ensure this is consistently achieved, and we continue to evolve better ways of monitoring compliance with policies and procedures in supervision and performance meetings and audit and dip sample activity.

We track and monitor themes and patterns arising from Fostering Panels, with specific actions arising from any consistent areas for development through our panel chair meetings.

The performance of the service is also monitored by Ofsted inspections, the Corporate Parenting Board, the Sufficiency Board, the Children's Trust Board and the senior leadership team. The Fostering Service were subject to an ILACS Inspection across the whole of NCT's Children's Services undertaken in November 2022 and then a full five day SCCIF Inspection of the Fostering Service only in February 2023.

The performance indicator system initially established in February 2022 continues to be reviewed and refined to ensure that we have management oversight on all our fostering files and is now more sophisticated in the data we can hold and correlate. This supports foster carers receiving regular supervision and that their annual reviews remain on time, unannounced visits, DBS, medicals are up to date. This also measures if the child has been seen and if their bedroom has been checked. All of the regulatory compliance functions are now supported by practice guidance and policy updates to support a congruent approach to social worker practice within the Fostering Service. This has been a significant focus of the work undertaken within this reporting period and remains so moving forward. This remains a continued area of focus of development and improvement for the Fostering Service.

A new induction programme is being introduced this year which will be reviewed with the input from a group of foster carers to ensure that our Independent Fostering Agency reflects our new carers' journey to being able to care for their first child.

Since last year we have started to co-work cases between the Recruitment Team and Post Approval Team. This ensures a smooth handover and more of a managed induction to fostering for many of our newly approved foster carers, with the recruitment workers having been involved with initial matching discussions and supporting with first placements. There has been positive feedback regarding this arrangement.

As we are currently reviewing our existing induction programme, this remains in development and will be in the form of interactive online information covering the following areas:

- Role of SSW and what to expect in supervision.
- Role of Fostering Duty.
- What to expect in the first duty phone call.
- What to expect and to request in a Placement Planning Meeting.
- Expectations of Training, Continuing Professional Development, TSD and Annual Review.
- Introduction to the NFCA.

This will not replace the co-working arrangements currently in place and remain the usual practice.

Support groups

The following support groups are established within the county and are based around localities. They are free for foster carers to attend. The Registered Manager has visited each of the support groups below between September 2022 and December 2022.

Locality/Group Name	Meeting Frequency	Description/notes
Corby Support Group	Monthly	Locality support group for the Corby and surrounding areas. Has been successfully piloted as a training hub.

Kettering Support Group	Monthly	Locality support group for the Kettering and surrounding areas
Rushden/Wellingborough area	Monthly	Covers Rushden/Wellingborough as well as Irthlingborough and wider area
Northampton Support Group	Monthly	Northampton based group
South Northamptonshire Support Group	Monthly	Covers geographic area of West Northants below Northampton
Family Link Support Group	Monthly	Support group for Family Link Short Breaks carers
Northamptonshire Foster Carers Association (NFCA)	Monthly	Established Foster Carer Association
Male Foster Carer Support Group (countywide)	Monthly	Based in Rushden, male carer support group.
Special Guardians and Kinship Support Group (Countywide)	Monthly	County wide group.
BAME foster carer support group	Quarterly	Newly established support group in March 2023.
Karing Kids (County wide)	Special events throughout the year	For birth children of foster carers
Children with Disabilities Support Group	Quarterly	Based at the Penrith Centre
Single Carer Support Group	Quarterly	Based at the Penrith Centre
Separated Children's Support Group	Quarterly	Based at the Penrith Centre
LGBTQIA+ Support Group	Quarterly	Based at the Penrith Centre
BAME Support Group	Quarterly	Based at the Penrith Centre
Foster Carer Buddy Support Group	Quarterly	Group in development to support the existing Buddy Scheme.

Other support in place

"Share the Care" E Newsletter

This goes out to all carer households every two months via email and includes corporate and carer information. There are contributions from foster carers, staff and senior leaders, and also includes positive news stories about children.

"We see J monthly for supervision but know that she is contactable in between those times if we needed her. She is responsive to any requests or concerns we may have. She makes sure that she sees our foster and own children too."

NCT Foster Carers

"We now have been allocated S and she has been amazing at getting to know both myself and J as well as the children. We look forward to working with her on our journey as foster parents."

NCT Foster Carers

"A particularly found his candid discussions with SSW. A to be useful, using her as a sounding board and having realistic expectations for the nature of placements. We have also found the recruitment team to be particularly helpful in getting us back in the loop and ready for our first annual review following a long break from fostering.

NCT Foster Carers

"Taking on K was something new for us, K came with some behaviours that could be difficult to manage at times and so we had to look at different ways to help her, make the world a calm and safe place for her, but also showing her boundaries. We took advice from doctors and our health visitor as well as our SSW who were all great helping and supporting us throughout K's time with us"

NCT Foster Carers

Whilst approval of new foster carers is a priority, we recognise that work needs to be undertaken to ensure that we are effectively using the fostering resources available within fostering households already approved.

This has included reviewing and supporting foster carers who have been 'on hold' to see whether they can return to caring for children and the introduction of a clear process for foster carers who are requesting to be put on hold with guidelines around timescales, staying in contact, support and training needs during this period and return to fostering (including need for review).

In the last month of this reporting period (March 23) two families felt able to return to fostering after being contacted and visited.

This review allowed us to get a clearer view of our actual capacity as well as supporting those carers who might struggle to continue their fostering journey.

Where appropriate, we support changing foster carers approval where they have space in their home to care for additional children, and this resulted in 3 additional beds through a permanent change of approval and 12 additional beds on variation of approval for limited time.

Public Health Project

Supported by Public Health for 2 years from October 2020-22, the Fostering Support Fund increases the support for in-house Foster Families with foster children aged 5-12. The project focuses on the development of in-house skills and commissioning therapeutic interventions for children and carers, with the aim of improving mental health outcomes for children and to improve placement stability. Since the start of the project, we have supported over 80 foster children/families/care experienced young adults with individual therapeutic interventions, with real improvements to their mental health, wellbeing and resilience.

Within this reporting period, these supervising social workers have now received the DDP Level 2 training to support and embed their learning of this approach. Additionally, a senior Supervising Social worker role has been created to lead on Therapeutic approach and to act as an ambassador for the whole Fostering Service, who is responsible for ensuring that all new relevant research is cascaded down to the service. Additionally, this dedicated worker will continue to expand supervising social workers own 'toolbox' with strategies and responses they can offer to foster carers to develop and employ within their work with children. Foster Carers

have access to the clinical psychologist for consultations and complex case supervisions bi-monthly which has been reported as being beneficial and supportive by foster carers. The staff team's knowledge base of therapeutic parenting and approaches has increased significantly due to all of the above.

Resources available through this scheme are:

- All foster carers can access the National Association for Therapeutic Parenting
- Clinical Psychologist offering consultations to carers
- DDP training for SSWs which will be introduced at support groups

Below is an overview of the support offered by this scheme to date:

Group Work Therapeutic Parenting

Non-Violent Resistance

Therapeutic Parenting

Thera play

Therapeutic Stories

Therapeutic Life Story Work including Carer

Resilience carers

This scheme is to meet demands for a specific cohort of children aged 10+, who are at risk of being placed in (out of county) residential homes due to their complexities and difficulties in finding family placements. Resilience foster carers have a team around the child including therapeutic training and support. The residential sector supports the placement and social workers. We are working closely with a local psychologist service, Broad Horizons, who have developed bespoke training for these foster carers to address key challenges in caring for this cohort of children. Clinical supervision is part of their offer to staff and foster carers.

We set out to have 10 Resilience scheme households by the end of March 2023 which would have enabled a further 6 children to be stepped down from residential care. Within this reporting period, we have achieved 7 households with 5 children in placement as of March 2023, with two other Resilience carers significantly progressed in assessment at this time.

Training Offer for Resilience Carers

Please see separate annual Training Report, with the highlights from this being:

Before attending fostering panel there is an expectation that carers must complete the Specialist Foster Caring Training Programme presented by Broad Horizons.

The training further develops skills in relation to the understanding of the emotional and traumatic experiences of children and young people in placements that have been identified as having complex needs.

On completion of that training and clinical supervision, the foster carer achieves a certificate in Specialist Foster Care.

Broad Horizons exclusive DART model is tailored to meet the learning needs for each individual to become a specialist foster carer.

The core principals focus on:

Dissociation

Attachment

Resilience

Trauma

Family Link/Short Break Care for Children with Disability

Family Link gives disabled children in Northamptonshire the chance to spend time with another family to give their family a break. This could be for an afternoon or a few days.

There were 7 family link foster carer households at the end of March 23 which is 2 less than the previous year. During the year 2022/23 we did not approve any new households. Further work is currently being undertaken to ascertain how many families we need going forward which is one of the priority areas in our recruitment strategy.

The Family Link carers are supported by two dedicated Supervising Social Workers from within the Fostering Service who lead on this support alongside their respective allocated fostering households. This ensures that a 'joined up approach' to the support that our Family Link foster carers receive.

Parent and Child Placements

We currently only have one approved foster carer households who is able to offer 'Parent and Child' placements. There remains an area of focus for the Independent Fostering Agency within the forthcoming reporting period, A targeted workshop was delivered to the supervising social worker cohort to support a wider understanding of the specialist support required for 'Parent and Child' foster carers at the whole Service Development Day held in March 2023. This was delivered by our specialist 'Parent and Child' foster carer.

These placements have offered opportunities for parents to care for their children and whilst neither led to children and their parents successfully returning to the community. The foster carers have been supportive in transitioning the children to their permanent carers when it became evident that their parents were not in a position to offer the consistent, nurturing care for the duration of their childhoods.

8. Connected Persons and foster carers granted temporary approval under Regulation 24

Connected Persons Foster Carers and Special Guardians

The Connected Persons Team undertakes assessments of people who are connected in some way to children being supported by the Trust. These assessments are typically of family members but may also include those who are connected to the children in other ways for example, trusted friends of the family, other professionals supporting the children including teachers and others who have a meaningful relationship with the children and who are able to evidence a commitment to supporting the children to maintain family relationships into the long term.

Assessments usually consider applicants to be the long-term carers of the children as either Foster Carers or, increasingly, as Special Guardians. Indeed, over the period of this annual review there has been far more emphasis on supporting prospective Connected Persons to become Special Guardians and to this end an SGO training package has been provided to social workers across the Trust and to Connected Persons which helps them to make more informed decisions about the opportunities that Special Guardianship conveys as opposed to fostering.

In terms of trends for the Connected Persons Team there has been a levelling off of the number of family and friends' assessments being undertaken this year compared to last year. This is mainly due to the development, through training, through the sharing of updated policies and procedures and through greater co-working, of better understanding across the Trust of the requirements of fostering as specified within Fostering Regulations and National Minimum Standards. This enhanced understanding has meant that referring agencies are better informed when making referrals to the Connected Persons Team and considering other options for children in terms of permanence.

In 2022 - 2023, there were 217 referrals into the team which is a reduction from the figure of 254 in 2021 - 2022. This reduction is mainly explained because of improvements in the screening process which has meant that a higher number of initial referrals have not progressed beyond this stage as they were identified as not meeting the requirements of Fostering Regulations and National Minimum Standards.

Furthermore, in terms of Connected Persons being approved by the Agency Decision Maker there were 4 more approved Connected Persons carers at the end of March 2023 as compared to the previous year, 34 in total. Additionally, 35 other households undergoing assessment were closed prior to the assessment being completed for reasons including placements no longer being required, applicants withdrawing and children being returned to their parents following positive parenting assessments.

The specific challenges for our Connected Persons foster carers and Special Guardians are fully recognised within the Fostering Service and to this effect a specific Kinship support offer has been developed this year for approved Connected Persons carers and those undergoing assessment. This offer includes a quarterly Kinship coffee morning which gives carers the opportunity to meet other carers and members of the team on an informal basis to both catch up on current developments as well as to take the opportunity to meet current and new carers to share their experiences of the assessment process and the opportunities and challenges that go side by side with being Connected Persons.

Most recently a Special Guardianship group has been set up specifically focussed on Special Guardians. This is in its infancy but is already beginning to bear fruit with an Open Day event for all Special Guardians being planned for later in 2023.

There are also more formal meetings with the Northamptonshire Foster Carers Association which are for all foster carers whether Connected Persons or Mainstream and which are regularly attended by Connected Persons carers.

In terms of the support to families and children going through the assessment process the Connected Persons Team continues to provide high levels of support and training as it has always done. The Connected Persons Induction training programme has been improved and built on in that there is now an IT based training programme that sits alongside the face-to-face programme, which enables applicants undergoing assessment who aren't able to attend face-to-face training to access the same training provision.

Furthermore, as already alluded to an SGO specific training programme has also been developed and currently 6 face-to-face sessions have taken place with social workers from across the Trust and with prospective Special Guardians. It is expected that this provision will support more applicants to become Special Guardians thus supporting families and children to move on in their lives without the need for ongoing Children's Services input. However, this does not mean that further support is not available as, if requested, the Post Adoption and SGO Support team provides a range of support to those Special Guardians who identify a need post order.

9. Involving our Foster Carers

Our vision is to work as one team together with children and their foster carers at the centre of that team.



We aim to work in partnership with our foster carers and are facilitating opportunities for them to share their views and influence service developments. Plans to achieve this include the development of task groups which offer opportunities for co-production between the Fostering Service, foster carers, our children and young people.

Managers, including NCT Chief Executive Officer, meet regularly with the Northamptonshire Foster Care

Association and foster carers are actively involved in recruitment activities. Additionally, any new process or change in process is also shared at the monthly IFA/NFCA Forums to which all of our foster carers are invited and a diary of dates for these meetings have already been shared with all of our foster carers through until the end of the year. These monthly meetings have been in place since July 2022. Managers from within the Fostering Service attend the NFCA committee meetings held on a monthly basis which is a further opportunity to share any changes to policy and practice. The NFCA committee members then further disseminate this information through the area foster carer support groups offered across the county on a monthly basis.

In January, a joint Child in Care (CIC), NFCA and IFA Forum was established to meet quarterly to support the development of relationships with our foster carers with both the Fostering Service and the CIC teams. This

has been well received and is progressing the development of both the new Savings policy for Northamptonshire children in foster care and a joint children's social worker and supervising social worker visiting policy, to ensure the 'Team around the Child' approach is maintained.

Moving forward in partnership with Northamptonshire Foster Carer Association we intend to work together to further develop a support group programme and events for the year ahead.

As referenced elsewhere within this report, the NFCA continue to deliver support groups across Northamptonshire on behalf of the Fostering Service and within this reporting period, the SLA has been reviewed in this regard.

A bi - monthly magazine, 'Share the Care', continues to be prepared and shared with all foster carers to share information, updates, and good news stories in respect of the Fostering Service and foster carers report that this is really helpful in receiving all updates in one place.

One of our Foster carers attends Corporate Parenting Board and takes an active part in contributing to service development through this forum.

10. Involving our children

Foster children and birth children are encouraged to provide feedback for their foster families' annual review and it is positive to see that feedback was received from looked after children and young people in 83 % of household reviews, which is a decrease from 94 % last year, and from birth children in 93 % of household reviews, which again is a slight decrease on 98% from last year. Most children report to be happy and settled in the families they live with. Where a child might express concerns, this feedback enables us to respond in a timely manner.

Celebrating the successes and achievements of children in our foster families is an important part of what we do and foster carers and supervising social workers present these to managers within NCT and the IFA.

Young People who are currently in care or are care experienced young people are supported by the fostering service to lead a workshop during the 3-day preparation training for potential foster carers. This is enjoyed by participants and also allows the young people to assess how the participants naturally relate to them. They then provide feedback regarding the applicant's suitability to foster.

A children in care consultation group is planned for this forthcoming reporting period, with a dedicated survey to be undertaken with our children and young people placed within our in-house foster carers to help inform and shape the delivery of our Fostering Service for our children and to ensure that the child's voice is heard through our service development.

'Karing Kids' support group has been ongoing for a number of years in Northamptonshire in recognition of the key role that birth children play in fostering households and to thank them for their



contribution to fostering. One of the aims of this group is to support with the retention of foster carers and improve the stability of our children in care placements. In November 2022, we held a 'Karing Kids' competition to design a logo. We have used the winning entries to create a pull up banner to be used at our recruitment events and 'Skills to Foster' training to support applicant foster carers gain an understanding of our support offer to their own birth children.

We are rightly proud of all our children, and we will continue to capture and celebrate all they do and their successes.

Children and young people's views are integral to the fostering service.

Positive feedback is celebrated, and any worries children and young people raise about their care are taken seriously and addressed with the foster carers and where necessary in line with the complaints policy.

Children in fostering families are also consulted as part of the foster carer annual review. Children's lived experiences are explored in support and foster carer supervision.

11. Learning and Development

Foster Carer Training Programme

Please see the annual training report.

NCT's Fostering Service offers a comprehensive online and 'face to face' training offer to our foster carers. This is kept under regular review and supports the mandatory training requirements for our foster carers. An annual survey is undertaken each year to garner feedback from our foster carers as to the value of the training made available to them as well as individual feedback and reflection forms that are completed at the end of each training by the foster carers. Additionally, within the Annual Review process, foster carer are always asked to provide as to the feedback as to the quality of the training that has been made available to them. This ensures that the training offer remains of a good standard and meets the varied learning needs of all our cohort of foster carers.

A Foster Carer learning, and development programme is produced annually. All Foster Carers have their own eLearning accounts through which they can access training online. Feedback on each course is requested from attendees and tells us that foster carers are finding the available courses informative and of value. A personal development plan for each individual foster carer has been introduced which is discussed and reviewed in supervisions to measure impact of learning and how this is supporting the child in placement.

As an action of the SCCIF inspection undertaken in February, a mandatory training requirement policy for foster carers has been reviewed and updated. Foster carers had been written to and a specific tracker put in place to record progress made against this. This includes the following requirements:

All foster carers seeking approval with NCT's Fostering Service must complete the following mandatory training courses within initial assessment:

- First Aid
- Skills to Foster' for mainstream foster carer applicants
- Connected Persons Induction for kinship foster carer applicants
- Online Safety
- Basic Safeguarding- to include Virtual Reality
- Health and Safety for foster Carers – An introduction
- Safeguarding Children for Foster Carers and Adopters only

Within the first twelve months of approval, all foster carers must also complete:

- Signs of Safety 1 day Introduction

Additionally, each approved foster carer (i.e. both foster carers where a two carer household) must complete one of the following safeguarding courses within each review period (i.e. annually as an absolute minimum). This needs to be only one of the courses detailed below:

'Face to Face' safeguarding training offer

Keeping Children and Young People Safe Online for Foster Carers and Adopters - Webinar

Bitesize Gangs and Knife Crime for Foster Carers and Adopters only

Safeguarding Children for Foster Carers and Adopters only

Keeping children and pets safe in the home - Webinar

E-Learning safeguarding training offer

Contextual Safeguarding

Female Genital Mutilation

Introduction to Safeguarding

Peer on Peer abuse

Radicalisation

Children and Young People who Run Away or Go Missing

County Lines

Gangs, Guns and Knives

Child Trafficking

Digital and Internet-Supported Self-Harm

Harmful Sexual Behaviours

Child Sexual Exploitation

Online Safety and Cyberbullying

Pornography and the Potential Impact on Young People

Social Media, Selfies and Sexting

The identified safeguarding course to be completed in the forthcoming review period must be included within the foster carers' individual PDP as part of each Annual Review.

Additionally, within each three year period following initial approval, all foster carers must renew the following mandatory training:

- Safeguarding Children for Foster Carers and Adopters only
- First Aid Training

A Foster Carer learning, and development programme is produced annually. All Foster Carers have their own eLearning accounts through which they can access training online.

NCT offer both face-to-face and online delivery as we recognise that the needs of our foster carers vary according to the they care they provide, with our face-to-face training offer being significantly increased over this last year.

Face-to-Face Training	E Learning
Within our current training offer we have over 56 face-to-face courses which are offered throughout the year. They are bookable and the offer can be viewed online.	We have over 70 courses available via E Learning. The courses range from knife crime, drug and alcohol awareness to court skills, healing environments and positive parenting techniques.
186 face-to-face courses delivered	780 E Learning units have been allocated and fully completed.
1475 attendees booked onto the courses and fully completed them.	

In addition to the Skills to Foster Training and a number of face-to-face and e-learning courses, the Recruitment team continues to be accredited in using Virtual Reality (VR) training. This is a tool we use within every assessment for prospective foster carers. It allows applicants to experience abuse and neglect from a child's perspective, as well as understanding the impact of trauma and how certain stimulus can trigger a trauma response in a child or young person. This resource has been used to great effect within assessment and has provided strong evidence of how applicants will be able to support a child or young person in a more therapeutic manner once approved as a foster carer.

Training	Feedback
Critical thinking in assessment	<i>Great course, well delivered learnt a lot how to put critical thinking into practice</i>
Working With Anxiety	<i>This was an online webinar presented by Jessica van Maanen. It was a very good overview of the topic giving a good balance of theory followed by practical examples of how to help reduce anxiety in the children we are caring for. There was balance between the use of the PowerPoint slides and talking through the topics in such a way as to keep them interesting. I was particularly pleased that we were given references to some of the materials used so that there is an opportunity to go deeper into some of the ideas presented.</i>
Working With Anxiety - Webinar	<i>I was pleasantly surprised how engaging this training was. We have been promised a copy of the Power Point. I have already been reading more by Dan Seigel as a result of this webinar.</i>
Keeping children and pets safe in the home	<i>Useful training and relevant to our role</i>
Keeping Children and Young People Safe Online for Foster Carers and Adopters - Webinar	<i>Our trainer was excellent and one of the most engaging and knowledgeable trainers we have had on our journey. Thank you so much for making a difficult subject informative and effective!</i>
Working with Anxiety	<i>Very informative and the trainer was excellent in the way she delivered the course. She was very calm and kept me focused and interested.</i>
Critical thinking in assessment	<i>Great course, well delivered learnt a lot how to put critical thinking into practice</i>

More recent discussions with Foster Carers have shown that they would prefer more local training and we have successfully piloted some training at one of our local groups for foster carers in the Corby area which was very well received. Training and contact hub lets have been established in Local and Independent Libraries across Northamptonshire within this reporting period and have been very well received.

In addition to the formal 'classroom' training, Foster Carers have access to a wide range of resources to support them to develop which are available through the online subscription platforms - Research in Practice and Fostering Network, Coram BAAF.

Although it is improving, training compliance remains a challenge for the service and a Fostering Training review has produced a draft proposal to renew the training programme for foster carers and improve compliance with training.

Foster carers are supported in completing the Training, Support and Development (TSD) workbooks as well as Advanced Level portfolios. Completion of these documents is linked to carer development and progression, which supports carer retention.

12. Placement Stability

The percentage of children who have lived in the same placement for 2+ years has remained strong (66%) and this tells that most children are appropriately placed in homes that are meeting their needs.

We continue to see an increase in requests for children to become cared for and this, combined with the challenges experienced both locally and nationally in identifying suitable carers who can meet children's complex needs, has contributed to the reduction in short term placement stability. The use of emergency carers has increased and, whilst offering a place of safety to children and young people, they experience a change of carer within a short space of time. Work continues to be undertaken to scrutinise new placement requests with a focus on supporting foster carers to continue caring for children at times when instability is experienced and ensure support for challenges faced within the foster home.

Monthly sufficiency board meetings continue to take place with colleagues in NCT to assess what is needed to improve stability for all looked after children and to ensure that all children receive the support they need.

The aspiration is for all children to live within stable and nurturing homes for the duration of their childhoods. Focus is on provision of support to prevent likelihood of placement breakdown and includes developing skills, knowledge and resilience of foster carers through the public health funded fostering support project, use of placement stability meetings, and greater involvement of birth families through progressive contact arrangements. Further work is planned within this forthcoming year to better cement robust processes in respect of the reporting and recording of placement stability meetings and to ensure that learning is then taken forward and cascaded through the Fostering Service, to support the stability of children's fostering placements more widely.

We are seeing a positive impact of the completion of the Initial Matching referral document at the point a child is initially matched with a carer and the individual Safe Care Plans in which the child's needs are highlighted. These plans are being linked to foster carer's own Personal Development Plans. This is starting to enable the carers and supervising social workers to ensure the training plan is around the child and the

needs of the Fostering household. This remains an area of continued development and focus within the Fostering Service.

The Independent Fostering Agency continue to have a Clinical Psychologist role embedded through the Public Health project which focusses on the outcomes for children in our foster families through placement stability.

The Psychologist has developed a training plan for staff which include: DDP & PACE, Adverse Childhood Experiences', coping with change, Restoring Resilience, Emotional Regulation, Self-Reflection (tree of life), Managing difficult conversations, Therapeutic Stories, Blocked Care.

The cohort of SSWs, Practice Managers and Team Managers who attended DDP (Part 1) last year, have been offered DDP (part 2) training within this reporting period and this has further embedded their understanding of therapeutic practices and the wide learning across the fostering service. This enhances the support offer available to our foster carers and children.

Monthly drop-in sessions for staff to discuss possible referrals to panel and seek advice are in place and continued to be well attended. The reasons for attending the drop-in sessions have included: to ask for clinical advice around complex cases; to ask for advice around placements at risk of disruption; to ask for advice around how to meet the mental health needs of children and foster carers.

Permanency has been achieved for 8 children where long term matches between child and foster carer have been presented to panel this year, an increase on 6 children from the previous year. This number is still lower than we expect, given the number of children in long term placements who have not yet been officially matched. The Fostering Service are committed to working in partnership with NCT's children's teams to progress permanence matching for children in a timely manner and the Fostering Service Manager now sits on the Permanence Tracking Panels that are held twice monthly, once in the West and once in the North of the county, since September 2022 to support the early identification of permanency planning for children and to maintain the timely progression of these plans. It is therefore anticipated that within the forthcoming year, the numbers of children who become permanently matched with their foster carers will increase significantly.

13. Fostering Panel

Please see annual Panel Report.

Northamptonshire Children's Trust Fostering Panel continues to have a significant role in maintaining quality services for children in care. The recommendations that panel make will always be based on providing a stable, secure, restorative and therapeutic living environment for children in care. The independent Fostering Panel and decision maker make timely, qualitative, and appropriate recommendations and decisions in line with the overriding objective to promote the welfare of children in foster care.

Fostering Panel provides an important Quality Assurance function to the Fostering Service. This year a total of 115 cases (74.68%) were rated as excellent or good. This is a decrease of 5.62% from the previous year with satisfactory and inadequate reports rising by 7.36%. Quality Assurance is discussed at the regular Joint Chairs and Team Managers Meeting. Additionally, the Registered Manager has observed a total of four Fostering Panels (both virtually and 'face to face' and across a mixture of Panel A and Panel B) since coming

into post in late June to support the Quality Assurance function of her role and the delivery of Fostering Panel. The Fostering Service meets quarterly with panel chairs and panel members are also invited to participate in Independent Fostering Agency -learning events. Bespoke panel training is provided twice yearly, in May and November.

In November, Fostering Panels moved from being held fully virtually to being held virtually and 'face to face' on alternating weekly basis; there are therefore now two monthly virtual Panels and two 'face to face'. The transition to this new arrangement has worked successfully with positive feedback from applicants, carers and social workers. To continue to improve the experience of fostering panel for applicants, approved foster carers and professionals, feedback is sought after attendance at panel.

Panel feedback

"I found panel to be a very positive experience. This was the first face to face panel in a very long time and I was worried it would feel overwhelming, however it was quite the opposite. As always panel was well structured, and I found the questions for the applicant to be appropriate. The carer was given sufficient time to respond and was listened to. Every member on panel had a lovely smiley face which is very reassuring and puts people at ease."

"I felt Panel were excellent today. This was a complex assessment, but all questions were sensitive and supportive. I really got a sense that Panel were delighted to recommend such a positive outcome for both children in this case."

"I have enjoyed attending both types of panels. I usually find that new applicants prefer virtual as they prefer the comfort of their own home and do not feel as nervous. However today the applicants enjoyed meeting face to face as they had fostered before and felt it was more personable. This was my first face to face panel since the pandemic and it was nice to meet everyone, and I felt the panel experience overall was very positive."

"The panel members themselves were very welcoming and friendly to me and the applicants.

Appropriate questions were asked, and panel identified key strengths that were highlighted in the assessment.

I was also given positive feedback on the report and how previous information had been incorporated, which was valuable."

"We had what felt like a very honest meeting reviewing our unorthodox first year of fostering. Our professional and personal challenges were met with understanding and respect, while taking practical perspectives on how to move forward. We both felt that the panel were very supportive and encouraging, empowering us as foster parents despite our setbacks. The questions covered reassure us that we have answers where attention is needed and incite further consideration to how we can improve.

Our needs and requirements were well considered, to make sure that we are fully equipped and able to undertake the role to the best of our ability."

"We were happy with the panel process and welcomed the questions from the panel. We appreciated the way we were told that we'd be recommended to be approved at the time of panel and the individual panel members reasons and comments made it feel more personal even though it was via TEAMS."

"Thanks very much for making me feel at ease. The general introductions helped to relax and put me at ease along with the questions which were put across in a straightforward manner."

Application	Numbers
Mainstream Assessments	18
Connected Person Assessments	42
1st Reviews	59
Change of Approval	9
Other Reviews	14
Match - In-House	2
Match - Agency	6
Termination of Approval	3
Extension of Reg 24 Placement	26
Representations	0
Closures	61 (to include mainstream and connected person's foster carers)
Short Report: Connected Persons	3

14. Complaints

There were 4 complaints made by foster carers between April 1st 2022 and March 31st 2023:

- Two complaints were made by carers in response to delays in agreed building works being progressed to provide an extension to the carers' property to support the fostering task. This building work is now progressed in one case and cannot be progressed in another due to the property being Housing Association owed and agreement not being given for the work to be carried out.
- One complaint related to the fact that the children's social worker had arranged to visit the two children in placement at school against the foster carers' wishes. This was predominantly a complaint against the allocated children's social worker but did also consider the fact that the SSW had supported this visit.
- One complaint was received by a foster carer subject to an ongoing investigation following several disclosures being made by a child and the fact that the other child in placement, the sibling of the child who has made the disclosures, has not been allowed to return to her care.

The theme this year was that complaints received were about foster carers experiencing a lack of support from NCT, but not necessarily directly the Fostering Service.

Three of the complaints were partially upheld but not solely against the Fostering Service but NCT more widely and one complaint cannot be concluded until the outcome of the investigation is known. Following all complaint investigations and response, recommendations made focussed mainly on a need for improving communication and timeliness in responding to concerns before they escalate in an official complaint.

Learning from these complaints is cascaded through team meetings. Peer reflective sessions will be introduced in the coming months to understand themes from complaints and collaborative reflective practice discussions (CRPDs/case audits).

Within this reporting period, there were 13 complaints made by children:

- One related to a child who complained about the home conditions, the way the foster carers' managed the behaviour of the other young people in placement and the foster carers' dogs whilst staying in a respite placement.
- One was made on behalf of a child via their school as he had become very worried that he would be 'told off' by his foster carer when he accidentally spilt paint on his jumper in an art class.
- One related to a child alleging that the male foster carer had hit his own children.
- One child complaint that the Foster carer had, when checking the child's phone found a picture where the top part of her body did not have clothing on. The female carer had taken a picture of this image and the child stated that this picture was sent in a text message to an adult ex foster Child aged (31) who subsequently showed the child the picture. The carer has apologised to the child and said the picture had been sent via a text message in error.
- One young person raised concerns with her social worker and her birth mother about her previous foster carer who had resigned.
- Four related to children being upset by comments their foster carers had allegedly made about their birth families.
- One related to a foster carer damaging their property (PlayStation game).
- One was made on behalf of a child via their school as to his 'unkempt' appearance.
- Two related to foster carers hurting a child: One when the birth parents of a teenage child complained that he had sustained a small bruise to his chest when the carer took him out of his seat in the car to separate him when he started fighting with his sibling in transit and one of pulling hair when the foster carer went to stop a child from hurting herself and causing damage with a hairbrush.

The Fostering Service has managed all these complaints made by children or young people against their foster carers during this reporting period through the Schedule 7 notification process. LADO consultation was sought on each occasion.

The expectation is that all of these children were visited by their allocated children's social work and their foster carer's allocated SSW very quickly after these complaints were raised. Training is identified where appropriate to support the development of foster carers in respect of the specific complaint raised.

Children are expected to be seen regularly in their foster placement and the dates and frequency of these visits are monitored within our Children's tracker. Children's 'wishes and feelings' are regularly sought, and children are made aware of how they can complain if they are unhappy with their fostering placement. Further tracking measures and auditing practices will be introduced to the Fostering Service to ensure that children are being seen in their fostering placements regularly and a new 'Visits to children' policy, to include reporting and recording expectations for SSWs, will be implemented to be able to better monitor this.

Children are always supported and encouraged to give feedback as to their experience of being in foster care for their own CIC Reviews as well as their foster carers' annual reviews.

15. Service Developments Planned for 2023 - 2024

Following the outcome of the SCCIF Inspection in February 2023, a robust Improvement plan remains in place for the Fostering Service which will be kept under regular review. The outcomes framework informing this plan include:



Additionally, the following targets for the growth and development of the Fostering Service remain in place:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Further develop of the infrastructure of the services reporting systems. NCT is committed to purchasing a system that is effective for a fostering service. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ The Fostering Strategy and Retention Strategy that has been implemented is progressed to ensure all the actions we are undertaking contribute to increasing our recruitment and the retention of our foster carers.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Continue to analyse the CRPD’s by end of March 23 to measure quality and identify areas of learning and development. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Ongoing review and refinement of Review of Placement making/ Matching – implement use of matching tool and comprehensive recording system for vacancies.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ To work together with our foster carers to improve on the training offer. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Carer engagement: To continue to improve and do more, to engage, strengthen relationships, and develop a sense of belonging to the agency and have a broader reach with our fostering families.

✓ Continue to build upon the comprehensive foster carer support group offer now in place for carers.

✓ Review our support and financial offer in consultation with our foster carers. To ensure it is competitive and contributes to the retention of our foster carers.

✓ Ongoing recruitment to the Resilience Fostering Scheme.

✓ To progress the development of support to our carers and children outside of normal working hours by supervising social workers.

✓ Develop a regular and systematic way of reviewing all foster carer resignations and all placement break downs, to ensure we learn and continuously improve our practice and the support we provide.

✓ To continue to work in partnership with our marketing team and be instrumental in implementing our recruitment and communications strategy.



NORTHAMPTONSHIRE CHILDREN'S TRUST VOLUNTARY ADOPTION AGENCY ANNUAL REPORT

2022-2023



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1. Purpose of Report

The Local Authority Adoption Service Regulations 2003 and National Minimum Standards 2011 require adoption agencies to provide a written report to their executive, i.e. the Children's Trust Board and the North and West Northamptonshire Councils respectively in relation to the activity of the Adoption Agency.

In order that they are able to satisfy themselves that the agency is complying with the conditions of registration (Minimum Standards 25.6; Statutory Adoption Guidance 3.3, and 5.39). This report has been prepared to achieve this.

The report includes information about the activity and performance of the Northamptonshire Children's Trust Voluntary Adoption Agency (NCT VAA) for the period 1st April 2021 to 31st March 2022.

2. Introduction

Northamptonshire Children's Trust Voluntary Adoption Agency was formed and registered with Ofsted in November 2020 to provide adoption services on behalf of Northamptonshire Children's Trust.

In January 2022 NCT VAA had its first Ofsted inspection as a Voluntary Adoption Agency since registration, the outcome of which was that the service was rated as GOOD by inspectors.

In addition, in October 2022 Northamptonshire Children's Trust was inspected within the ILACS framework and the work of the adoption service was considered within that process with the inspection report noting that -

'Strong adoption work means that children benefit from permanence at the earliest appropriate opportunity, sometimes with foster to adopt carers. Adopters benefit from the support of passionate, knowledgeable and skilled social workers. Adopters reported positively about their preparation and journey to becoming adoptive parents'.



The table below provides an overview of the progress made during this reporting period toward achieving the identified areas for development from the 2022/23 period.

Area for Development	Actions Achieved	Impact
<p>Family Finding and Transitions Model to be embedded in practice utilising research undertaken by the UEA to promote positive transitions for children to adoption and promote ongoing relationships with foster carers post placement.</p>	<p>Model launched in May 2022 and now is fully embedded into practice.</p>	<p>Family finders state that the model supports consistent, transparent, and evidenced based practice which is focused on the child's needs. They feel the model has supported collective decision making with improved management oversight.</p> <p>Adopters and foster carers are positive about the increased opportunities for them to meet and get to know each other prior to introductions commencing which supports all involved to feel positive and give the child 'permission' to move on with opportunities to maintain contact post transition focused on child's needs.</p>
<p>Training and support to adopters and prospective adopters will be enhanced by the launch of the FAL (RAA) core training and support group offer which will be complimented at a local level in response to local needs.</p>	<p>FAL training calendar launched and online booking system in place managed via the FAL central hub team.</p> <p>Twice monthly support groups are facilitated by NCT (1 day time and 1 evening group) for adopters – see report for details in addition there is FAL support group which NCT adopters are also able to access.</p>	<p>Adopter preparation Training has a stronger focus on therapeutic parenting and the lifelong impact of early experiences which provides a good foundation for adopters understanding of the needs of adopted children.</p> <p>Adopters are able to access a wider range of training via the FAL calendar.</p>

<p>Support Services for birth families to be reviewed to ensure services meet the needs of families and support them to maintain relationships with their children, as appropriate, following the granting of an adoption or SGO order</p>	<p>A 'Taking Stock' review of services has been completed considering supports offered and aspirations for future development.</p>	<p>The service has made links with the PAUSE project – the adoption service manager is now a member of the PAUSE strategic partnership board.</p> <p>The service has linked with PAUSE project workers to identify a group of birth mothers who would be willing to meet, to gain their views on what support services they feel would be beneficial in order to support a collaborative / co production approach to future developments.</p>
<p>Develop service user feedback mechanisms to enable the voice of children young people and their families to inform practice and policy developments.</p>	<p>Online service user feedback forms have been developed that can be completed and returned anonymously via MS forms.</p> <p>Feedback forms have been designed to capture feedback at key points across the adopter assessment and placement process as well as for families accessing post order support services.</p> <p>FAL have additionally developed similar online feedback mechanisms to capture adopter experiences of FAL share service activity</p>	<p>Forms will be launched for use from April 2023</p> <p>Feedback themes will be reviewed quarterly by the adoption service management team to inform practice and policy developments</p>
<p>Awareness raising activities and training in relation to the benefits and challenges of direct contact in adoption to be established for adopters, SW's and panel members.</p>	<p>General discussions are had with social workers individually and collectively within team meetings re the benefits and</p>	<p>The impact of this work is limited at present as the work is in its infancy.</p>

	<p>challenges of post adoption contact.</p> <p>Panel regularly feedback in relation to exploration of post order contact when considering matches for children and adopters.</p> <p>Plans for post adoption contact are routinely discussed in permanence planning meetings.</p> <p>Initial scoping discussion have been held with researchers who conducted the UEA contact after adoption study in relation to a staff training day on this topic which would include adoption service staff, panel members and wider NCT staff.</p>	<p>Issues relating to <i>safe uncertainty, risk assessment and management</i> need to be explored in conjunction with this work and will be progressed during the 2023/24 reporting period</p>
<p>Adoption Service Staff Training and Development plan to be launched in April 2022.</p>	<p>Training and Development Plan was launched in April 2022 as planned.</p> <p>Alongside generic training adoption specific training has been sourced and accessed for adoption social workers and managers in line with the plan as follows during this period-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using the Secure Base Model in Adoption Assessments • Learning from Serious Case Reviews where children had been living with adopters, SGO carers or foster carers 	<p>Adoption staff report feeling valued by the provision of adoption specific training opportunities. Staff are particularly positive about the secure base training, and this is routinely utilized within prospective adopter reports to support analysis and evidenced based recommendations.</p> <p>Feedback from adoption panel chairs within their annual report acknowledged the <i>strong emphasis upon a learning culture within the agency.</i></p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'We are Still Humans' supporting Birth Parents through the adoption process and contact • Assessing Prospective adopters considered for Sibling Groups • 'Blended Families' – Adoption from the perspective and experience of birth children <p>Alongside formal training the service hold monthly <i>learning lunches</i> which provide opportunities for workers from across the service to share areas of interest or expertise with each other to promote a culture of shared learning.</p>	
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3. Service Remit

The voluntary adoption agency was registered in November 2020. Prior to this, it operated as the adoption service for the local authority.

Co-location of adoption staff within the NCT office base supports collaborative working in relation to planning and placements of children for whom adoption is the plan and in relation to families in receipt of post order support services where there may be safeguarding concerns.

The Adoption Agency has the following remit:

- Recruitment, preparation, and assessment of adoptive parents.
- Family finding for children for whom Northamptonshire Children's Trust has a plan of adoption.
- Adoption Support to include provision of assessment and support to children and families both pre and post Adoption Order, services for adopted adults to access their birth records, support for



birth families affected by adoption, Letterbox contact exchange and support with direct contact post order.

- Support for children, young people and families for whom a Special Guardianship Order has been granted.

4. Family Adoption Links Regional Adoption Alliance

In January 2022 Northamptonshire formally became a partner of Family Adoption Links (FAL). This is a regional adoption partnership bringing together adoption services across Rutland, Leicestershire, Leicester City, North Lincolnshire and Lincolnshire and Northamptonshire. It aims to provide excellent, friendly inclusive services to those looking to adopt and families who have adopted.

As a partnership we are working together to improve outcomes for those children who enter care and are not able to return to their families of origin. We aim to ensure that *our* children achieve emotional, physical and legal permanence; growing up in loving homes with adults who provide them with a strong sense of security, continuity, commitment and identity.

FAL operates through a hub and spoke model enabling NCT to benefit from coordinating central functions whilst retaining direct service delivery functions within their own borders. This ensures the Partnership reflects the local context, adapted to meet the needs of local children and families, and maintains clear links to local Children & Families Services.

During the 2022-2023 reporting period the service has become a fully embedded partner within FAL with representation on all work stream and management groups. NCT have led the work to develop a FAL stage 1 pack for social workers supporting consistent practice across the partnership and are leading the Early Permanence work stream.

The FAL partnership supports NCT, and other agencies, to extend their support and training offer to adopters at all stages of their journey and work undertaken via the family finding work stream is supporting the tracking and placement of children from across the partner agencies with **82%** of partner agency children now being placed within the region with their families benefitting from the development of supports, training and consistent practice models delivered by the partnership.

In October 2022 the partnership launched the **Adopter Hub** and **Collabor8** groups, the purpose of which is to develop forums to support consultation and co-production of services going forward. The *Adopter Hub* group has representation from adopters from all partner agencies and similarly *Collabor8* is a group for adopted young people. The focus of discussions and topics is led by the groups and



supported by FAL staff – both groups have chosen to focus on education in the first instance and these discussions will be fed into work within the education work stream and development of the *education passport*.

5. Service Structure

The Registered Individual for the Voluntary Adoption Agency is Christina Skeel. Operational management of the service is provided by Tracy Morton as Adoption Service Manager supported by team managers responsible for two teams and an adoption panel service as outlined below.

Adoption Recruitment, Assessment and Family Finding Team
Team Manager x 1
Practice Manager x 2
Family Finding Social Worker x 2
Senior Social Worker x 1
Social Worker x 8
Administrator x2
Post Adoption and SGO Support Team
Team Manager x1
Practice Manager x 2
Post Adoption Counsellor x1
Post Adoption Adults Co-ordinator x1
Adoption Support Co-ordinator (Letterbox) x1
Family Support Worker x 1
Financial Allowances Officer x1
Administrator x 2
Adoption Panel
Panel Adviser x1
Panel Co-ordinator x1.5
Panel Administrator x1

All social work staff are registered with Social Work England. Workers within the service have a range of post qualifying experiences and are supported by NCT to add to their academic and professional qualifications to enhance their practice as appropriate.

Recruitment is carried out in line with the NCT's Equality and Diversity policies and recognises good employment practice. NCT and the Adoption Agency seek to recruit a diverse workforce that reflects the community that they serve. All staff having direct contact with children must undergo enhanced checks with the Disclosure & Barring Service (DBS) to ensure that they are suitable to work with



children. In line with a recommendation made as part of the Ofsted inspection a safer recruitment checklist for the Voluntary Adoption Agency has been developed to sit alongside NCT's recruitment process which ensure that the safe recruitment of staff meet the required standards. ('Adoption: national minimum standards,' page 71, paragraph 24.1)

Social work staff have regular monthly supervision from their managers, and their professional competence is appraised annually in line with NCT's staff supervision and staff appraisal schemes.

In line with the requirement made as part of the Adoption Ofsted inspection in 2022 a standalone Adoption Service Training and Development programme has been developed and was launched in April 2022 to ensure compliance with The Voluntary Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2003, regulation 15(2)(a) this will be reviewed in April 2023 and updated as appropriate. In addition, the supervision record used by the adoption service was also amended to reflect compliance with regulations.

6. Adoption Panel

All Adoption Agencies, whether Local Authority or Voluntary Adoption Agency are required to have an Adoption Panel under Regulation 3(1) of the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005. The Panel makes a recommendation to the Agency Decision Maker in relation to:

- The suitability of prospective adopters to adopt
- The proposed placement of a child with a particular prospective adopter
- In the case of children whose birth parents are consenting to their adoption, a recommendation as to whether the child "*should be placed for adoption*"

The Agency Decision Maker then makes a decision on behalf of the agency, taking into account the recommendations of the panel and all relevant assessments and reports.

NCT VAA adoption panel is held weekly, as required, to support the timely approval of prospective adopters and progressions of matches for children. The panel adviser acts as the day-to-day link between the agency and the independent panel chairs and this is further supported by regular meetings and shared training opportunities between the agency, panel chairs and the agency decision maker. In November 2022 a panel training day was jointly facilitated by the panel chairs and the service and focussed on two key areas.



1. Learning from the Child Safeguarding Practice Review, undertaken by Cumbria Safeguarding Children Partnership, following the death of Leiland James Corkhill who was placed for adoption and whose adopted mother was convicted of his murder.
During the session the chairs presented an overview of the case and facilitated group discussions with panel members focussing on key areas of practice followed by a presentation from the adoption service manager of NCT VAA response and learning from the report.
2. Cultural Competence with a presentation of the experience of a family moving to the UK in the 1960's and the discrimination they faced and overcame then and now.

Feedback from panel members about the day was positive regarding opportunities for reflection, discussion, and learning.

It is recognised that there is a positive and respectful working relationship between the agency and the panel chairs with challenge being offered and considered by both sides appropriately. Regular liaison meetings support the ability to address themes from feedback quickly when necessary and as such there are no surprises in the 6 monthly or annual panel reports to the agency

During the 2022-2023 reporting period, the panel met on **41** occasions and considered the following number of cases on behalf NCT VAA

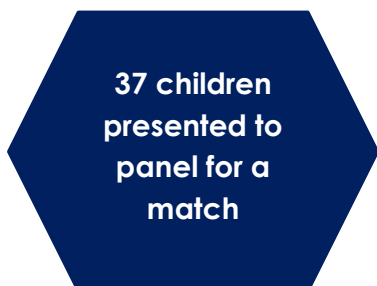
Adopter approvals	31
Matches for NCT children	37
Plans for Relinquished children	0

7. Adoption Service Performance

Adoption performance is measured and reported nationally via the completion of the Adoption and Special Guardianship Leadership (ASGLB) return which forms the basis of the publication of the adoption scorecard.

At the time of completing this report the adoption scorecard for the 2022 – 2023 reporting period has not been published as information from Q4 returns is not due for submission until the end of April 2023 and data will be then require validation prior to publication.

What we know from locally held data is that of the children matched with adopters during the 2022-2023 reporting period 41.67% were matched within 4 months of a placement order being granted this equates to 15 children. Of the remaining 21 children 44.4% were placed within 4 to 8 months of the PO being granted which equates to 16 children and 13.9% which equates to 5 children were placed within 8-12 months of the Placement Order being granted within this cohort there were 2 sibling groups of 2 boys.



**37 children
presented to
panel for a
match**

- ❖ During the 2022/23 reporting period **37** Northamptonshire Children were matched and placed with adoptive families of which:
- ❖ **26** were placed with adoptive families recruited, assessed, and approved by Northamptonshire Children's Trust Voluntary Adoption Agency (NCT VAA)
- ❖ **11** were placed via inter agency placements (adopted families recruited, assessed, and approved by another agency)
- ❖ In addition, **6** children were placed by other Local Authorities with NCT VAA approved adopters.

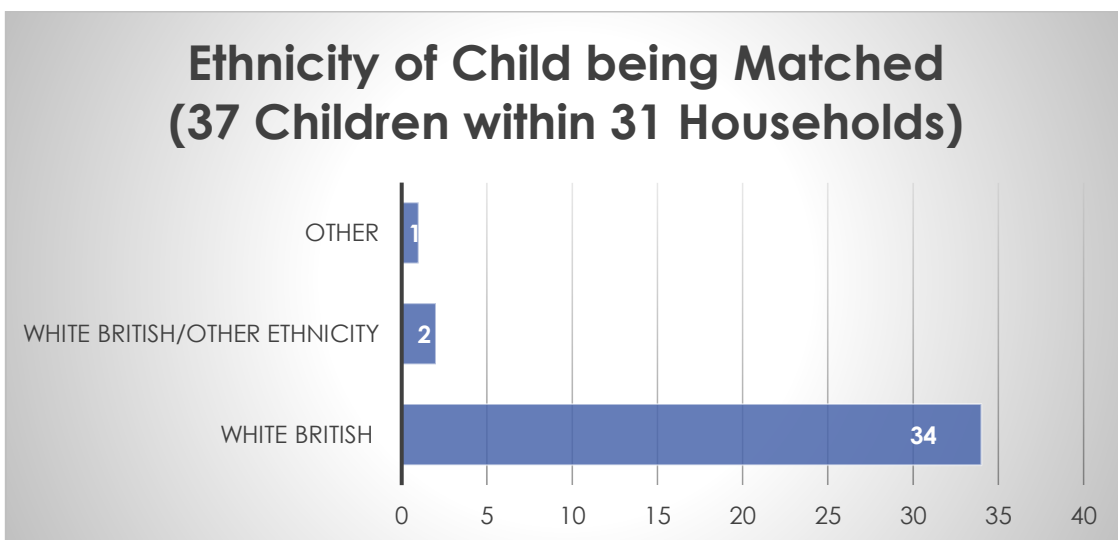
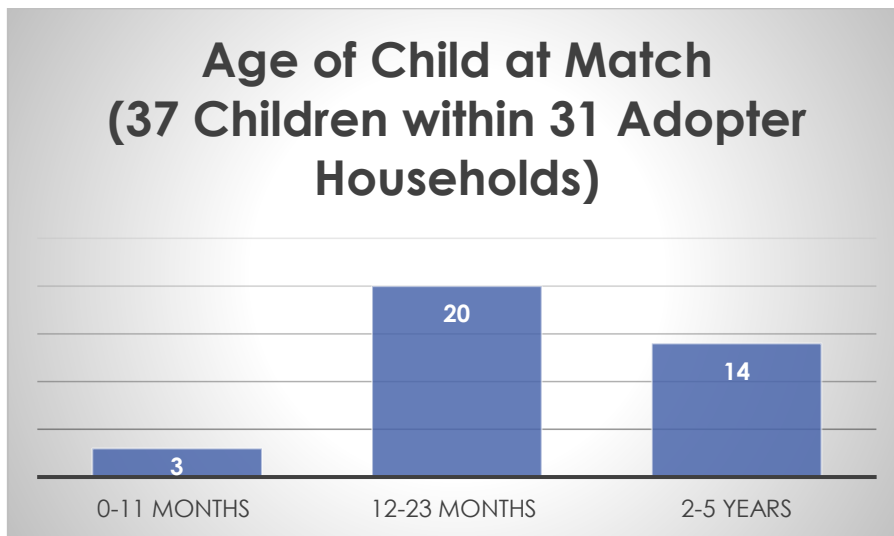
In relation to the 11 children placed via inter agency placements these were three sibling groups of 2 children and five individual children for whom placements with families who were considered as being able to meet their holistic needs and seen as the *best match*. Of these 11 children 5 were placed with FAL partner agency adopters.

In relation to the 6 children placed with NCT VAA adopters these consisted of 5 individual children and a sibling group of 2. Two of these children were placed from a FAL partner agency.



During the 2022 – 2023 reporting period **56** children for whom NCT were responsible had a plan of adoption agreed via the Agency Decision Maker compared to 41 during the 2021 -2022 reporting period. This number is still lower than during the 2019 – 2020 reporting period when 59 children had a plan of adoption but does indicate a steady return to pre pandemic activity levels.

The charts below provide an overview of the age and ethnicity of the children matched for adoption.





The data indicates that the majority of children matched for adoption are aged 12-23 months – given that within this cohort 13 of these children had benefitted from an early permanence placement which has allowed them to be placed with their prospective adopters, on average, 183 days sooner than would have been achieved via a traditional adoption placement route this will translate to a much higher percentage being placed in their permanent placement under 12 months of age which is beneficial for their longer term stability and attachment development. There is also a high proportion of children placed aged 2-5 years which reflects the agency's ambition and success in exploring adoption 'not just for babies' and in terms of keeping siblings together when it is assessed to be the right plan for them.

8. Family Finding

Family finding for NCT children for whom adoption is the plan is undertaken within the adoption service. There are two social workers whose role is dedicated to the family finding task and they are supervised by a practice manager who has oversight of all family finding activity.

The use of fortnightly tracking meetings for all children from the point that a parallel plan of adoption is made is supporting the service to identify at an early stage any emerging themes or needs in relation to the characteristics of children likely to require an adoptive family. In conjunction with this the introduction of **permanence planning meetings** led by the Family Finding workers is supporting the ability to have conversations at the earliest opportunity with childcare social workers in relation to children's needs, future contact plans, life story work and the identification of key family members who may either be able to offer permanence for the child or for whom an ongoing contact arrangement could be considered if the ultimate plan were adoption.

Family Finding social workers report that;

'PPMs are well and truly established and useful. They support Family finders and their practice managers to know the children. The meetings are useful for child care social workers, particularly those new to adoption & permanence planning.'

The adoption service manager is a member of the unborn baby tracking meeting which has supported the ability to identify at the earliest opportunity babies who may have a plan of adoption or where early permanence placements could be considered.

Alongside this fortnightly tracking meetings are held in relation to adopters which is supporting the ability to identify and consider links between adopters and children at an early opportunity and to identify if an external adopter resource may be needed.

In March 2023 the service introduced a monthly Adoption Tracking Panel the purpose of which is to;



- Monitor the progress of adoption plans for looked after children upon the conclusion of care proceedings to reduce drift and delay in achieving the agreed plan
- Advise and make recommendations in respect of care planning and consider the potential for the use of early permanence placements. For families where previous children have been placed for adoption consider the appropriateness of early discussions with previous adoptive families
- Monitor and advise on permanency planning processes to maintain a focus on plans being progressed in a timely manner
- Track permanency planning for adoption from the conclusion of proceedings through to the point it is secured for the child
- Endeavour to resolve any presenting issues/obstacles and ensure that there is effective communication between the professionals involved
- Escalate concerns with senior manager, as required, where cases highlight drift or difficulties that will hinder implementation of agreed plans
- Provide 6 monthly reports to the SLT on the numbers of cases reviewed, outcomes and any practice issues
- Monitor cases in respect of changes of permanence care plan and ensure that revocations of orders are progressed in a timely way e.g., placement or care orders
- Panels will agree a review period on a case-by-case basis generally between 3 and 6 months.

Whilst there has only been tracking 1 panel held at the time of writing this report it has demonstrated the value of the additional level of oversight and professional curiosity brings to the care planning and monitoring process for the child.

As the FAL partnership develops there is an increasing shared ownership of the family finding task in terms of taking a whole partnership responsibility for oversight of children waiting for placements across the region. Monthly FAL family finding meetings share information in relation to children and adopters waiting to support the early identification of potential links across the partnership and all partner agency children's detail are placed on the FAL link maker site from the point that the ADM agrees a plan of adoption.

This collective ownership supports the partnerships' ability to be responsive to the needs of children waiting for placements across the partner agencies e.g., in organising adoption activity days, profiling events or featuring children (anonymously) within the partnership website

On 27.1.23, the partnership held a virtual profiling event called a 'Discovery Event.' The Discovery Event provides registered adopters with a secure link to where they are able to see information



including videos, photos and an overview of the child provided by a recording of the social worker and /or foster carer talking about the children. The secure link is accessible to view for a period of 72 hours.

The partnership has also held two in person activity style days called 'Getting to Know You' events on 14.10.22 and 18.03.23

Below is an overview of the numbers children who attended these events and the impact -

Getting to Know You Event – June 2022

16 children attended the event 1 of whom was from NCT. The event resulted in 4 partner agency children being matched with adopters.

Getting to Know you Event – March 2023

13 children attended this event 1 of whom was from NCT. The event resulted in 6 links being explored for children of which 2 were with NCT adopters.

Discovery Event – January 2023

The secure link video was viewed 171 times and over the weekend that it was shared Linkmaker enquiries quadrupled in relation to the children featured

All adopters who attended reported the event was beneficial for them with specific feedback noting that –

'We found it beneficial being face to face with children'

'It was nice to spend time with children, not just looking at profiles'

During the 2022/23 reporting period in addition to the above at a local level the service have held 2 *virtual profiling events* where approved and waiting adopters are provided with anonymised information about children for whom the service are family finding to support the ability for adopters to remain open minded in relation to the characteristics of the children they may be able to consider, adopters were also able to hear how the service identify and match children and the processes involved in this.

Feedback from adopters attending the sessions was that -

'Adopters felt reassured about the robustness of the matching process and pleased that they weren't aware that they were being considered for a particular child until it was identified that the match was positive'



A practice guidance model for family finding and adoption transitions was developed and launched in May 2022, the practice model was designed utilising the research and transition model developed by the University of East Anglia (UEA). The model has strengthened existing family finding practices and led to a more child focussed, evidence based and transparent approach to matching and linking.

'I feel linking with our adopters is much more child focussed this past year.' – Quote from Family Finding Social Worker.

When family finding for children, it is essential that adopters are supported to make an informed decision in relation to linking and matching with a specific child or siblings. The new family finding model incorporates increased opportunities for foster carers and adopters to meet and share information ahead of the formal introductions process and for adopters to have *anonymous 'getting to know you'* meetings with the child to help them to *'learn the child'* outside of the formal introductions process. Feedback from foster carers and adopters who have experienced these meetings is very positive. Family Finding Social workers report that;

'Without exception, all foster carers, adopters and social workers have expressed very positive views re the 'Getting to Know You visits'. Feedback has been that these have had a positive impact on introductions with the child and adopters feeling better prepared for the intensity of introductions being familiar with each other already. Prior to the changes last year these were done with some but not all children. Feedback has been that all involved are pleased these are now in place for all of our children.'

As a result of work undertaken by the service to consider the learning from the Child Safeguarding Practice Review, undertaken by Cumbria Safeguarding Children Partnership, following the death of Leiland James Corkhill the service has developed a presentation which will be delivered to the support network of adopters prior to the children being placed with them which revisits some general topics from family and friends training they may have attended but is personalised to focus on the specific child's early life experiences. The session will be facilitated by the adoption SW and focus on what the child's early life experience may mean now and in the future for the child and adopters and give ideas in relation to therapeutic parenting techniques that may be useful. The session will also reinforce that until an adoption order is granted the child remains a looked after child and that the adopters will have delegated parental responsibility during this period, what this means and also the responsibilities of the network in respect of sharing any concerns they may have both in relation to the support needs of the adopters and in respect of the welfare of the child. These sessions will commence for matches progressing from April 2023.

9. Early Permanence

Early Permanence placements allow babies and young children who may need adopting to be placed with a potential permanent family earlier than a conventional adoption.

Early Permanence is an umbrella term we use when talking about certain types of adoption placements for babies or toddlers. It includes placements also referred to as Fostering for Adoption (FfA) and Concurrency placements.

Early Permanence helps to avoid delay in deciding a very young child's future, at a time in their life when days and weeks really matter.

Findings from the Coram 2017/18 Longitudinal study of Early Placements noted that early placement is not a panacea but offers the opportunity to build secure attachments from the earliest age. This has created stability of placement despite the difficulties presented which in turns supports the long-term connection and understanding of the adopter in respect of their child and has benefits in relation to maintaining relationships with birth family relatives and the child's life story.

**13 children
were placed in
early
permanence**

- ❖ During the 2022- 2023 reporting period 13 Northamptonshire children benefitted from early permanence placements. This allowed these children to be placed within their prospective adoptive placement an average of 183 days earlier than if a traditional adoption placement route had been followed.

There is currently a national focus on the use of early permanence placements for children with a view to increasing the use of such placements for a wider range of children including siblings. The adoption service manager is leading the FAL Early Permanence workstream and attends national learning events to support the development of practice and process at a local and regional level. As part of the agreed work plan for the FAL Early Permanence workstream an application for the *Working Towards Early Permanence Quality Mark* is being prepared for submission in the summer of 2023.

10. Adoption Orders Granted



- ❖ During the 2022-2023 reporting period 32 adoption orders were granted for Northamptonshire children.
- ❖ In addition to adoption orders granted at the end of the reporting period there were a further 17 children in adoption placements awaiting the adoption order.

11. Adoption Disruptions

During the 2022 – 2023 reporting period sadly there were 3 disruptions to placements of children pre-adoption order. These 3 disruptions equate to 5 children – 2 sibling groups of 2 and 1 single child.

Disruption meetings have been held in relation to the two disruptions involving the siblings and a third meeting is scheduled for April 2023 in relation to the 3rd disruption. Disruption meetings are chaired by an independent chair with experience and expertise of adoption who, following the meeting, produces a report and practice recommendations for the agency as appropriate.

Disruption meetings are not intended to apportion blame to individuals involved and recognise and acknowledge that disruptions occur due to complex, multi-faceted issues which could not have been predicted, that said they provide a valuable forum for reflection, review, and learning.

As an agency we have used the learning from these meetings to review and develop our practice, strengthening areas of potential vulnerability and have produced reports in response to the recommendations made. Reports are shared with panel, and we have plans for a joint service and panel learning event to consider the key themes emerging from the meetings.

12. Adopter Recruitment

The service offers a daily enquiry line which those considering adoption can access to speak directly with an adoption social worker should they wish to do so. Information in relation to adoption and an online enquiry form can also be accessed by the website which has been rebranded as the service has become a member of the Family Adoption Links Regional Adoption Alliance. As a result of this



membership monthly information evenings are now managed and delivered centrally by the partnership.

Below is a selection of feedback provided by prospective adopters attending the sessions.

'Whole presentation very good and all useful'

'I found it very informative, I had already read and researched the information given, but hearing it directly also clarified a few thoughts I'd had about it. I think if anything could be improved, it would be to go through any questions at the end as it broke up the continuity of the information given. But I had a really enjoyable evening.'

'The most useful part of the process was hearing from people who had gone through the adoption process.'

A central calendar of training including preparation training for adopters is accessible via the FAL website, in addition NCT adopters are able to access locally provided training details of which are included later within the report.

At a local and national level there are recognised challenges in identifying placements for sibling groups, children from black minority ethnic backgrounds, children over the age of 5 or those with additional or complex health needs and the service will undertake specific marketing activity to attract adopters able to consider children with these characteristics as required. The website includes anonymised information in relation to children waiting for adoption from these *priority groups*, these stories are regularly updated in order to maintain a focus on the children and interest of prospective adopters.

As a partner of Family Adoption Links Regional Adoption Alliance (RAA), the VAA is able to utilise a broader range of adopter recruitment and awareness raising opportunities via social media and at a local *'in person'* level. All of which is undertaken in liaison with NCT Communications colleagues.

During the 2022-2023 reporting period enquiries to adopt and attendance at information events was centrally managed and coordinated by the FAL hub team. During this period across the FAL partners 778 households registered to attend an information event of which 137 were NCT VAA enquiries with 395 households attending 111 of which were NCT VAA enquiries.

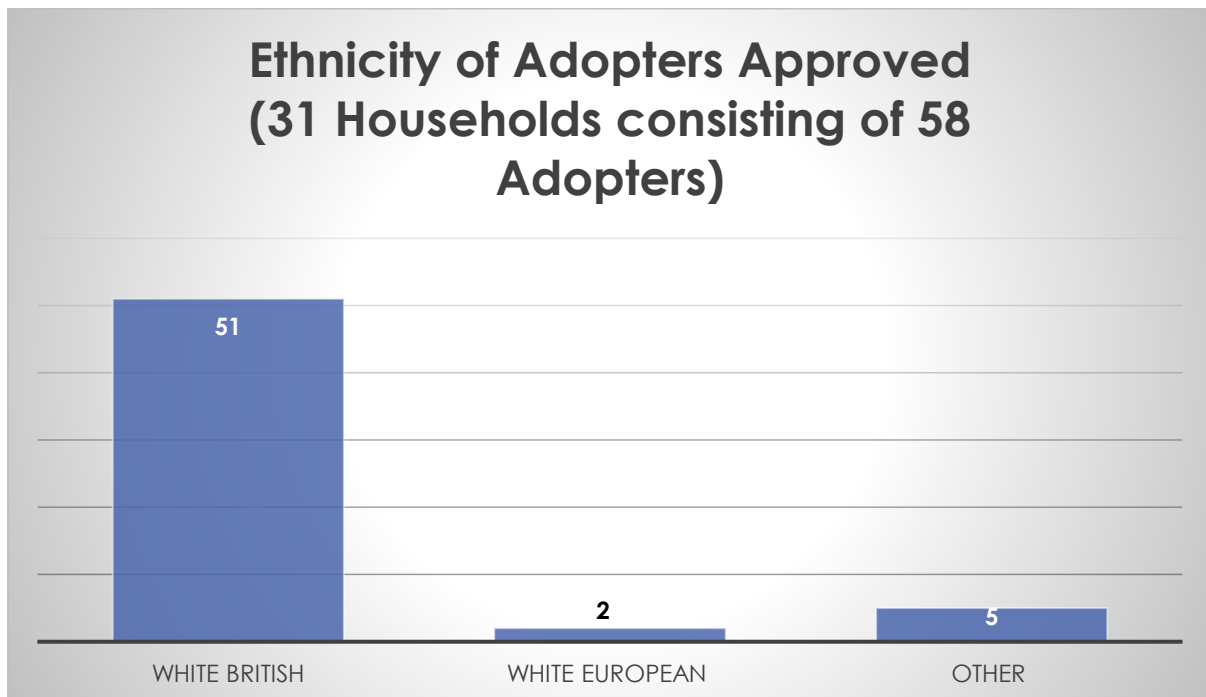


Overall NCT enquiries in this reporting period resulted in the progression to stage 1 of 28 Adopters, 25 of which have progressed to stage 2, which resulted in **31** adopter households being approved, a demographic breakdown of which is illustrated within the tables which follow.

Below is a sample of feedback from adopters in relation to their NCT VAA adoption assessment experience.

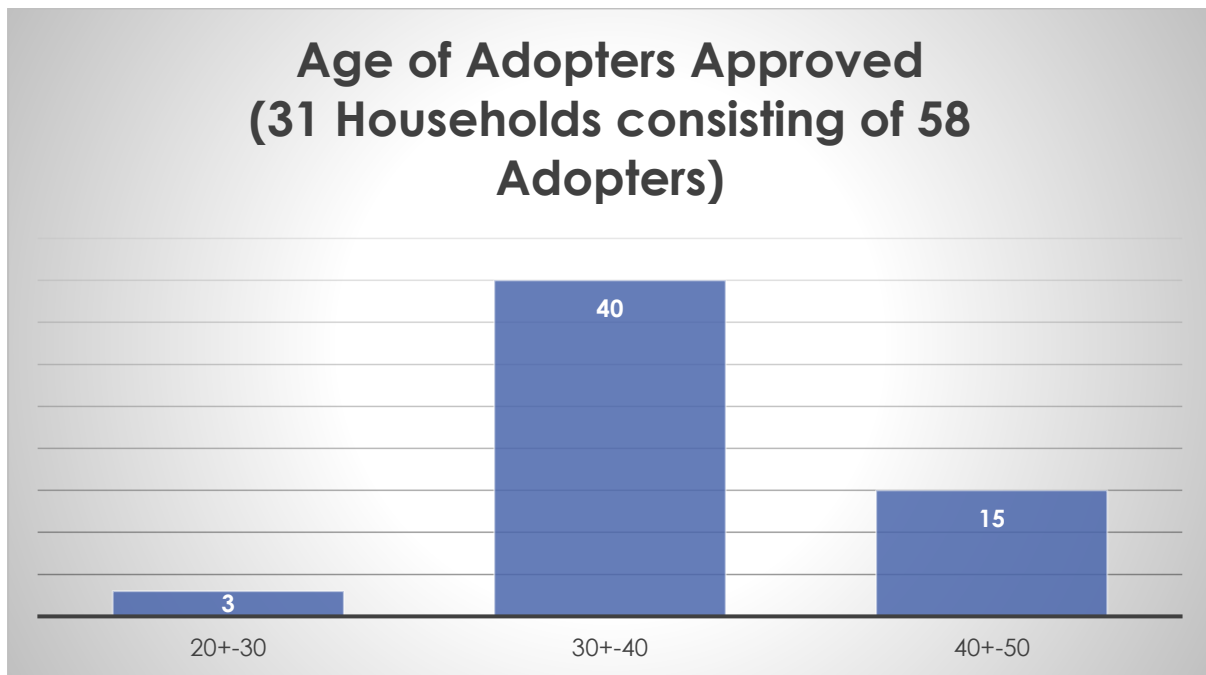
'We have been lucky to have had the same adoption social worker throughout our process, and have a good relationship with them, as we feel we can ask her anything especially for support.'

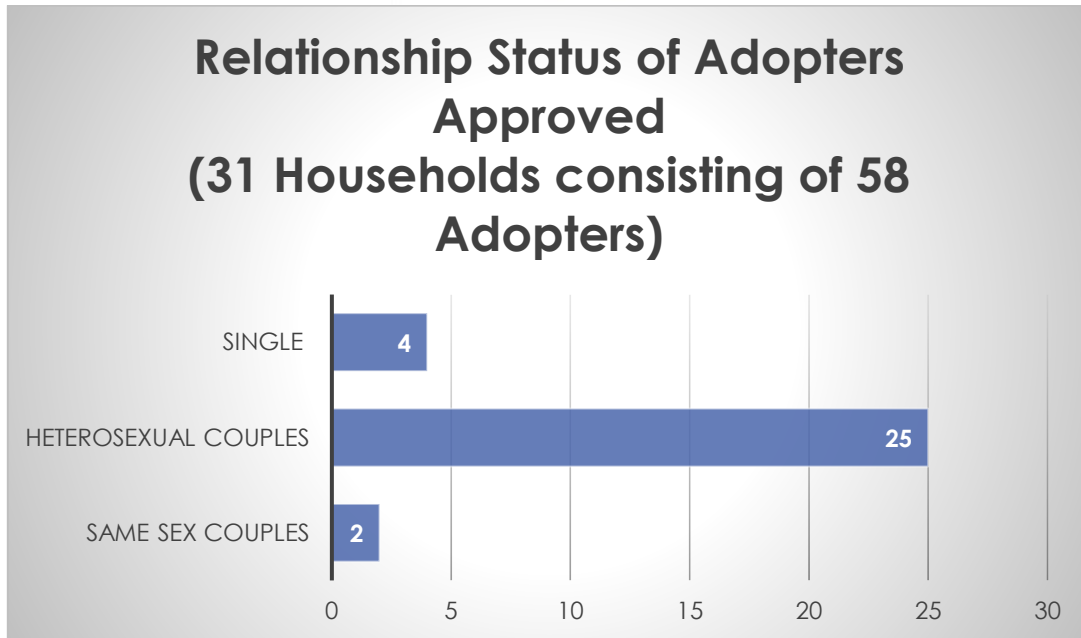
'Our social worker has been amazing throughout the process; she has talked us through all the sections of process and supported us when things got a bit tough in looking for a match.'





As outlined above the ethnicity of NCT adopters recruited broadly reflects the ethnicity of NCT children for whom adoptive placements are sought. As an agency we are always mindful of the need to recruit a broad range of adopters able to meet the needs of children at a local, regional and national level and as such marketing activity and materials designed in conjunction with our FAL partners aims to reflect this. Our FAL partner agencies have differing ethnic and cultural demographics to NCT which supports the partnership to work collaboratively at a regional level to identify cohorts of children with a plan for adoption and target recruitment activity in response to this.





Timeliness of adopter assessments is tracked via the adoption panel as part of their quality assurance process, during the 2022-2023 reporting period the panel noted that 41.94% of stage 2 adopter assessment presented to panel were completed within the recommended 12 week timescale. This is in part due to unprecedented level of staff absence within the service during this period and also due to the complexities presented within the assessment for some households which, in some instances, has led to the need to pause the assessment process or to extend it in order to give sufficient time to explore issues and undertake a robust assessment. The service is mindful of this and will monitor this timescale going forward – strengthened practice during stage 1 of the assessment should support the ability to progress applicants at a time that is right for them and identify any issues that may need addressing prior to commencing stage 2. We have a target for completion of stage 2 assessments within the 12-week timescale of 80% for the 2023- 2024 reporting period.

The adopter recruitment and assessment team work closely with colleagues within the post order support team who are able to offer advice on adoption support and learning opportunities in preparation for the matching and placement of children with an adoptive family. Post adoption support is routinely discussed with prospective adopters during their training and preparation and the post order team co-deliver the preparation training provided to adopters. Workers from the post order support team are available for advice and consultation with SW's and adopters when placements are being considered and during transitions and early stages of placement.

As a result of the publication of the Leiland James Corkhill Child safeguarding practice review, undertaken by Cumbria Safeguarding Children Partnership, the service has undertaken a review of adopter assessment, family finding and support practice and as a result have introduced additional measures to support robust safeguarding. These include the requirement to seek references from counsellor's adopters may have engaged with and more detailed exploration of financial information including debt management during stage 1 of the adopter assessment process. In addition, we have introduced an '*end of stage 1 meeting*' which is chaired by the adoption team manager and is the point at which the applicants experience, and views of their stage 1 process are discussed, references and checks are reviewed and progression to stage 2 is discussed and agreed as appropriate. A direct work tool kit has been developed to support social workers to gain the views and support an understanding of the *lived experience of children already part of the prospective adopter household* including birth children, step-children or previously adopted children.

13. Step-Parent Adoption



**9 Step-Parent
Adoption
Assessments**

- ❖ In addition to adopter recruitment, assessment, and preparation the team also undertake assessments for Step-Parent Adoption. During the 2022 -2023 reporting period the service received 120 enquiries in relation to applying for a step-parent adoption and undertook 9 step-parent adoption assessments resulting in 6 adoption orders being granted.

14. Adoption Support

The Post Order Support Team provides support services for children, young people and their families following the granting of an Adoption or Special Guardianship Order (SGO). In addition, the service provides specialist support to birth relatives via an independent counsellor based within the team and supports adopted adults wishing to access their birth records.

These services include:

- Counselling, information and support for birth parents whose children have a plan of adoption or are placed for adoption



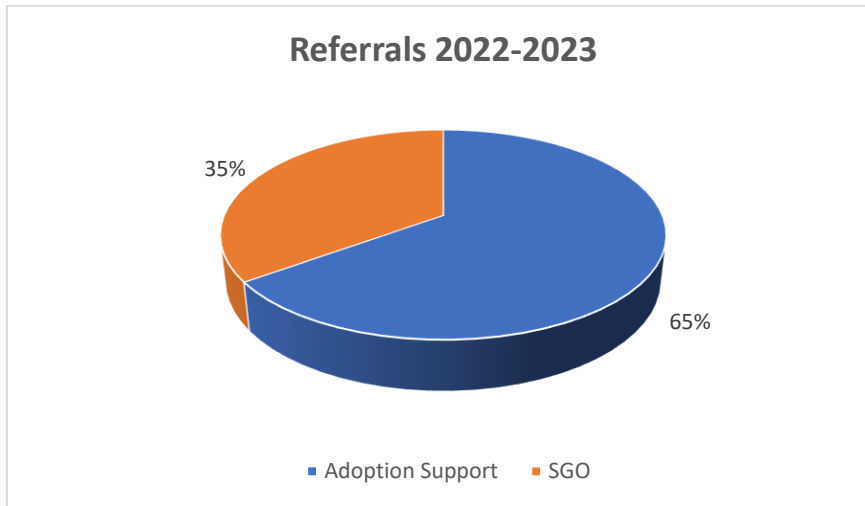
- Counselling for adopted adults in accordance with Schedule 2 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002. Those wanting intermediary service to track birth relatives are signposted to appropriate independent agencies.
- Assessments of adoption support needs pre and post order and when appropriate will make applications to the Adoption Support Fund to support the provision of therapeutic services for adopted children and their families.
- Comprehensive adoption support for those affected by adoption in line with the Adoption Support Services Regulations, both prior to and after an Adoption Order has been made. This will include adoptive families' not known to the Agency who reside in the County and request adoption support assessments three years after their Adoption Order was granted. Likewise, the team provides adoption support to adoptive families who have adopted placements Northamptonshire children but live outside of our area for a period of three years after the granting of the Adoption Order.
- Post order support services for families where children are placed under a Special Guardianship arrangement.

As previously mentioned, Post adoption support is routinely discussed with prospective adopters during their training and preparation, and day 2 of the adoption preparation training is delivered by workers from the post order team. Workers from the post adoption support team and the adoption recruitment team now co facilitate adoption support groups which provides further opportunities for adopters to speak to and become familiar with the post order team

What we know from the feedback received from the families with whom we work, other professionals and from the Ofsted inspection is that what we do has a positive impact upon children, young people and their families both in terms of supporting the quality of family life and relationships and in terms of children managing to access education.



- ❖ Of these referrals 65% related to adoption support and 35% to SGO support as documented below.
- ❖ Resulting in 160 assessments of need.



The post order support offer for families starts with the provision of a listening ear and an open door, provided via the VAA duty social work facility, which is open to all SGO and adoptive families. Contact information for this is outlined in both Adoption and SGO Support Plans which are prepared for the families at the point the child or young person is placed with them and accessible via the Adoption service website.

There is a duty worker available daily to respond to contacts from families. The duty worker can offer advice and signposting and if appropriate will commence the referral/initial assessment pathway to families and will use a Developmental Dyadic Practitioner (DDP) informed approach to offer an empathic and supportive experience to a family.

The service works closely with colleagues in NCT Children in Care teams to provide information in relation to support services and are available to offer in person information and advice to those families considering SGO.

During the 2022/23 reporting period the service has worked collaboratively with colleagues within the fostering connected persons team to develop an SGO pathway which included information for prospective SGO cares in relation to the role of an SGO carer, training to help them prepare for the role and understand the lifelong implications for children of their early life experiences and supports available. The SGO support plan document has been updated to support an improved emphasis on the likely and known support needs of the child and therefore what support the SGO carers may need. During January 2023 SGO workshops were delivered to staff across NCT to launch the SGO pathway and a further session are planned which will be recorded and can be used within the training and induction process for new employees.



At times SGO and adoptive families may be in receipt of services via NCT safeguarding teams in these circumstances the post order team will provide advice and support as a member of the *team around the child* in recognition of their post order status and the lifelong implications of their early life experiences.

On a national level there is a focus on support and services provided to SGO and Kinship carers, as a service we are participants in the East Midlands Permanence Board Project /Steering Group the focus of which is Improving Services to SGO and Kinship Carers. The work of the group is in the early stages and an audit of services and current provisions for partner agencies has been completed and will inform priorities and focus going forward.

15. Social worker support

Both the social workers and family support worker within the post order support team are trained in a combination of therapeutic parenting interventions including

- Therapeutic life story work at foundation and diploma level
- Theraplay© at foundation level, higher level and on the practicum with clinical supervision
- DDP at level one and level two
- Video Interactive Guidance
- NVR at foundation level
- BUSS model

This supports the team's ability to undertake focussed direct work with children, young people, and their families. The team have developed a number of tools to support them to gain the views, wishes and feelings of children including a young person's referral form and a suite of direct work resources. A children and young people's guide to post order support has been developed and is available via the website link below:

[https://www.nctrust.co.uk/adoption-fostering/Documents/Post Adoption Support A guide for children.pdf](https://www.nctrust.co.uk/adoption-fostering/Documents/Post%20Adoption%20Support%20A%20guide%20for%20children.pdf)



During the 2022/23 reporting period the service has facilitated three therapeutic based programmes for families which include two types of group-based support and one individual programme for families as follows.

Empowering Parents Therapeutic (EmPaTh) groups:

These are groups to support therapeutic parenting, delivered by a therapy provider on a commissioned basis and funded by ASF or directly by NC Trust where ASF access is not available. To date, there have been five groups completed and there is one group currently ongoing. The groups last for 12 weeks and are led by a psychologist and supported by a therapist.

35 families (representing 69 children) have engaged in the groups and feedback has been extremely positive. Access to the groups is offered as soon as a family contact the team for support and some families attend groups prior to being allocated a social worker, whereas others attend the groups as an outcome of an assessment of need and this may be alongside the support of a social worker.

25% of those who attended the groups did not seek any further support outside of the groups, which indicates that the support made sufficient difference to eliminate the need for more intrusive/intensive social work support.

Feedback has been extremely positive, with 71% of families providing written feedback which indicated that the course was helpful and was very positive. Examples of general feedback include:

"The course has really helped me to be still and calm and not try to fix everything straight away and to be more accepting of the situation"

"It hasn't been easy, but it has been useful"

"Easy minor tweaks to what I was already doing made quite a difference"

"I've tried to use a few strategies with my child and when I have, it has worked really well. It's trying to remember to use them and not react in the moment. As I definitely see a different outcome when I use a strategy learnt on the course, then reacting to certain behaviour. Sometimes difficult though."



Energy Groups

These groups have been run over a six week period for children aged 5-9 who are struggling with emotional regulation. The groups use a combination of the BUSS method and interoception curriculum to support children to build awareness of body sensations which will support emotional regulation.

As a result of building up the child's interoception awareness, using fun sensory based activities and 'experiments', the programme seeks to increase the child's awareness and encourage the child to link their body sensations with emotions and hence to learn about their triggers and gain valuable coping strategies which support emotional regulation and result in more positive choices/behaviours. Parent sessions assist families to learn about their child's sensory needs and how to support them and a parent participation session is included as part of the groups.

The groups have only just commenced, and we have so far reached 8 children with the first group. Feedback from parents is in the process of being gathered in the one to one applying the learning sessions but an early comment that was offered in writing was:

"The regulation group was brilliant and has given me loads of ideas"

Building Bridges

This is a six week programme facilitated by the family support worker which uses a DDP and Theraplay© base from a qualified Theraplay© and VIG practitioner. The programme focusses on empowering parents to start to understand the trauma needs of their child and to use PACE model to meet the individual needs of their child. Observations of the parent-child relationship form the basis of parent coaching and support.

This has been offered to 6 families this year and feedback has been positive, including:

"I just want to say what a difference (the worker) has made to our lives. She has helped us through a difficult time and given us the tools and strength to keep going"



At times parents, carers and children can be in a place of feeling very distressed and getting the help they need to understand their children can change life for everyone. Below are some examples of the feedback received from families accessing the service:

“Thank you so much for all you’ve done for us this year, it makes the world of difference! “

“(worker) gave us loads of practical strategies and was really able to get to the reasons behind Arthur’s behaviours. Dee has an incredible wealth of knowledge and was excellent in supporting us. She is so easy to talk to and very friendly. We really enjoyed the sessions with her.”

“(worker) was kind, capable and professional and genuinely cared about improving C’s situation”

As is evident from the feedback above families accessing services from the team feel that those interventions had a positive impact on their family life and the wellbeing of their children. This is also a view shared by other professionals involved with the families, working collaboratively with the service to consider the holistic needs of the child or young person. The service has built positive links and working relationships with colleagues in the virtual school which supports them to advocate for adopted children and their families as appropriate.

16. Support Groups

Support groups are facilitated for adoptive families and special guardians pre and post order.

Support groups for adopters are facilitated jointly by the adopter recruitment and post order support team and are open for adopters at all stages of their journey (following approval as suitable to adopt). Daytime groups are held monthly and have been re branded as ‘Adoption Stay and Play’ sessions as anecdotal feedback was indicating that the title ‘support group’ may be off putting for some who felt they didn’t need support but would want to have an opportunity to meet other adopters and for them to have a space for their children to meet.

Social workers facilitating the Stay and Play groups see the session as an opportunity to have informal discussions with families re their children’s presenting behaviours and offer advice re therapeutic parenting techniques which may support them and their child as well as an opportunity to revisit the adoption support offer available.



In recognition that not all adopters are able to attend daytime support groups the service also facilitates a monthly evening online support group. As with the stay and play sessions adopters are invited to attend from the point that they commence Stage 2 of their assessment process. The sessions have a broad discussion topic which is emailed out to adopters on the mailing list in advance of the group in order for them to make a decision to attend if particular topics are pertinent to them at any given point.

As well as being advised of the groups via their SW's, adopters are routinely invited by via the service mailing list and information is available on the NCT and FAL website All NCT VAA groups are open to adopters from FAL partner agencies and in addition there is a FAL online support group which adopters are able to attend.

Feedback from sessions is positive as demonstrated below –

'We enjoyed meeting others in the same position as ourselves and others who have had a child placed with them, in an informal social setting,'

Social activities including summer picnics and Christmas parties are also facilitated by the service supporting the ability for adoptive families to make connections with others informally and for adopted children to have the opportunity to get to know other children like them to support their sense of acceptance and self-esteem. In addition, the post order support team negotiated cut price tickets to a Christmas Light Show and a day at Wicksteed Park for adoptive and SGO families.

One family reported that;

'We particularly found the organised social events to be supportive and encouraging.'

Support groups are also held for SGO carers which mirror the offer outlined above for adopters, other than access to groups via FAL, and are facilitated solely by the post order support team.

Going forward the post adoption & SGO support team will have a supporting role in a coffee morning designed for kinship carers including Special Guardians, alongside the fostering service.



17. Training

Adopters are able to access a range of training pre and post order as detailed below, some of which is directly delivered by the service and some via other routes. As part of the Family Adoption Links partnership a programme of core training across the region has been developed which will be complimented by specific training or workshops on a local level in response to the needs of those accessing the service.

An overview of the FAL training offer can be found via the [2023 FAL What's On Calendar](#)– some training is delivered face to face e.g. the adoption preparation training and Early Permanence training whilst others are online. Adopters are able to book onto any courses via an Eventbrite system which is centrally managed by the FAL hub team.

Since the FAL programme was launched in July 2022 and up until the end of March 2023 NCT adopters accessed 170 training sessions on courses including;

- Non-Violent Resistance
- Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder
- The Child's Sensory World
- Adopting Siblings
- Early Permanence
- Therapeutic Parenting
- Talking about Adoption
- Family and Friends Training



At a local level NCT adopters are also able to access training via the NCT ILearn programme and E-Learning training via the link below. During the 2022-2023 reporting period adopters attended 168 training sessions via this route. which includes courses relating to the following topics;

- An Introduction to Attachment
- Birth Parents in the Lifelong Adoption Journey
- Child Development
- Bitesize training Gangs & Knife Crime
- Identity
- First Aid
- Letterbox contact
- Separation and Loss
- Transracial Adoption
- Equality and Diversity
- Contextual Safeguarding
- Radicalisation
- Resilience and recovery

[Children Services Training Online - AC Education \(ac-education.co.uk\)](https://www.ac-education.co.uk)

Below is a sample of the feedback received from adopters attending training;

'The prepare to adopt training got me thinking more about the child being at the centre of adoption process. I will try and do this throughout the journey going forward as it's not just about my wants.'

'We gained a better understanding of a child's view from the prepare to adopt training. It was great thanks'

'We found the friends and family training really good. It will help us to support everyone when the child moves in with them.'

Therapeutic parenting training groups have also been established the details of which are within the post order support section of the report.

Below is an overview of the training and support groups available to adopters for the coming year.

Training /Support Groups Programmes	
20 April 2023	Stay and Play Group
26 April 2023 8-9pm	Online Support Group birth family time - Modernising our ideas around direct contact and letterbox with birth families.
18 May 2023	Stay and Play Group
31 May 2023 8-9pm	Online Support Group behaviour - Challenges & triumphs with behaviour issues
15 June 2023	Stay and Play Group
28 June 2023 8-9pm	Online Support Group - Exploitation and how we can do our best to protect our children
14 July 2023	Kinship Coffee Morning (SGO)
20 July 2023	Stay and Play Group
26 July 2023 8-9pm	Online Support Group - Therapeutic parenting
17 August 2023	Stay and Play Group
23 August 2023 8-9pm	Online Support Group - Self-care and family fun. Ideas for fun family times and holidays and keeping self-care alive in August!
20 September 2023 8-9pm	Online Support Group - School support - Challenges & triumphs with school issues
6 October 2023	Kinship Coffee Morning (SGO)
19 October 2023	Stay and Play Group
25 October 2023 8-9pm	Online Support Group - Facing fears and phobias
28 November 2023 8-9pm	Online Support Group - Letting birth family time letterbox families.
20 December 2023 8-9pm	Online Support Group - Managing the holidays, sharing ideas and common tricky moments and how to plan to succeed.
January 2024 8-9pm	Online Support Group: You're ok, I'm ok - Promoting good self esteem
21 March 2024	Stay and Play Group.
February 2024 8-9pm	Online Support Group: non-violent resistance parenting. Dealing with loss and grief.
March 2024 8-9pm	Online Support Group: looking after adult relationships /Your adult relationships and how to care for them.

18. Financial Support

Within the service there is a finance officer whose role it is to undertake annual reviews of financial support allowances and set up new allowances once agreed for both adoption and SGO families.

749 financial allowances

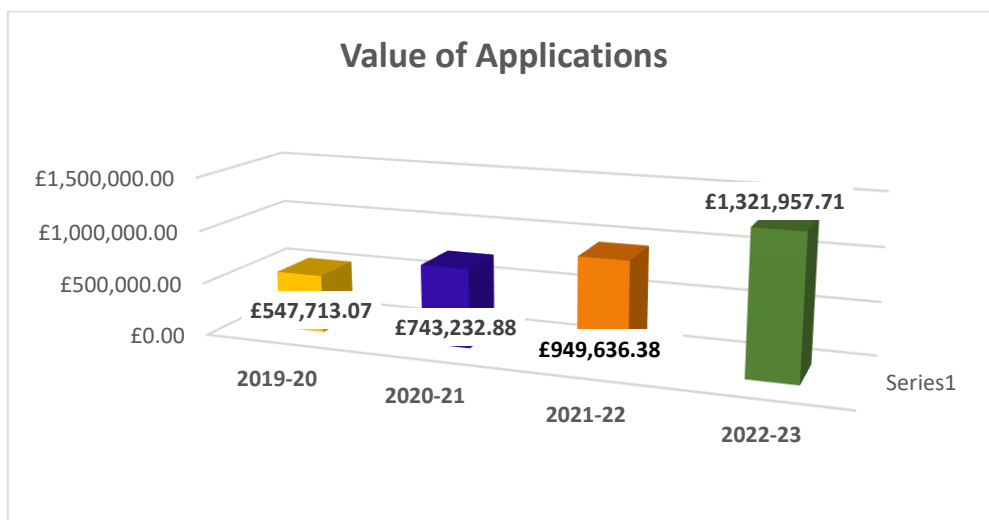
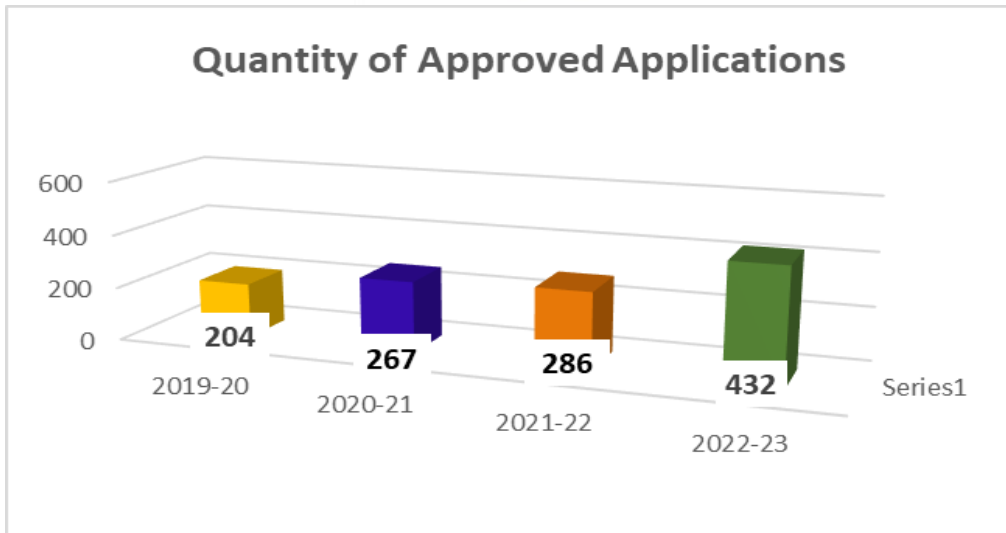
There are currently 749 financial allowances being paid to carers and there have been 37 new allowances awarded during the 2022-2023 reporting period. Adoption support allowances are not common with only 76 out of the total 668 allowances being paid to adoptive families. Allowances are normally offered for a time limited period either at the start of an adoption or as a result of an assessment of need where a family experiences additional financial pressure relating from the needs of their child. All allowances are subject to an annual review.

The SGO financial support policy was reviewed and updated in November 2022.

19. Adoption Support Fund

432 Applications to Adoption Support Fund

The provision of post order support for both adoption and SGO families is enhanced by the use of the Adoption Support Fund (ASF). During this reporting period the service made 432 applications to the adoption support fund resulting in the provision of over £1.3m of funding for specialist therapeutic interventions to support children, young people and their families. The charts below indicate a rise in both applications to the ASF and the allocation of funding compared to the previous three reporting periods.



As a high user of the ASF the service was invited to take part in the ASF outcomes pilot which commenced in January 2022. Independent evaluation and feedback from the adoption sector indicates that the provision of funding for therapeutic services is having a positive effect however there is not a systematic way of measuring outcomes from ASF funded therapy. The outcome measures pilot aims to support the development of the ASF and improve the overall understanding of what works and also.

- Improve agency's ability to deliver the right support offer to children a families
- Inform which therapies work best for children and families
- Enable services to have data to inform their commissioning



The outcome measures pilot reported on its findings at the end of 2022, which concluded that a national rollout of the Outcome Measures Project will be incorporate into all ASF activities in the coming years, and we expect this to begin in June 2023. As a service we are in a very strong position to participate in this due to the involvement that we had in the pilot project.

20. Adoption Support Newsletter

As a partner agency of Family Adoption Links the VAA co produce a quarterly newsletter called 'Thrive' which can be emailed via the service mailing list or downloaded by adopters via the website. The newsletter provides information in relation to training, social events articles, and ideas for adoptive families. In March 2023 900 adopters across the FAL partnership received the online newsletter and there was an opening rate of 59.4%.

21. Birth Family Support



During the 2022-2023 reporting period the service received 33 referrals from birth family members requesting support in relation to the children being adopted or placed in a special guardianship arrangement. Below is an example of feedback from those accessing this service.

'(Counsellor) has helped me immensely, she has helped me separate my feelings/emotions into what I can deal with now and in future. She is kind understanding and has huge knowledge of many things. I feel more settled in myself and parenting than I have at any point before.'

Links have been developed by the service with the PAUSE project and as a result the adoption service manager is a member of the PAUSE strategic partnership board and work is being finalised to develop links with the project to gain the views of birth mothers in relation to what support services, they may find useful. The service would like to develop this work with an aim of making a video with birth mothers to share at adopter training to support adopters understanding of birth parents' situations and the significance of their ongoing role in adopted children's lives.

22. Post Order Contact



619 Letterbox Exchanges

There is a dedicated letterbox co-ordinator within the post order service who manages post order contact arrangements for both adoption and SGO families, during the 2022-2023 reporting period there have been **619** exchanges of letters, cards and photos between birth and adoptive families. The letter box coordinator is also central, due to the relationships built with birth parents, in exploring introducing direct contact where either birth family or adoptive family are seeking to establish this and mediates to consider these possibilities, alongside social workers from the service.

We have supported 8 direct family time sessions during this reporting period a family support worker within the team is engaged in assisting families to make agreements and facilitate meetings. This is an area of work we plan to develop in the coming year in line with the modernising adoption agenda and the importance of supporting children and young people to develop a sense of their identity and maintain significant relationships. Post order contact plans are routinely discussed during permanence planning meetings to support with the development of care plans reflecting the lifelong needs of adopted children.

The Adoption UK Adoption Barometer report published in June 2022 reporting the following from the online survey completed as part of the information gathering process;

- 70% of prospective adopters believe direct contact should be standard for adopted children as long as it is deemed safe
- 69% of adopted adults who did not have childhood direct contact regretted not having the opportunity
- 80% of adopted adults and 88% of adoptive parents who were involved in direct contact during childhood were glad they had participated

As a service we recognise and value the ongoing importance that birth family members have in relation to children placed for adoption or cared for via special guardianship arrangements in respect of supporting the child's sense of self and their identity. We are committed to developing the services we provide to support contact arrangements including direct contact. This includes the need to discuss plans for children during permanency planning meetings and by asking professionally curious questions during tracking panels and Child in Care reviews and when necessary, challenging the notion of risk often associated with post order contact.



Below is feedback from those who have been supported by the service, in face-to-face family time:

“(worker) has been like a breath of fresh air and she really has supported me not just with arranging contact but also while we are at contact. (worker) has been amazing and very supportive and helpful during and in between visits.”

23.Support to Adopted Adults

Supported 141
Adopted
Adults

Within the service there is a coordinator and social worker who support adults who have been adopted who live in Northamptonshire to locate and access their records. These records can be paper or electronic and can be from last year or as long ago as the 1930/40’s.

Finding their records enables adopted adults to learn details about their early life that may have eluded them for many years and to resolve worries and questions that they may never have even shared with anyone. Where appropriate the service will offer advice and signpost people in relation to how to trace and locate their birth family and this is a life changing event for many who thought they would be lost to each other forever.

During the 2022-2023 reporting period the service has supported 141 adopted adults to access their birth records compared to 90 in the 2021/22 reporting period.

Below is an example of feedback received from an adopted adult:

“It was a wonderfully endearing experience to read through such detailed and well logged work over all those years. I learnt so much about myself and lots of memories came flooding back, both good and bad. I think I have got some kind of closure from the documents, which was like being handed your past on paper. I really enjoyed it. Thanks so much for your help”



24. Summary

The service has continued to have a successful year in terms of adopter recruitment, matching for children and supporting families post order. During the 2022/23 reporting period the service has taken the opportunity to *take stock* and review practice across the teams. Work following the Leiland James Corkhill safeguarding practice review has strengthened practice which will support the ability of the service to safeguard children throughout their adoption journey.

The partnership with Family Adoption Links (FAL) is now embedded and is bringing benefits in terms of a broader training and support offer for families and in terms of supporting family finding for children across the partnership.

As a service we remain aspirational in terms of our vision for an *Effective Adoption Agency in the 21st Century* and as such recognise that whilst it is important to continually monitor the effectiveness of our locally and regionally delivered services It is equally as important to maintain an outward facing awareness and response to national drivers, reports and research and consider the implications of this upon local practice development.

In July 2021 the Department for Education published the *Adoption Strategy – Achieving Excellence Everywhere*. The strategy set an expectation to strive for excellence in all adoption services meeting the needs of every child waiting for adoption and for all adopted children who need support. Whilst this strategy was published in 2021 the aspirations outlined within it remain the focus of work being undertaken at a national, regional, and local level as it continues to mirror the vision which we have as a service.

In June 2022 Adoption UK published its annual Adoption Barometer report, below is a summary of the recommendations made;

- Create and implement quality standards for the journey of prospective adopters through preparation, approvals and matching, for use by all adoption agencies.
- Introduced ringfenced, multi-year government funding for adoption support across all nations of the UK.
- Produce clear, specific support plans for every child to be placed for adoption, distinct from the placement plan, agreed with their adopters and reviewed at least once a year.
- Adoption agencies to have a duty to provide the adoption support set out in a child's assessment of support needs.
- Train education and health professionals in early childhood trauma and associated conditions, including Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder and Attachment Disorder.



- Provide free, expert, lifelong support for establishing and maintaining birth family relationships including during childhood and when tracing birth relatives in adulthood

These recommendations are aspirational and far reaching in terms of considering adoption within the wider societal context. As a service whilst we cannot address all the recommendations, we are mindful of them within our day-to-day practice and service planning and are mindful that these are recommendations borne out of feedback gathered from adopters, adopted young people, adopted adults, birth parents and professionals across the sector. As such we have a responsibility to view this as we would other forms of feedback. In response, as part of our review of service areas during the 2022/23 reporting period we have:

- Strengthened our QA process in relation to support plans to ensure they are reflective of the child's needs,
- Maintained links with education and health partners and share information and training opportunities with them to support attachment aware practice
- Held workshops with education colleagues re Supporting the attachment needs of children in schools, and education passport is being developed via the FAL adoption support work stream
- Made a commitment to applying for the Early Permanence Quality Mark which is underpinned by an agreed set of nationally agreed practice standards.
- Established links with the PAUSE project to support our understanding in relation to what birth families would find useful in terms of support services including support with post order contact arrangements.
- Developed training workshops re managing attachment needs which can be delivered to staff across residential children's settings.

Overall, we feel we have had a positive year across the service and whilst we are all saddened by the adoption disruptions, we have experienced we have used these as opportunities for review and reflection of practice and as such continue to strive for excellence in all that we do.



18. Plans for development 2023/24

The service has a strong foundation of good practice upon which to continue to develop during the 2023 – 2024 reporting period and have identified the following priority areas.

1. Continued development of tracking systems including embedding the adoption tracking panel to support oversight and planning for children alongside effective tracking of adopters to ensure that matches for children are made in a timely manner.
2. Tracking and data collection systems to be developed for the post order support team.
3. Strengthened quality assurance systems including an audit framework to be embedded within the service.
4. Awareness raising activities and training in relation to the benefits and challenges of direct contact in adoption to be established for adopters, SW's and panel members.
5. Feedback mechanisms for service users to be embedded and feedback used to inform practice developments and co-production – including feedback from the Adopter Consultation Hub and Colabor8 groups.
6. Early Permanence Quality Mark to be applied for.
7. Share learning from recent disruptions to inform practice across the service including with the adoption panel and the wider children's trust teams.
8. Developing an Adoption Community to support adopters and adopted children and young people to have a network where that can share experiences and links with others who share an *adoption identity*.

Tracy Morton

Adoption Service Manager

April 2023



Northamptonshire Children's Trust

Independent Reviewing Officer Service - Annual Report 2022/2023



Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Service Northamptonshire Children's Trust

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Introduction

The Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Annual Report is a requirement set out in the IRO Handbook (2010). It is directed that the report should be written in a format which is easily accessible to children and young people who live in care.

This report contains a summary of work completed by Northamptonshire Children's Trust's (NCT) Independent Reviewing Officer service between 1st April 2022 and 31st March 2023.

It is the duty of NCT, commissioned by the respective unitary Authorities (North Northamptonshire and West Northamptonshire Councils) to act as corporate parents for all our Children in Care and, as any good parent, it is our duty to ensure that our children and young people are safe, healthy, supported to do well in education, employment & training and are helped to transition smoothly into adulthood.

NCT's vision is **Children, Young People and Families are at the heart of all we do, in every action we take and every decision we make.** Our commitment, which was co-produced with children and young people is:

'What we do today affects your tomorrow, we promise to walk side-by-side with you.'

The Role of the Independent Reviewing Officer

The appointment of an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) for a child or young person in the care of a Local Authority is a legal requirement under s.118 of the Adoption and Children Act (2002).

The role of the IRO is set out in Care Planning Regulations and Guidance (2010) and Children Act (1989). The Children and Young Persons Act (2008) extended the remit

of IROs from a focus on chairing reviews to reporting on Local Authority's performance in respect of the wider case management of children's Care Plans.

Detailed guidance and regulations for Independent Reviewing Officers and Local Authorities was published in 2010 as the 'IRO Handbook'. In this, it states that the primary role of the IRO is 'To ensure that the Care Plan for the child fully reflects the child's current needs and that the actions set out in the plan are consistent with the Local Authority's legal responsibilities towards the child'.

A guide to help children and young people to understand the role of the IRO has been developed and can be found at the following link:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/221761/young_20peoples_20guide_20to_20the_20independent_20reviewing_20officers_20handbook.pdf

In this guide it states that: -

- *The main job of the IRO is to make sure that your care plan meets your needs.*
- *They will do this by first, chairing your review, second, by letting you have your own say in your review and third, by following up to make sure that people actually do what they agreed to do.*

Children and young people are reminded that Children in Care Review belong to the young person, and it is essential that the IRO knows how and what they feel.

Furthermore, the IRO Handbook states that IROs must: -

- promote the voice of the child;
- ensure that plans are based on a full and proper assessment of each child's needs;
- make sure that each child knows how they can get hold of an Advocate;
- act as a safeguard against children staying in care longer than necessary, or not getting the services they need, because of a lack of good planning;

- listen to children and see that they understand any changes to their Care Plan and
- make sure that the Local Authority is a good “corporate parent” to children in care

The IRO Service

The IRO Service is part of the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Service (SQAS) within Northamptonshire Children’s Trust. The service comprises of 19 IROs (16 full-time, 3 part-time) 84% is female, and 26% are global majority identity. The service is managed with the support of an Assistant Director, Strategic Manager and two IRO Service Managers; all of whom are permanent members of the service. There is an extensive range of experience in the team, with IROs who have experience in youth justice, fostering, adoption, kinship fostering, children in care, safeguarding (child protection), mental health, separated children (unaccompanied asylum-seeking children - UASC), children with disabilities, substance misuse services and CAFCASS. Five IROs are designated Signs of Safety champions. The service continues to be supported by a dedicated business support team, without which, the service would struggle to function effectively.

The IRO Service is a separate service to the Child Protection Chair Service, which is supported by 10 Child Protection Chairs (CPC’s) and a Service Manager. Having a separate service enables IROs to focus solely on the needs of our children and young people who are in care and ensure they receive good quality services in line with the IRO Handbook and Care Planning Regulations. Whilst CPC and IRO Services are separate, some officers are recruited as joint IROs and CPC’s, enabling services to be flexible to meet the needs and demands placed on either service area.

The IRO Service, whilst employed by NCT, is an independent service whose functions include ensuring that NCT meets the needs of Children in Care, monitoring the performance of the Trust’s function as a corporate parent and to identify areas of

practice that require improvement. As a service, we take the view that having a positive, collaborative working relationship approach, whilst remaining a critical friend to our colleagues, is more effective to work towards best outcomes for our children and young people. The service also recognises the importance of acknowledging and highlighting good practice that Social Workers evidence and the positive impact this has on children. IROs regularly praise Social Workers, share good practice, and bring positive work to the attention of senior leaders, including the Chief Executive of the Trust, who acknowledges each contact personally.

IRO caseload (number of children and young people they should work with)

1. The IRO handbook recommends a caseload between 50 to 70 children and young people per IRO. Ofsted (2013), *Independent reviewing officers: taking up the challenge?* A thematic inspection of IRO services states 'although a lower caseload was not a guarantee of high-quality work, IRO input was likely to be more effective where caseloads were manageable'
2. The number of cases held by individual IROs has varied and has, at times, risen above 80 cases. Individual caseloads have ranged from 40 (part-time staff) to 84 cases per IRO during the reporting period. At the end of the reporting period (31st March 2022) the average caseload was 71; however, this included the 2 Service Managers managing small caseloads due to the increasing numbers of children coming into care and IRO absence (long-term sickness and maternity leave). This resulted in IROs also having to cover for colleagues, and this is not reflected in the average caseload data.
3. Size of caseload does not always provide an accurate picture of the volume of work for an individual IRO. It does not account for additional reviews due to placement breakdown or disruption, additional visits to children - prior to, or between reviews, children in out-of-county placements or large sibling groups.

Progress made April 2022 to Mar 2023

The IRO Service continues to be a permanent staff group. This year saw some changes in the staff group, with four new IROs joining the service because IROs retired, went on maternity leave, moved to an Auditor role and creation of new post from existing hours using hours 'released' when IRO's chose to reduce hours and work part-time. The team has remained stable, with 50% of the team engaged in their IRO role for more than 5 years and 5 IROs with over 8 years' service. This has resulted in our children and young people benefitting from someone consistent in their life, and with whom they can build a positive, stable relationship. This is vital at a time when some children in care have experienced higher than desirable changes of Social Worker. The IRO has been able to be the constant and therefore able to ensure that the child's assessed needs are met and regularly revisited as part of the care planning and review process.

The last year has seen the IRO service being able to fully return to in-person reviews, following the conclusion of Covid concerns. IROs comment that they continue to value this position and they are able to visit children and young people in their homes and engage with them in-person. Some young people have continued to request that visits take place virtually, as they find this way of communicating more engaging and less formal; similarly, reviews now benefit from learning gained during Covid to enable i.e. face to face, virtual and hybrid meetings, as agreed / directed by the young person. As a service we have agreed that all first and second reviews are ideally in person and face to face in order to start to build that important relationship with the children and young people.

IROs rightly believe that active participation of children and young people in their review is critical. IROs continue to prioritise and support children and young people to share their views and be part of their review in a range of ways - from attending face-to-face or virtually, writing their views for their review, having an Advocate support them to share their wishes and feelings, and supporting children to chair their own reviews.

IROs have made effective use of a range of approaches to engage with young people, using various IT platforms. In the last year there was a 15% increase to 54% of children and young people attending their review compared to last year. Overall, 82% of children and young people were able to either attend or share their views with the IRO prior to, or at their review enabling the young person's voice to be more clearly heard and enabling them to actively partake in the decision-making about their life

IROs continue to work closely with CAFCASS, holding 2 joint meetings / workshops last year. Joint IRO / CAFCASS Guardian workshops allow both services to develop good practice and to share concerns relating to cases, consider Family Proceedings Court practice and Deprivation of Liberty Orders (DOLS) and to share developments within services. IROs continue to attend regional IRO seminars to develop their practice and the service provided to children and young people through learning from other authorities.

IROs continue to write their Chair's report directly to the child or young person - subject to the young person's age and understanding and this includes a summary letter to all children / young people regarding their review meeting. The young person has a choice of receiving the full report, summary letter, or both. Over the last year we have had 1½ service development days and writing to the child has been discussed and good practice shared to further progress this practice and to act as role models across the Trust. (See appendix A).

IROs continue to raise formal and informal escalations on individual cases when there is a significant impact for a child. Alongside the daily report, the service creates a quarterly report highlighting team performance and themes raised. Key findings from this process are shared with senior managers in a quarterly report to the Quality Assurance Board. The report is available to operational Service Managers and themes are addressed in regular Service Managers' meetings, the latter is chaired by IRO Service Managers; these meetings have become better attended and more focussed during the last year.

Children and young people have fed back to IROs that they continue to find having one-page profiles (see appendix B) beneficial and this assists in making the first meeting more informal. IROs continue to update and send their one-page profiles to children and young people prior to their first review and new IROs are required to complete their profile upon appointment.

Examples of challenges by IROs: -

- An IRO raised concerns about the quality, safety, and cleanliness of a placement and this resulted in 5 young people being moved into appropriate accommodation.
- When a young person had photos taken and they were published in the local paper or on the school website, they put an emoji over her face as a standard risk averse response for children who are in care rather than a risk managed approach which the IRO was able to support. The IRO then agreed to advocate that her face be shown - which was in line with her views and wishes.
- IROs attendance at final care planning meetings and challenge to the proposed plan where the IRO has assessed this to not be in the best interests of the child/children - for example, a plan for 4 siblings was to be 2 separate plans: adoption for the younger siblings and long-term fostering for the older siblings. Following challenge, this was changed to a plan of long-term fostering for all 4 children, where very regular family time could be supported into their futures.
- IRO supported 2 young brothers to present their concerns regarding their sleeping space and the need for an urgent extension (previously agreed, but not actioned) to the Chief Executive and the Director of Children's Social Care. An extension to this property is now progressing.
- IRO raised concerns regarding a CPR (Child's Permanency Report) for a child where there had been no management oversight or quality assurance checks and the work was of an unacceptable level - this has been addressed and now reflects the child's history.
- IRO raised concerns regarding a lack of school place for a young person living out-of-county. As the IRO and Social Worker did not get a response through the escalation process, the IRO made a formal complaint using the Local Authority's complaint's process where the young person was placed, and this resulted in instant resolution of the issue.

Example of compliments for IROs: The work and support of IRO's has been appreciated by many children and young people, parents, carers, and professionals.

Please see below for some examples of this: -

Foster carers shared... The IRO was absolutely superb and a key driver in ensuring A and B's voice was heard. It would be excellent to have him involved again.

Fostering Social Worker shared... We just wanted to say thank you for all your support. You are excellent at coordinating these meetings, ensuring clear actions and accountabilities are taken.

Parent shared.. *"I just want to say thank you to you and A for everything your kind words and support.. I know your jobs not easy just like social services but I want you guys to know I appreciate what you all do and very lucky to have had two very supportive people. It helped me see what is right and the importance of parenting and help me see I am a great mum people can change and I'm not worthless i am strong and to know my kids will grow up with happy memories makes me happy. So thank you both very much".*

Parent shared.. *"Thank you so much i want you to know you have been a very active and positive part in my struggles as a parent I'm really grateful for your help guidance and I have learned so much about myself it's daunting but I'm glad I want you to know you are amazing at your job you will be missed also sorry if I've been hard work I never meant to be it's my of trying to say thank you for everything you have done for me and my family on after what happens next you deserve our gratitude and more there are not many people like you who are open to understanding You will be missed and remembered Thank you so much for everything"* 😊

Foster carer shared this after the review about the IRO... I just wanted to write a few lines to praise her as we thought she was really professional and a great advocate for our children. She was no nonsense and was not worried about talking about the difficult subjects that needed discussing, doing it in a caring but respectful way. It was a pleasure working with her and we hope to again, people are always to ready to complain so I wanted to praise instead.

Practice manager shared: She has gone above and beyond in her role as IRO with one of our families. She has been available when the carer has called and been reassuring to her. She has been extremely supportive of the family who sing her praises highly.



SSW shared ...she was talking with the young person B. And she talked about several social workers and other professionals in her life since she and her siblings were subject to care proceedings in 2015-16. B named the IRO as the only professional who really shows an interest in her life, takes time to listen to her views and try to support her. I also have observed the same during reviews where the IRO's approach was child centred and encouraging the YP to voice her views. The IRO has also emailed us to chase the actions as part for planning for next review. The organisation, communication and attention to detail are few skills to mention. There was always response the same day when the IRO was copied into emails and prioritised attending a professional's meeting organised at short notice.

Family time supervisor...Just a short note to say that I have just read the CIC notes you put on FB's Care First observations and, I have to say, it is one of the BEST I have ever read! I am sure that people are quick enough to complain about things but not many speak up to say a "Well done" do they? I think its beautifully written, for FB to read when he is older if he chooses to – very sensitive to his situation and careful consideration on the way it was written in the style of "writing to the child" - its also informative for other professionals involved in this child's life. So, a big Thank You from little old me 😊 tell your Boss I said so too

A compliment from an adoptive placement breakdown parent where there has been a really challenging journey. *Just wanting to say thanks again for all your hard work and keeping him, ooh making sure he's become the lovely young wonderful lad that he has. Thanks for being there for him and for us, we've met very few of those people on our adoption journey and we really really appreciate it. Take care Bye bye*

From April 2022 – March 2023, 3036 Children in Care reviews took place:

The timeliness of the first Children in Care review in 2022/23 was 83%. Delays occurred as result of IROs changing dates in the best interest of young people, following changes of Social Workers, late notification of children entering care, and, in some cases, unavoidable delay caused by IRO sickness absence. The percentage of second reviews on time was 88% and subsequent reviews was 93%. Some reviews were out-of-timescales through IRO sickness, and it was not considered in the best interests of the young person to allocate to another IRO to meet performance targets. Other reasons include changes of Social Workers, delaying reviews to enable a Social Worker to attend Court, to enable parental attendance and, in some cases, so that young people could attend the review.

The table below show timeliness of completion for IRO decisions and recommendations reports for year ending March 2023. The figure is taken from the reporting system. The 'actual' figure relates to data which has been corrected to consider human data entry errors which, in the report, shows as 'missing' and is recorded by the data entry system as being out-of-timescale. Unfortunately, this year the 95% target for chair reports was not achieved as result of unexpected long-term sickness and maternity leave.

Report type (Target 95%)	Reported Figure	Actual Figure
Decisions	83%	96%
Chair's Review Report	78%	86%

The following priorities were highlighted in the 2022 / 23 IRO Annual Report (**What we said / What we did**): -

- Ensure that the voice of the child / young person continues to be central to care planning for all our young people and is supported and evidenced by greater use of the Mind of My Own App to record and represent their wishes and views for children in care reviews.
 - IROs received training on the use of the Mind of my Own App and IROs have encouraged young people to use the App to provide feedback and their views and wishes for their reviews. Many of the children and young people have however shared that they are not happy to download and use this and prefer to talk with their IRO and use feedback forms.
- Ensure the Care Plan / Pathway Plan holistically explores and identifies each child and young person's needs, particularly focusing on children and young people's cultural and diversity needs.

- IROs have attended cultural competence training and have also taken part in bespoke training focussing on the role of the IRO and CP Chairs; this training included a focus on care planning and diversity.
 - There are now 2 equality influencers in the IRO service.
 - Team meetings now have a monthly focussed discussion regarding any individual needs to be considered in care and pathway planning, with a specific focus on equality and diversity.
- Continue to develop our practice of writing reports and summary letters to children and young people to ensure this becomes consistent across the service.
 - This has been consistently implemented across the service, including with new IROs who have joined the team.
 - An IRO has developed a training course about “Writing to the Child” with the Learning and Development team and some IROs have been able to attend this for their development.
- Work with our colleagues in NCT by facilitating monthly Service Managers’ meetings, with the aim of sharing good practice and identifying areas of concern so we can develop joint plans to address these.
 - This has been progressed and these meetings now take place bi-monthly. There has been good attendance across the Children’s Trust to work together at this level.
- Progress monthly quality assurance meetings to review themes identified through escalations and standing team agenda items regarding policy, procedural, and practice concerns. This will be supported by developing action plans to address matters identified with peers in NCT.
 - This has been progressed as a standing agenda item in the Service Managers’ meetings and through bi-monthly meetings with the Children in Care Strategic Manager.
 - Service Improvement plans have been updated to address these issues.
 - This was an area reviewed in an IRO development day, where themes and concerns were identified which will inform the IRO service development plan.
- Support and encourage IROs to fully evidence the direct and indirect contact they have with children and young people and their families.
 - We continue to monitor this and have tried to support this through making changes to the Chair’s report; unfortunately, the IT system could

not support this change and we await the new system to be able to progress this further.

Children in Care population

The number of children in care has continued to rise from 1185 in care at the end March 2022 compared to 1226 at the end of March 2023. (A more detailed breakdown is found at Appendix C).

Priorities for 2023/24

As a service we have identified the following priorities for the year April 2023 to March 2024:

- Ensure children and young people's voices are heard by updating our consultation forms to make them more age-appropriate and accessible, whilst concurrently supporting them to use the Mind of My Own app. Further surveys to be undertaken by the Independent Advocates on themes to be agreed with the IROs and Children in Care Council.
- To continue to focus and improve evidencing our understanding of each child's unique diversity. Service Managers to undertake observations and case audits to assess context and substantive practice in this area.
- All IROs to attend Cultural Competence and Writing to the Child training.
- To develop the role of the link IRO with respective children's teams across the Trust and to build effective working relationships which will enhance the lives of all our children and young people. Services from across the trust will be invited to the IRO Team Meeting to share and develop our understanding of the full range of roles across the Children's Trust.
- To positively reflect upon our learning in our work with children and young people and use appreciative inquiries to facilitate this and further development days.
- To ensure IROs understand their role within the developing Child Exploitation framework.

- IROs to ensure that Care Plans identify the clear route to permanency by the second children in care review
- Where IROs identify a concern that has a significant impact on the Child/Young Person's Care Plan they will address these issues consistently using the dispute resolution process.

Overview and Summary

The last year saw an increase in the number of children and young people coming into care. As a result, caseloads for IROs have remained over the recommended amount outlined in the IRO Handbook. IROs have continued to increase the number of in-person reviews and enabled young people to make an active choice if they prefer hybrid or virtual meetings. Performance this year has not been as consistent as we would have hoped for, but we have had significant illness and loss in the team, alongside the return to more face-to-face work – with associated time lost from travel-time.

The service continues to work in collaboration with NCT colleagues to acknowledge areas of good practice and highlight areas that require improvement. The service has welcomed four new IROs to the team in the last year. The service continues to benefit from having a stable and permanent workforce, who are committed to being the best advocates they can be for the children and young people in our care.

Appendix A: Writing to the child examples:

Child in care review Summary provided to young child:

Hello A, My name is B(IRO) and I am your independent reviewing officer. At the time of writing this report you are nearly 5 months old and whilst I appreciate you are too young to understand the current circumstances and offer your views, wishes and feelings, I wanted to write this record should you wish to read this when you are older, in hope this record will support your understanding of the meeting and decisions agreed in your best interest. My role as your independent reviewing officer is to oversee your care plan and what I mean by care plan is a document that considers your safety and wellbeing, ensuring your needs are adequately met in the environment where you live, your health, education, identity and family time. Today is your second child in care review. A, I can confirm that your current care plan is a twin track plan and what I mean by a twin track plan is consideration for your longer term care needs to be met and for you to be cared for with your family or with connected other and if this option is not deemed a in ensuring your needs are consistently whilst ensuring your safely and wellbeing, as a last option a plan of adoption for you to be cared for outside of your family will be considered. A, you have a new social worker named C and she shared in the review that despite her best efforts she has not been able to consistently engage with your mum to complete the parenting assessment, and due to non engagement, the assessment is negative which means your social worker is not recommending a return of you to mums care at this time. Mum is understandably upset receiving this news and has shared in the meeting today that a number of personal circumstances have impacted her engagement. C and myself and have urged your mum to speak with her legal representative to seek an extension and to do this as a matter of importance for the court to consider. A, your mum has put forward your great maternal uncle to be assessed as a possibility to care for you long term. Your social worker is going to complete an assessment as part of parallel planning. C aims to have the initial viability screening assessment completed within the week and if positive this will progress to a more in-depth assessment called a Connected Person Assessment. In the review A, your foster carer proudly shared updates about your progress. Your foster carer (FC) often shares pictures of you on various outings and you have the most precious smile that lights up your face. FC explained that you are gaining weight steadily and that this has been supported with a change in milk which appear to have eased your symptoms of reflux. A you are now provided Kendamil milk and this replaced Cow and Gate, you take 5-6oz every bottle and you are having feeds every 4 hours. At the time of writing you are 6.7kilo. Your health visitor has completed your 4.5 month development review and you are meeting your age expected milestones, which is fantastic. FC has shared that in the last 3 months, you have accompanied them on various trips and outings such as visiting a new country of Scotland, going to Butlins and you enjoy going out in your pram in the community exploring, taking in your surrounding. FC described you are becoming more active and personable each day and that you are an absolute delight to care for. Next steps, in respect of your care plan A, is C will complete the assessment of your great maternal uncle and mum will explore if she can obtain an extension to engage with C as part of her assessment. Whilst all of the assessments are being undertaken, you will continue to be cared for by your foster carers who love and value you greatly. I have set another date to review your care plan for 6 months 26/06/2023. Your IRO

Dear

This was your first child in care review, following you becoming looked after. You left the hospital following your premature birth at 19 days old and moved straight to the care of J, following the granting of an Interim Care Order by the Court on the same day. An assessment of mummy is being completed to see if she is able to care for you in the future and given she has not put anyone else's names forward, twin tracking has been agreed. This means that in the future you will either return to mummy's care or permanence will be achieved for you by way of adoption. This decision is not taken lightly and your social worker will work with everyone to ensure the wise Judge in Court is given all the information to make a forever decision for you. social worker agreed to finalise your My Care Plan within 10 days of your review, that being 08/06/23 and this is to be shared with mummy and daddy on completion. I was pleased to hear you have settled well into J's care and your development is evident, which was agreed by everyone in your review including you mummy. A great photo was shared with everyone of you in your swimming costume, we all joked that by your next review in 3 months time you will have hopefully grown into it! I'm so looking forward to seeing your development over the next few months and I look forward to visiting you again before your next review on 08/08/23. Best wishes

Appendix B: One-page profiles of 2 new IROs

Hi! My name is Nina Loyal.
Here is some information about me...



What makes me happy?

Helping others to have a good and happy life.
Seeing people being treated fairly and with respect.
Performing random acts of kindness whenever I can.
Knowing that people I care about are doing well.
Relaxing at home with absolutely no chores left to do!
Eating chocolate and ice-cream (a little bit too much!)

Things people like about me

I am always truthful, thoughtful and kind.
People have told me that I am good at listening and helping.
I speak up when I see that things are not right or unfair. I think that usually people need to know more about a situation so they can understand others better.
I look at the whole story before having an opinion about something.

I might feel sad when

People being negatively judged. For example because of their skin colour, language, heritage, ability, gender, mental health and other things about them or their situation.
The people I care about are unhappy or unwell.
Something unfair or unkind is happening.

As an IRO, it is my job to make sure that :-

- your care plan meets your needs and is based on a proper assessment of these.
 - decisions taken are ones that are best for you, follow your care plan and respect your rights.
 - I know how you feel and what you want to happen.
 - you know how to get hold of an advocate
 - plans for you are made as quickly as possible so you can feel settled in your home.
 - everyone is doing what they should be and within the time agreed.
 - you feel able to attend your review meeting and be in charge of it with me if you are comfortable to.
- There is much more to what I do but I can tell you about that when we meet.

I need a little help with

Hearing things well.
To make things easier, I often wear hearing aids.
It helps if people speak clearly and look at me when they are talking.
It helps me to 'hear' more clearly if I see facial expressions and lip movements as well as the words being spoken.

I am really looking forward to meeting you
and getting to know more about you 😊



My name is Liz White. I am an IRO (Independent Reviewing Officer), and this is my 1-page profile!



What makes me happy?

Getting to know People and learning about their experiences

Listening to music and going to festivals

Watching films and Netflix series and Anime

Exercising, if I'm not eating chocolates and food

Knowing that I listen to the young people I work with, and support them the best I can



Things people like about me

I am friendly, and easy to talk to

I am always kind to people

That I always do my best to help people

I might feel sad when

When the young people I support are not happy, and feel that their voice is not being heard

I need a little help with

Getting to know you, and your journey. How are you feeling about coming a child, young person in care?

Who are the people most important to you? and how they can support you

What IROs do – My job is to make sure that YOUR Care Plan meets your needs.

These are **your** reviews, so it is very important that you make sure I know how you feel and what you would want to happen. This includes letting me or your social worker know who you want to come to your meeting and where you would like to have your meeting. It could be where you are living, your school, Virtual meeting, our office or somewhere else you feel comfortable, but it must be a private place where no-one else can hear us.

- ❖ Ideally you will attend your review if suitable.
- ❖ If you want to, I will help you to chair your review meeting, if you feel you don't want to, I can chair the meeting, or we can do it together
- ❖ I will make sure you have your own say in your review; and
- ❖ After the meeting I will do my best to make sure that people do what they agreed to do during the meeting.
- ❖

There is more to what I do, but I can tell you about that when we meet.

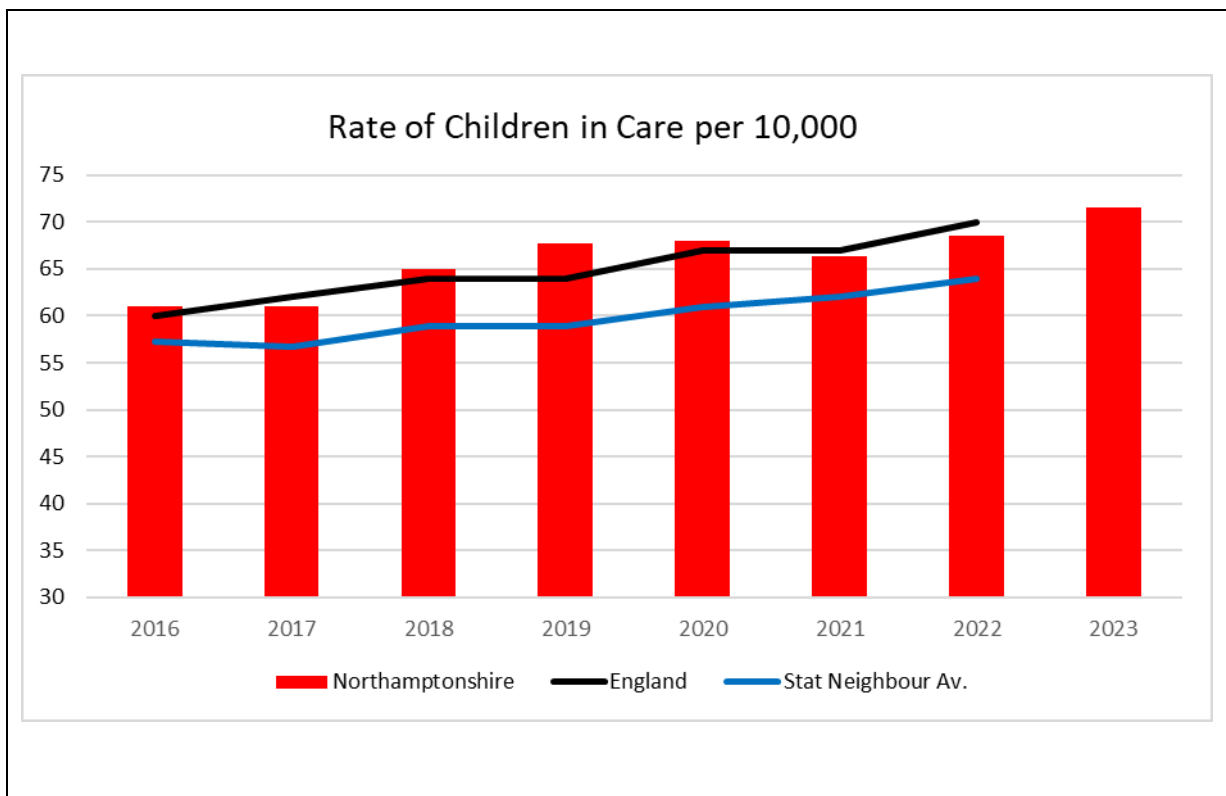
Appendix C - Children in care - data trends

Participation Data April 2022 to March 2023

Participation	0-3		4-6		7-9		10-15		16+		Grand Total
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
PN0 Under 4 at time of review2	527	99%	40	14%	32	10%	18	2%	11	1%	628
PN1 Attended spoke for her/himself	0	0	19	7%	43	13%	400	36%	510	64%	972
PN2 Attended spoke via an advocate	0	0	0	0%	1	0%	1	0%	6	1%	8
PN3 Attended used non verbal means	0	0	2	1%	0	0%	1	0%	2	0%	5
PN4 Attended did not convey views	0	0	4	1%	2	1%	6	1%	2	0%	14
Attended Total	527	99%	65	22%	78	24%	426	39%	531	67%	1627
PN5 Did not attend spoke via an advocate	0	0	13	4%	13	4%	32	3%	6	1%	64
PN6 Did not attend used other means	0	0	130	45%	158	49%	403	37%	114	14%	805
PN7 Did not attend did not convey views	0	0	57	20%	47	15%	145	13%	81	10%	330
Did not attend total	0	0	200	69%	218	68%	580	53%	201	25%	1199
Not recorded	3	1%	25	9%	26	8%	93	8%	63	8%	210
Grand Total	530		290		322		1099		795		3036

Participation	Grand Total
PN0 Under 4 at time of review2	628
PN1 Attended spoke for her/himself	972
PN2 Attended spoke via an advocate	8
PN3 Attended used non verbal means	5
PN4 Attended did not convey views	14
PN5 Did not attend spoke via an advocate	64
PN6 Did not attend used other means	805
PN7 Did not attend did not convey views	330
Not recorded	210
Grand Total	3036

Rate of Children in Care:



Commentary

The Northamptonshire child in care rate has steadily increased since 2016. At a rate of 71.6 per 10,000 head of population at the end of March 2023, it is above national (70). IROs continue, together with Children in Care team, to review cases of children who are having regular contact with family to assess if significant changes have been made that can enable children to safely return to the care of their family.

Gender of children and young people in care at End March 2023

	Male	%	Female	%	Total
2017/18	596	55%	488	45%	1084
2018/19	613	55%	502	45%	1115
2019/20	638	55%	525	45%	1163
2020/21	620	54%	523	46%	1143
2021/22	650	55%	536	45%	1185
2022/23	709	58%	517	42%	1226

Comparisons to National and Population statistics

Gender

	Northamptonshire 2023 (%)		England 2022 (%)	
	Children looked after	Population	Children looked after	Population
Male	58	51	56	51
Female	42	49	44	49
Commentary				
The above table shows that more boys than girls come into to care both locally and nationally compared girls.				

Ethnicity of children and young people in care at end March 2023

	All Children looked after %	Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children %	Non-Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children %
White	77%	6%	83%
Mixed	9%	1%	10%
Asian or Asian British	2%	20%	0%
Black or black British	7%	31%	4%
Other ethnic group	3%	24%	1%
Not stated			
Not recorded	4%	18%	2%

Comparisons to National and Population statistics

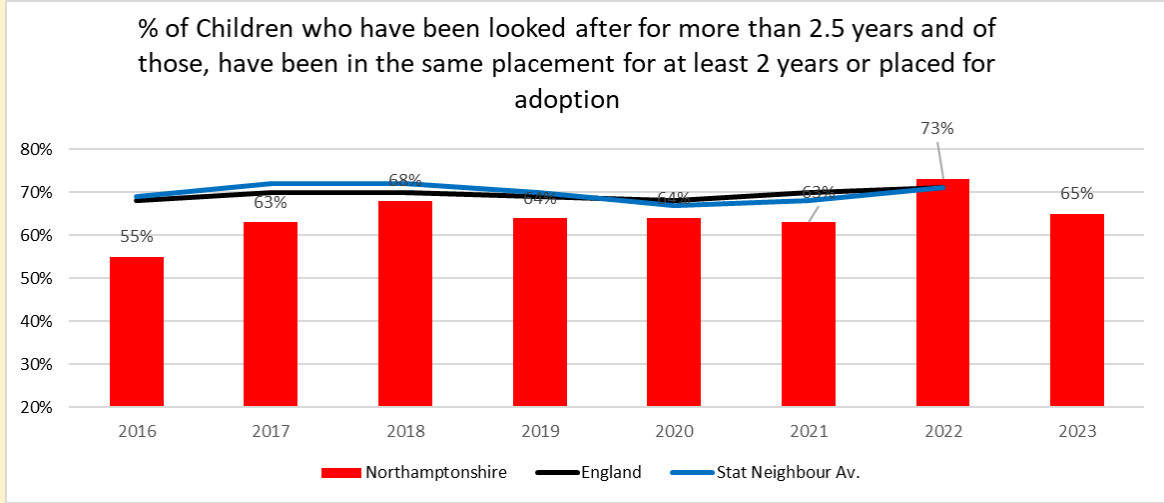
	Northamptonshire		England 2022	
	Children looked after %	Population %	Children looked after %	Population %
White	77%	83%	73%	74%
Mixed	9%	6%	10%	6%
Asian	2%	5%	5%	11%
Black	7%	5%	7%	6%
Other	3%	1%	4%	2%

Commentary

The above tables show that children and young people who are from mixed and other minority background are over-represented - both locally and nationally, when compared to the general population.

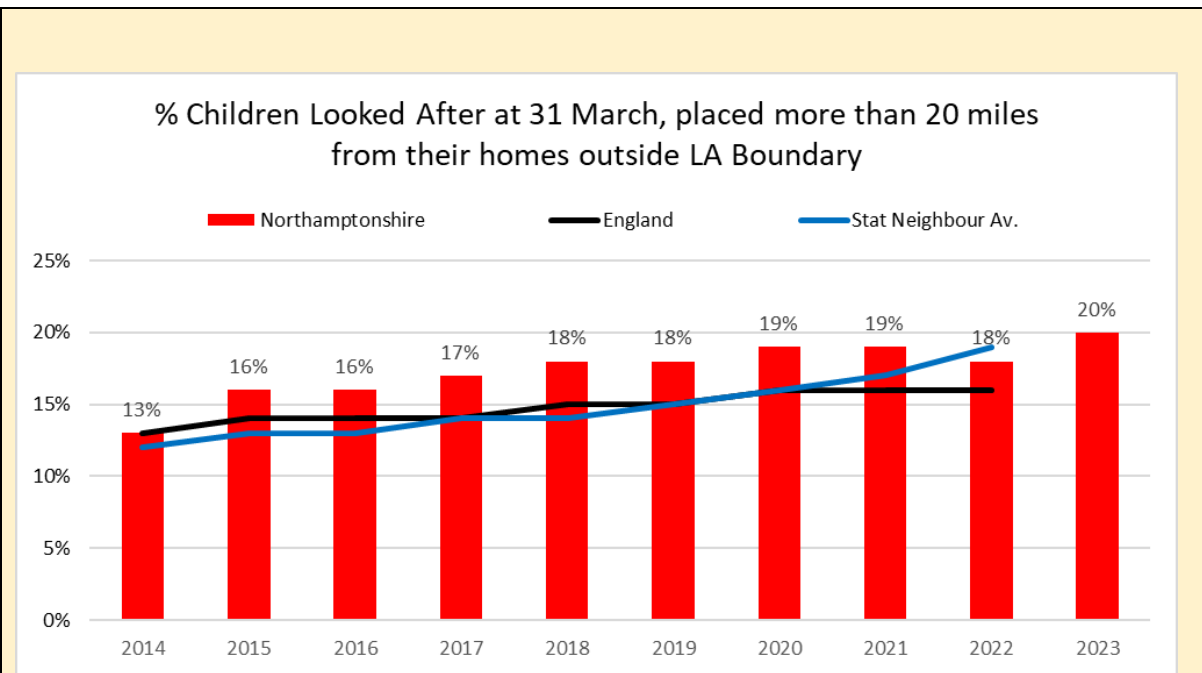
Children in Care at end March 2023 by age and placement type

	Under 1	1-4	5-10	10-15	16+	Grand Total
Children's Home	5	2	6	66	60	139
Fostering	41	85	135	265	96	622
Fostering (Friends & Family)	5	38	63	76	23	205
Independent living	0	0	0	7	135	142
Placed for adoption	0	9	4	0	0	13
Placed with parents	6	20	22	28	12	88
Residential care home/School	0	0	0	2	4	6
Other	3	1	0	2	5	11
Grand Total	60	155	230	446	335	1226



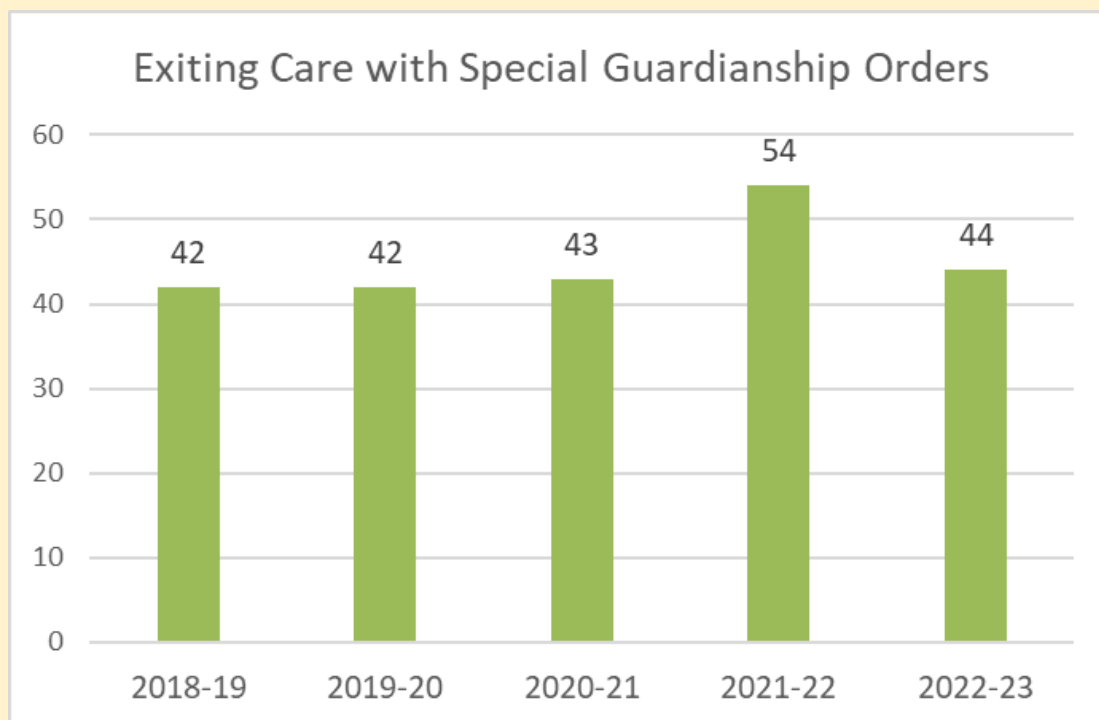
Commentary

This chart shows a decline for 2023, with the provisional end of March 2023 being 75%. The IRO Service has been involved in supporting stability through attendance at stability meetings and also within Circles to Success and tracking for permanence planning.



Commentary

The chart above shows the number of children placed 20 miles or more away from their family home and outside the Northamptonshire boundary. In some cases this means they could be closer to their family home than being placed in-county, which spans 56 miles along its axis. Placement sufficiency is a key concern local and nationally resulting in some children and young people having to be placed out of county.



Commentary

This chart shows that 44 children were made subject to a SGO in the year April 2022 to Mar 2023. Children in Care teams continue put forward plans for SGO as route to permanency with connected carers. IROs together with Social Worker also encourage foster carers to consider applying for SGOs for children who have been in long-term stable placements.

For the period April 2022 to end of Mar 2023

- Timeliness of reviews held compared to previous years

	2021-22	2022-23
% of Children in Care with their 1st review on time	78.9%	82.6%
% of Children in Care with their 2nd review on time	88.0%	88.3%
% of Children in Care with their subsequent review on time	93.2%	92.7%



Placement Sufficiency Strategy October 2022- March 2025

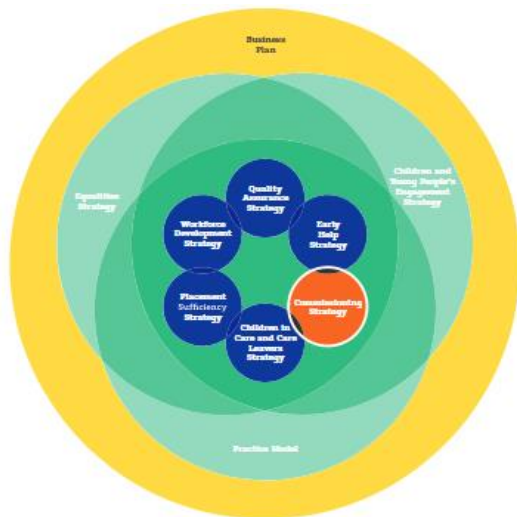
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1. Introduction

At Northamptonshire Children’s Trust we are dedicated to ensuring children, young people and families are at the heart of all we do – in every action we take and every decision we make. We know that what we do today affects children and young people’s tomorrows and we are focused on helping children and young people to live safe, be safe; fulfil potential; develop resilience and enjoy good health and wellbeing.

Our Placement Sufficiency Strategy sets out how we will ensure children in our care and care leavers have a home that is safe and suitable for their individual needs, where they are supported by people who care for them and about them to be achieve their full potential, develop resilience, enjoy good health and wellbeing and develop into adulthood. This will enable us to fulfil the *Sufficiency Duty*¹ along with West and North Northamptonshire councils by ensuring sufficient accommodation is secured that meets the needs of the children in our care and care leavers. Our Placement Sufficiency Strategy connects to the other core NCT strategies that together deliver our overall business plan:



In particular, it reflects the ethos and practice for working with children in care and care leavers, as set out in our Children in Care and Care Leavers Strategy 2021-25:

¹ Section 22G of the Children Act 1989

- 1** **Children and young people are best cared for wherever possible with their birth family or extended family.**

We recognise the strengths that are present in every family and help families to arrive at their own solutions to their own difficulties; we believe children are best raised within their birth family network and will do all we can to support this. We will ensure that the children in our care are only those who need to be in our care.
- 2** **Children and young people will live in homes that take account of their needs and preferences.**

We will work to ensure that positive opportunities and effective help are available at the earliest opportunity – encouraging children and young people to be ambitious and make the choices that mean they can thrive and achieve. Children's care will be well planned, promote stability and reduce the need for placement changes and emergency placements.
- 3** **Permanence and a sense of belonging will be secured for children and young people.**

Relationship-based practice will strengthen the relationships that are important to children and help them to stay connected to those people they love and are important to them.
- 4** **Aim high and have high expectations.**

We work with children young people and the families in which they live to ensure that they receive the support and services they need to live happy, healthy and successful lives.
- 6** **Children and young people develop positive and stable relationships with those who support them.**

Retaining a stable and resilient workforce which will empower and enable children, young people and families to achieve their full potential.
- 5** **Good outcomes for children and young people are achieved through a collaborative approach with partner agencies.**

Children, young people and their families experience consistent joined up approaches to assessing and meeting their needs.
- 7** **The views, opinions, needs and priorities of children in care and care leavers inform everything we do.**

We listen and observe attentively to children, young people and families, and respond to what they are telling us in order to inform how we improve the delivery of our services.

And is key to achieving this aspect of our pledge to children in care and care leavers, by achieving the outcome of *increased sufficiency of local placements so there is more choice for children:*

Make sure you are living in the right place

In delivering our Sufficiency Strategy we keep in mind what our Children in Care Council have told us about what **makes a good home**

People	Place	Other things that matter
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Motivate me • Support with medical needs and appointments • Kind hearted • Gentle • Patient • Approachable • Caring 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nice family who want to involve you in their family • Having someone there for you • Good company • Boundaries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Warm comfy environment • My own bed • My own space • Good food • Pets • Blankets • Safe • Activities to do • Groups to go to • Have access to things you like • Good school • Sense of belonging • Pocket money and budgeting

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having a voice is the most important • Someone to talk to • Friends • Need respect • Larger family wanting to be involved with the young people • Strict but fair • Organised • Mother / father figure • Agree rules 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being able to freely express myself without judgement • Help me with my future • Life skills • Help with homework • Informed about trauma and how it affects me • Understand feelings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respect my privacy • Wi-Fi • Own computer • Clean 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Happiness • Good birthday and Christmases • Holidays
--	--	--	--

Our Strategy is delivered within the **NCT Strategic framework**



Strategic Framework

Vision

Children, Young People and Families at the heart of all we do - in every action we take and every decision we make.

Our Commitment

(co-produced with children and young people)

What we do today affects your tomorrow, we promise to walk side by side with you

Outcomes Framework



Conditions for Success



2. Our journey since 2020

In Northamptonshire, the vast majority of our children in care are cared for in stable placements that are meeting their needs, supporting them to achieve positive outcomes and progression towards independence. Compared with 2020/21, a higher proportion of children who have been in care for 2.5 years or more have been living in the same placement for 2+ years or placed for adoption (68% YTD at August 2022 compared with 63% in 2020/21), bringing us in line with our statistical neighbours.

We use a mixed model of inhouse and external fostering, children's homes and supported accommodation to meet the needs of our children and young people. The majority of our children

are living in children's homes or foster care that is rated good or outstanding by Ofsted. This means we are assured that children receive good quality care and we can see how this helps them achieve good outcomes through their care or pathway plan reviews.

We have improved the quality of our NCT IFA (Independent Fostering Agency), which is now judged as 'requires improvement to be good' by Ofsted, and we continue to deliver activity to further improve the quality of the services delivered by our IFA. The vast majority of our NCT children's homes and those on our 'block contract' (where we have sole use of the homes delivered by an external provider) are judged to be good or outstanding by Ofsted. At the time of writing, 2 of the 14 NCT and block contract homes were judged as 'requires improvement to be good' and have plans in place to achieve an improved rating. All provision on our residential and IFA frameworks are rated good or outstanding by Ofsted. In the main any spot purchased registered provision we commission is rated good or outstanding.

Our 2020 – 2022 Sufficiency Strategy was delivered in a context of major local, national and global challenges and changes: The Covid 19 pandemic impacted our lives in a way most had not previously experienced and we continue to see the impact on children and families' mental health, pressure and dynamics in families, which has been exacerbated by cost of living increases in 2022. Nationally, there has been increased demand in public and specialist services whilst recruitment and retention challenges in care and social work have grown, and risks to children from outside their homes in the form of exploitation continues to cause serious safeguarding issues, trauma and stress to children and those who care for them across the country.

As is the case nationally, we have seen an increase in demand for our support, an increase in the complexity of needs of children and an increase in numbers of children in care as we emerged from lock downs. NCT have seen an increased number of safeguarding referrals; 43,393 initial contacts were received by children's social care across 2021/22, which is 2,020 more than 20/21. The number of children in care in August 2022 was 1218 in comparison with 1143 at March 2021. We also saw an increase from 785 children in placements in Apr 2021 to 888 in June 2022. Additionally, since 2020/21 we have seen an increase in the proportion of our children in care who have had 3+ placement moves in the last 12 months, and this is higher than England and statistical neighbour averages.

During this time, it has also been recognised that the placements market is not meeting the needs of children or local authorities: [Final Report - The Independent Review of Children's Social Care \(independent-review.uk\)](#) (June 2022); and The Competition and Markets Authority report on Children's Social Care [Final report - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#) (March 2022)

Within this challenging context, we have remained relentless in our drive to achieve the priorities of our 2020- 2022 Sufficiency Strategy:

- Improved placement stability
- Improved outcomes for children and young people
- Improved sufficiency of NCT fostering
- Improved sufficiency of placements
- Reduction of placement costs

The impact of this activity is that we now have a better early help offer which is having a positive impact enabling families to remain together or be reunited. We have improved our understanding of needs and have delivered plans to provide access to a greater number of fostering, children's homes and independent supported accommodation that is suitable to meet the needs of our children. We have reviewed our processes to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of placement searches to

enable the right placement to be found in a more timely way and have improved our quality assurance activity to ensure action is taken swiftly to address any concerns and better value for money is achieved. Many of the activities will continue as we move into the delivery of our 2022-25 Sufficiency Strategy and the continuing national sufficiency challenges and increase in demand mean this remains a top priority for NCT.

A summary of what we did to deliver these priorities and the impact on children and young people is provided at **Appendix 1**.

3. Sufficiency Assessment 2022 - Our children

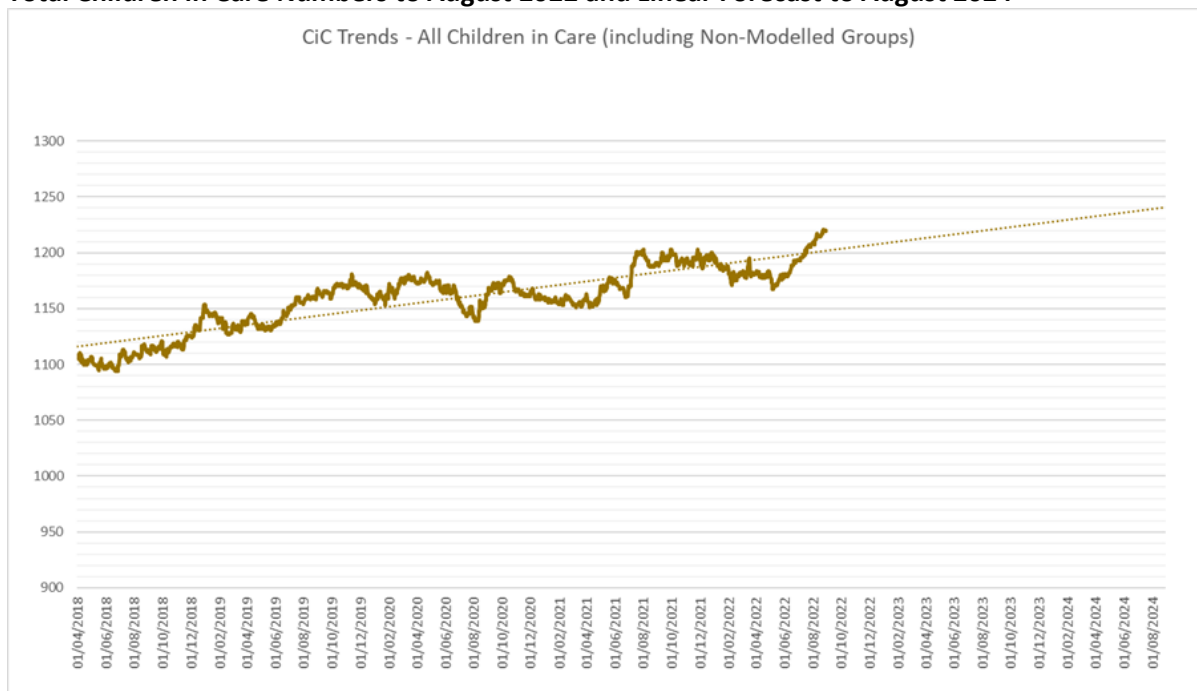
Number of Children in Care and Forecast

At the time of the 2020 -2022 Sufficiency Strategy, there were 1163 children in care. The linear forecast at that time was 1254 children in care by March 2022. As at 31st March 2022, there were 1184 children in care, 70 less children than our forecast. The number may have been lower than expected due to the Covid 19 pandemic and lockdowns from March 2020 when the number of children in care remained steady.

Overall numbers of children in care increased from 1094 to 1184 across 4 years up to March 22, which is an 8% increase. April – August 2022 has seen a further increase to 1218. This is likely due to the impact of the pandemic followed by a significant cost of living crisis, as well as separated children arriving after the allied withdrawal from Afghanistan. Using the Placement Modelling tool from the Data to Insights project with August 2022 data, a straight linear trend line estimates the August 2024 total care population at 1241². The forecasting tool also provides a lower and upper confidence intervals of 1185 and 1257 respectively. NB because the tool forecasts up to 2 years ahead and the current cost of living crisis could have a major impact on children needing to come into care, we will re-run the forecast every 3-6 months and adjust our plans accordingly.

² The term 'modelled groups' refers to children in care in foster placements, residential or supported accommodation. It excludes groups where modelling is not created – e.g. adoption placements, placements with parents and other placements.

Total Children in Care Numbers to August 2022 and Linear Forecast to August 2024



Based on current trend, the tool provides a forecast by age and placement type as per the table below:

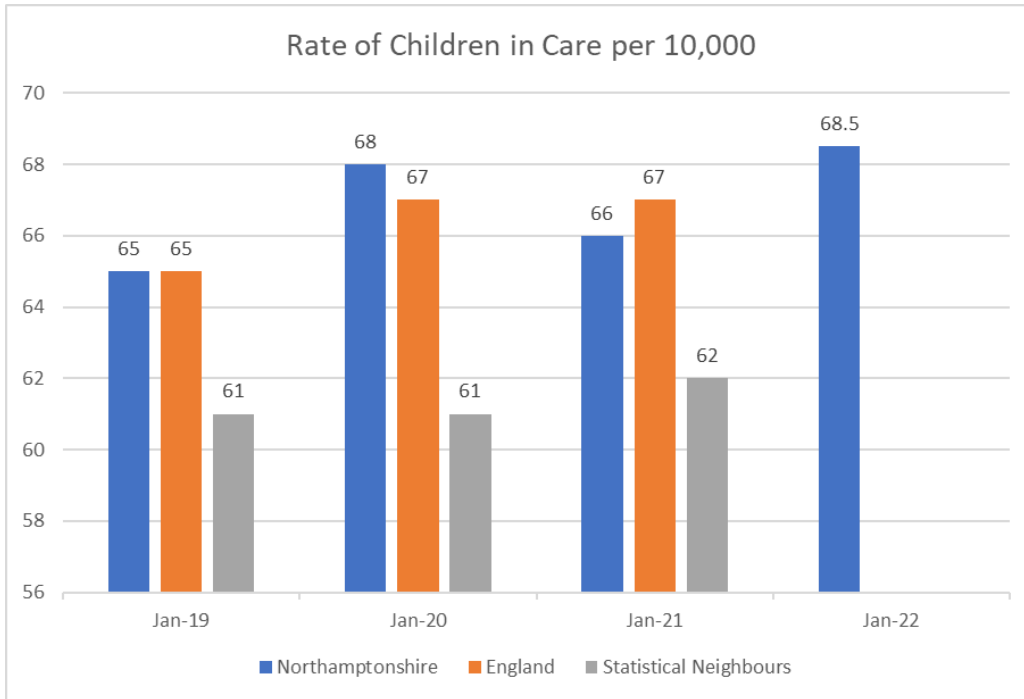
2024 Forecast Summary Figures for children likely to require fostering, residential and supported accommodation: Placement Type and Age

	Total - All	Total Modelled (Fos, Res, Supp)	Fos	Res	Supp	Age 0	Age 1_4	Age 5_9	Age 10_15	Age 16_18
31/03/2022 Actual	1184	1062	844	131	87	57	115	207	440	243
31/08/2022 Actual	1218	1093	847	139	109	43	136	188	441	285
31/08/2024 Tool Forecast	1221	1085	861	134	90	48	123	201	461	252
Base LCI	1185	1048	830	122	77	36	110	186	441	234
Base UCI	1257	1121	892	146	103	60	136	216	481	270
31/03/24 Linear Trend Forecast	1241	1114	862	141	111	44	139	192	449	290
% change Aug 2022 to tool forecast	0.2%	-0.7%	1.7%	-3.6%	-17.4%	11.6%	-9.6%	6.9%	4.5%	-11.6%

The forecast shows an expected increase in the numbers of children aged 5- 15 years and an expected increase in demand for fostering.

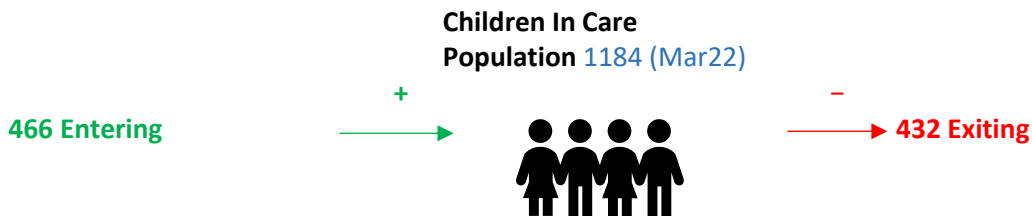
Rate of Children in Care per 10,000

As at March 2022, the rate of children in care per 10,000 was 68.5. This is slightly higher than the latest available national average 67 per 10,000. As with the number of children in care, the rate per 10,000 has increased since 2019.



Please note the rate of children in care data for England and Statistical Neighbours will be not released until November 2022.

Number of Children Entering and Exiting Care (all under 18s) April 21 – March 22



Gender and Age of Children in Care

In Northants, the proportion of **boys and girls** in care remained steady in 2020/21 (54%/46% respectively) and 2021/22 (55%/45% respectively). There were 194 females entering care in 2021/22 compared to 272 males.

This was similar to the latest available national data of children in care from 2020/21 (55.9% boys and 44.1% girls). Boys are overrepresented in the care system in comparison to both the county and national demographics.

Census data 2021

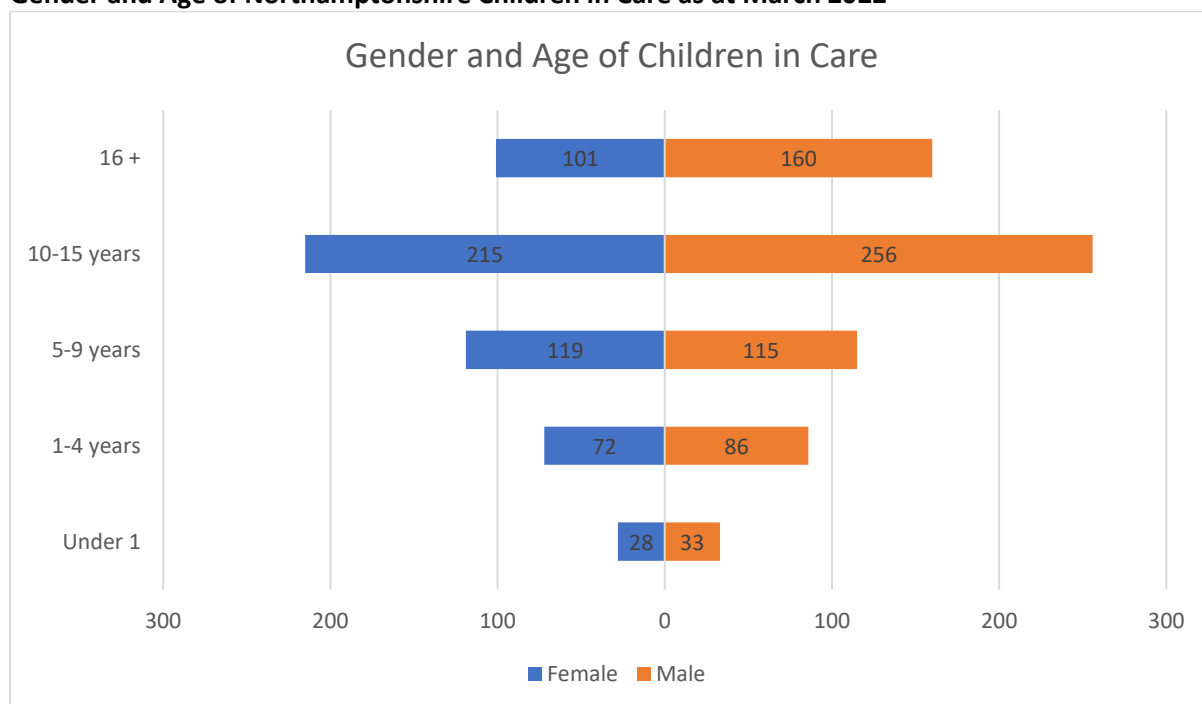
0-19 years old Northamptonshire	%
Male	51.04%

Female	59.86%
0-19 years old England & Wales	%
Male	51.23%
Female	48.77%

A What Works for Children’s Social Care study (2021) highlighted that boys are more likely to externalise emotions. There is some evidence to suggest that children who externalise are more likely to make positive progress in residential care³.

The **age group** with the highest number of children in care and entering care is the 10–15-year-old age group. We know that a significant number of this age group has a care plan of long-term fostering.

Gender and Age of Northamptonshire Children in Care as at March 2022



The largest group of children entering care during 21-22 were 10-15 year olds.

Entrants (March 21- 22)	Gender		Grand Total
	Females	Males	
Under 1	36	40	76
1-4 years	31	37	68

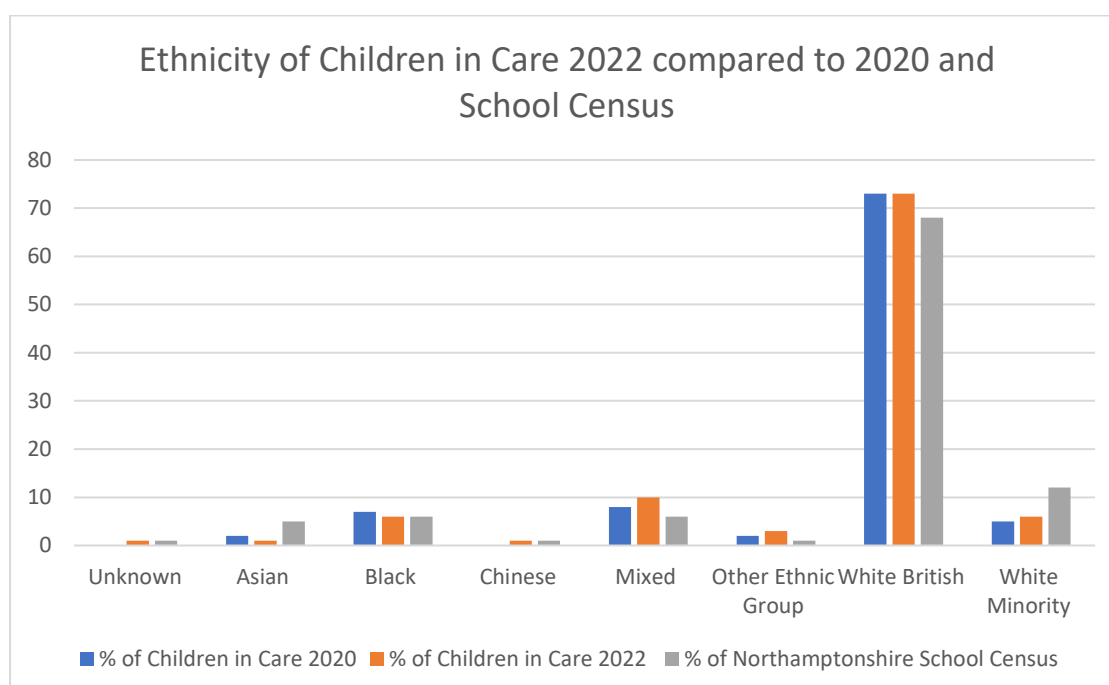
³ What Works for Children’s Social Care (2021) ‘Residential Care’, *Comparing the outcomes of residential care with other types of placement, such as foster care*. Available at: <https://whatworks-csc.org.uk/evidence/evidence-store/intervention/residential-care/#:~:text=Overall%2C%20residential%20care%20had%20no%20effect%20on%20children%E2%80%99s,care%20when%20both%20were%20providing%20%E2%80%98care%20as%20usual%E2%80%99>

5-9 years	39	59	98
10-15 years	63	72	135
16 +	25	64	89

Ethnicity of Children in Care

The largest ethnic group of children in care is White British, with 865 (73%) children and young people. The second largest is children from any other White Background (61 children, 5%) followed by African (50 children, 4%). The lowest number of children in care ethnic groups are Chinese (>5), Asian (>5) and Other Ethnic Groups (>5)⁴.

The profile of children in care is slightly different to the Northamptonshire school population as a whole with White British and Mixed Ethnicity being slightly overrepresented in the children in care population. This is change from 2019 when Black children were slightly overrepresented in the Northamptonshire care system compared with the school population.



Children In Care with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

There are 198 children in care with an EHCP (Education, Health, and Care Plan) (at March 22). 4099 children in Northamptonshire have an EHCP, which is 3.3% of all children. Of the 767 children in care who are of statutory school age 26% of children in care have an EHCP. Therefore, of the 4099 children in Northamptonshire that have an EHCP 198 of them are children in care which is 5% meaning that children with an EHCP are slightly over represented in the care system.

⁴ The ethnicity categories used are those used in the Census and further definitions and information can be found here: [List of ethnic groups - GOV.UK \(ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.service.gov.uk/ethnicity-facts-figures) and [Writing about ethnicity - GOV.UK \(ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.service.gov.uk/ethnicity-facts-figures).

There are currently 43 children in full time care in the Disabled Children’s service, 27 of whom are in residential care.

Needs of Children in Care

Reasons for Children Coming into Care over 2021/22 were:

Entrants by Reason	Entrants
Socially unacceptable behaviour	12
Parental disability or illness	12
Low income	0
Family in acute stress	23
Family dysfunction	79
Child's disability	7
Abuse or neglect	205
Absent parenting	50
Cases other than children in need	78

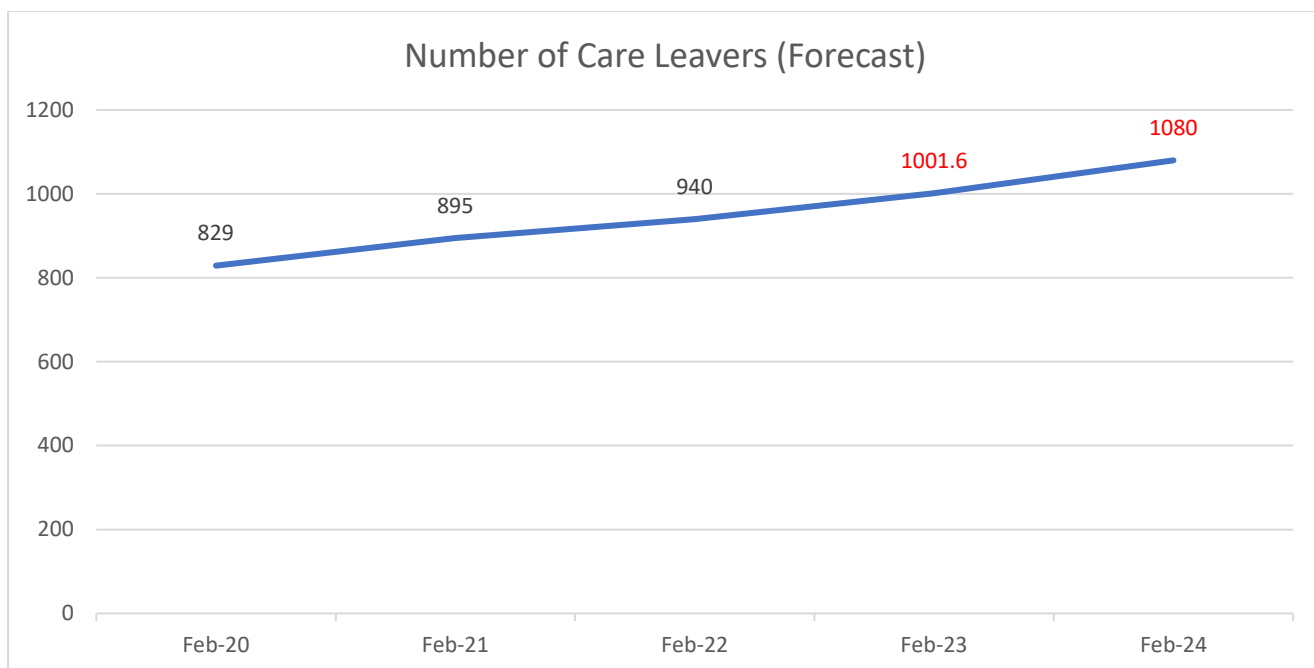
The most frequent reason for children coming into care is because of abuse or neglect. This means we will need placements that can support children who have experienced abuse and neglect and the effect this can have on children’s presenting behaviour, particularly as they reach teenage years.

Leaving Care

In March 22, 940 young people above the age of 16 were being supported by the Leaving Care team.

Leaving Care Cohort by Age	Grand Total (Mar 22)
16+17	258 (14 of whom are relevant so no longer in care)
18	146
19	140
20	165
21	100
22	55
23	47
24	29
Grand Total	940

Our projections tell us that this population is likely to grow to 1080 by 2024 which is an increase of 140 who are likely to require the support of the Leaving Care service (this includes 16 – 17 year olds supported by the service)



Number of Young People 18+ Entering and Exiting the Leaving Care Service Projections based on current age (April 22-March 24)

This projection is based on the number of 16 & 17 years old currently in care who may become care leavers and the number of 22 - 24-year-olds who are leaving care as shown in the diagram below.

The net gain in the care leavers population is potentially 127 by March 2024

It should be noted that over 21s choose whether they still want support from Leaving Care. However, it is envisaged with the forthcoming economic challenges faced in the UK, as well as other challenges facing young people such as mental health, that more care leavers may choose to stay supported.



The percentage of care leavers aged 17-21 and in employment, education or training was 60.6% and 92.5% were in suitable accommodation (August 2022), both above the national and statistical neighbour averages. This indicates the majority of our care leavers are on positive journeys to independence.

Separated Children

There are currently 68 separated children in care (also known as UASC – unaccompanied asylum-seeking children) and 48 entered care during 2021/22. 97% of the UASC population is male (66) and only 3% are female (less than 5). Out of the 48 UASC who entered care during 2021/22, 85% (41) are 16 or 17 years old. Only 7 (14%) are 10 to 15 years old. The number of separated children arriving in

the UK is impacted by international issues such as wars and will need to be monitored carefully to adjust plans according to any large increases.

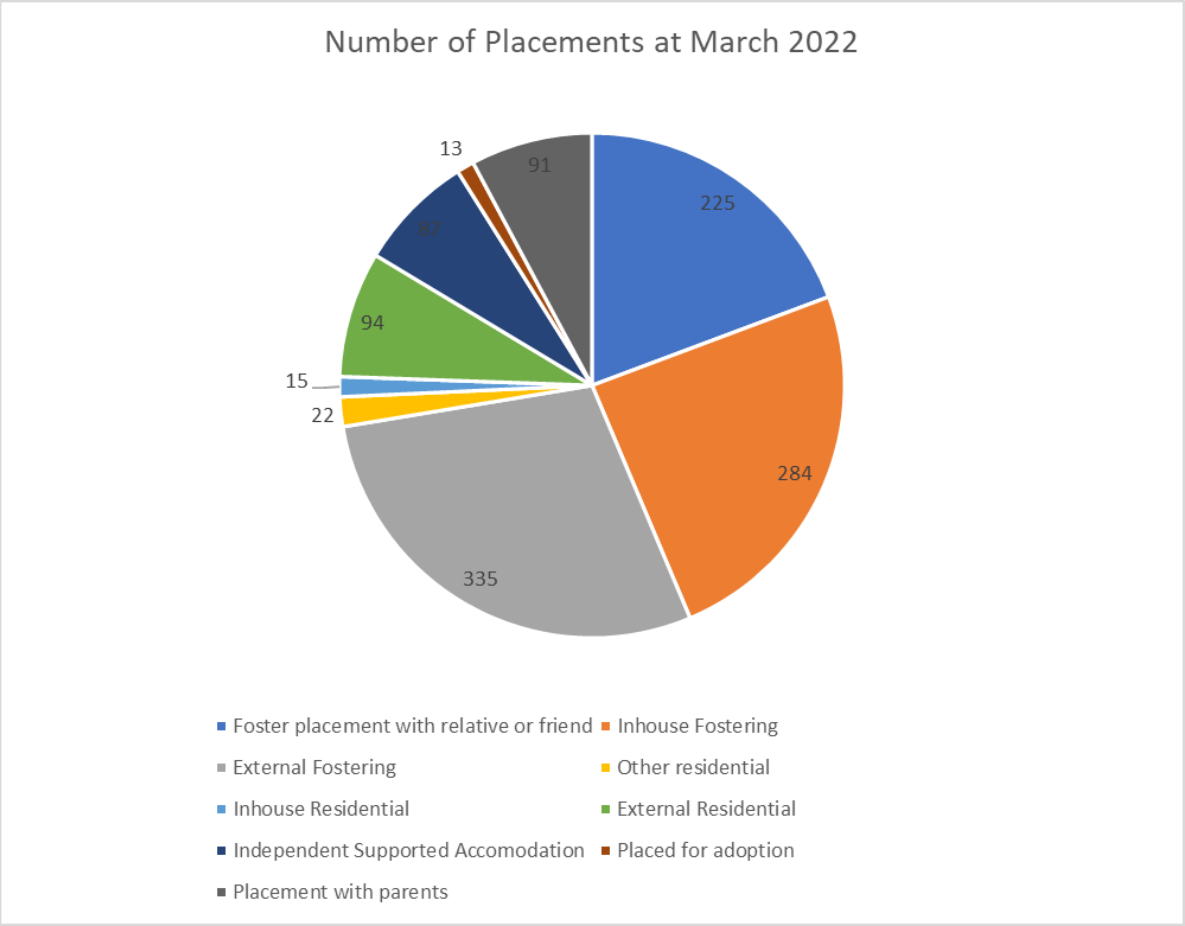
Age	UASC	Former UASC population (care leavers)
14	1	
15	3	
16	19	
17	45	1
18		43
19		50
20		56
21		24
22		19
23		14
24		8
Total	68	215
Grand total	283	

Of the 215 former separated children most have leave to remain status, 11 have no recourse to public funds and have the status of ARE (Appeal Rights Exhausted). All young people who are ARE will have a Human Rights Assessment before decisions are made as to next steps.

In the next year, according to the numbers above, 45 separated young people will become care leavers.

Current Placement Trends

Placement Types for CIC (Children In Care including separated children) and Care Leavers (including separated young people)



In March 22 the largest number of placements were with foster carers with 335 children placed with external fostering agencies and 284 with our internal foster carers. There were 94 children placed with external providers children’s homes. There were 82 under 18s in Independent Supported Accommodation and a further 204 over 18s were also in ISA placements.

49% of all placements for under 18s at end of August 22 were with external providers.

Separated children

For those externally commissioned placements we know that separated children and young people are placed in the following types of provision:

Placement Type	Number of Children in Care UASC
Supported Accommodation	37
Agency Fostering	15
Staying Put/Shared Lives	0

Placement Type	Number of Care Leavers UASC
Supported Accommodation	111
Agency Fostering	0
Staying Put/Shared Lives	10
HMOs	9

Planned and unplanned placement requests

We use the following definitions for our placement requests:

Planned	14 days notice or more
Short notice	4-13 days notice
Emergency	2-3 days notice
Crisis	Same day

The proportion of crisis placement requests have reduced since 2017 and the proportion of planned placements has increased. Planned placements allow for time to be taken for the best match to be found and therefore are more likely to have better outcomes for our children.

Placement Request Type	2017		2018		2019		2020		2021	
	CYP	%	CYP	%	CYP	%	CYP	%	CYP	%
Crisis	336	39%	444	37%	410	38%	308	35%	318	35%
Short Notice	264	31%	303	25%	259	24%	294	33%	280	30%
Planned	259	30%	452	38%	406	38%	283	32%	317	35%

58% of respondents to a People Too survey of our providers (Jan 22) said that the main reason they serve notice on a placement is due to challenging behaviour presented by the young person. The highest proportion (38%), when asked what would help more, said closer working and support from allocated social workers would be valuable.

There is a national shortage of placements that can receive children in an emergency or on the same day. To address this we are taking the following action:

- Taking actions to reduce placement breakdowns and need for emergency placements, informed by analysis completed on this in 2021 and 2022 (effective earlier intervention with families, effective multi disciplinary team and placement stability meetings, more effective and efficient placement request and brokerage processes, additional capacity to support NCT IFA and external placement stability)
- Focused recruitment of NCT emergency and short term foster carers
- Commissioning external emergency external foster carers
- Commissioned 2x new emergency children's homes (6 places in total) to be operational in Q3 22/23
- Secured continuation funding for therapeutic interventions for children in NCT foster care
- Improving our understanding of the impact for children of therapeutic support within placements

Type of placement requested vs type of placement secured

Due to the national sufficiency challenges it is not always possible to secure the same type of placement as that which was requested. This means the placement may not be completely in line with the child's care plan and a further move may be needed when a preferential type is available. Although it should be noted that more than one placement type may be suitable for a child. Data for the 12 month period of 1 Sept 21- 31 Aug 22 shows:

- Of the 688 children for whom a foster placement was requested, 49 went to residential care and 28 to supported accommodation – this suggests their needs could not be supported within available foster care places

- Of the 111 children for whom residential care was requested, 21 went to supported accommodation - this suggests their needs could not be supported within available residential care places

Unregulated/ Unregistered Placements

Places where children (other than disabled children) are accommodated while on holiday or taking part in leisure, sporting, cultural or educational activities where each individual child stays there for less than 28 days in any 12-month period, do not require registration with Ofsted and are unregulated. The child would however require a main placement, that should be regulated.

THE CARE PLANNING, PLACEMENT & CARE REVIEW (ENGLAND) (AMENDMENT) REGULATIONS 2021 came into force on 9 September 2021 and prohibit placement of children in care under 16 in unregulated / unregistered accommodation.

Where a service is **providing care for a child under the age of 18** in a static placement, this service must be registered by Ofsted. Failure to do so results in the placement being unregistered and therefore illegal. It is NCT policy that we do not place in an unregistered setting.

All young people over the age of 16 who have care needs and are living in accommodation other than foster care, are required to be placed in a children's home that is registered with Ofsted. Supported accommodation is not Ofsted registered and is therefore deemed an unregulated setting. We use the DfE published care and support checklist to confirm if care or support is being provided for over 16s if this is not immediately apparent. All independent and semi-independent provision for children in care and care leavers aged 16-17 will be required to register with Ofsted and subject to mandatory national standards from April 2023 and inspections from April 2024.

There are circumstances when it may be appropriate for a care home to be registered with CQC (Care Quality Commission) rather than as a children's home with Ofsted. If a child over the age of 16 is placed in accommodation because of their need for nursing care or personal care, the CQC provider would be suitable if registered to provide residential care and the child's plan indicates that would be the young person's permanent home beyond the age of 18. If the primary reason for placing a child in the accommodation is care that is not nursing care or personal care, it is likely this will be a children's home that should register with Ofsted.

Like children's services in other local authority areas, we have on occasion had to use unregulated provision for children under and over 16. This has been in the context of the national sufficiency challenges and there not being a suitable regulated provision available that could meet the needs of the individual child.

The decision to use unregulated/ unregistered provision is taken at Assistant Director level or above, with confirmation of how the placement can meet the child's needs, quality assurance checks and an unregulated placement risk assessment. Once a child is living in unregulated provision, IRO and senior management will continue alongside regular visits from the child's social worker and the Quality & Outcomes team. The Quality and Outcomes team continue to provide quality assurance and follow up any actions required of the provider with regards to quality, they will also provide advice and guidance regarding Ofsted registration and track progress of this.

As at 31st August 22, there were:

- 9 under 16s living in unregulated/ unregistered accommodation
- 9 over 16s living in Independent Supported Accommodation and receiving care

- 8 over 16s living in CQC registered provision, including 3 for whom the plan is for them to continue living in the placement after the age of 18

Of these children:

- A number had required a same day placement as a result of a police protection order and / or bail conditions meaning they could not return home
- A number were subject of deprivation of liberty order or applications were in progress
- A number had been living at a residential schools which had given notice and an alternative residential school had not yet been identified
- A number were living in provision that had applied or started the process to apply for Ofsted registration

There has been a commonality of needs of children for whom we have been unable to find regulated/ registered provision when the placement has been made and we are progressing plans to address this sufficiency needs

Needs	Progress so far on increasing our sufficiency to meet the need
Mental health issues, self-harm, suicide ideation	3 places planned - DfE capital bid in partnership with external provider and West Northants Council
Exploitation (particularly criminal and sexual)	Proposal to develop 3 NCT beds through unitary capital refurbishment scheme
Complex disabilities including ASD and behaviour that challenges	Additional 5 bed out of county children's home added to our block contract – operational from Nov 22
Trauma from a history of abuse	New provisions will provide trauma informed care

Emergency provision opening in the autumn 22 will provide 6 regulated beds with an external provider helping us to avoid need to make unregulated placements.

We are also commissioning a block contract for emergency same day and out of hours foster carers.

Unregulated foster care

If a child is placed with a connected person who is not approved under Regulation 24, or with a foster carer where the placement is not in accordance with their terms of approval, the placement is unlawful. Where it is in the best interests of the child to be in an unregulated foster care placements approval is required at Assistant Director level or above. A risk assessment and senior management oversight of actions will be in place.

There are 225 children living in Family and Friends Fostering arrangements. In July 22 11 of these arrangements were unregulated with the carers in the process of undertaking registration and training.

Proportion of Children living out of county and 20+ miles from their home

As at August 22, 17% of our children were living out of county and placed 20 miles or more from their home. This has decreased steadily from 19% in 2020/21 and 18% in 2021/22. We are now in line with our statistical neighbours and 1% point lower than the national average. Whilst in some instances an out of county placement is required, where it is not, we always seek to find a suitable home in county and within 20 miles of their home so they can continue to easily access support from local services and networks. We therefore need to continue to focus efforts on ensuring sufficient local provision that can meet children's needs

4. Current Sufficiency

Fostering

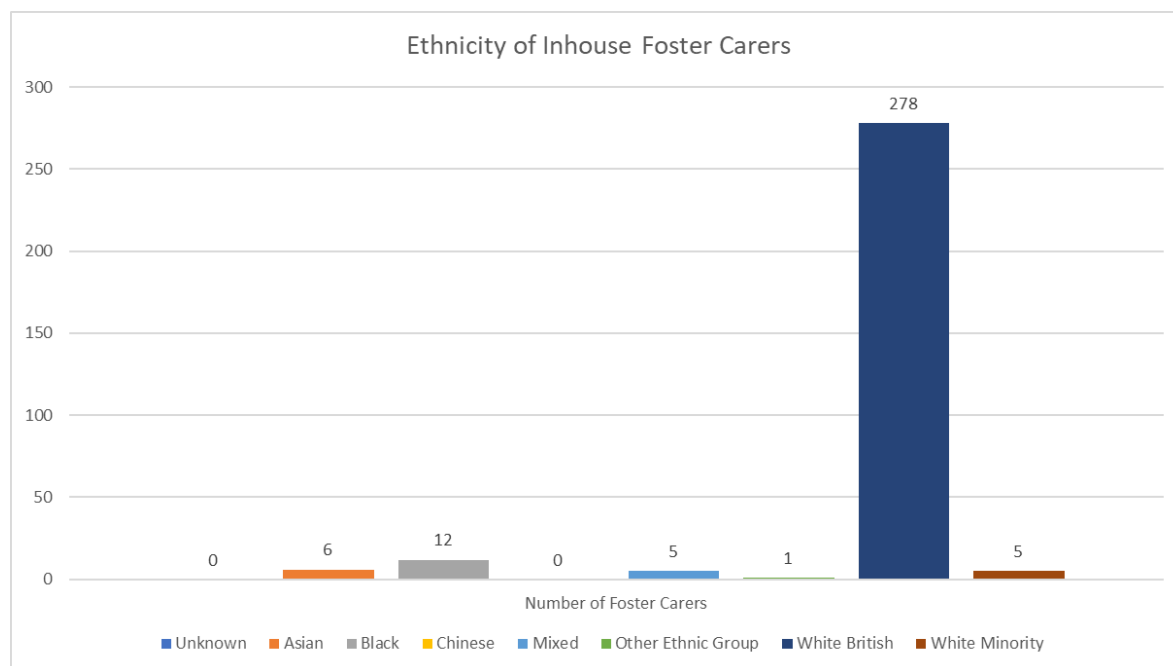
NCT Independent Fostering Agency

As at end of August 22, there were:

- 122 approved friends and family carers
- 207 approved foster carer households, providing up to 392 places, including:
 - o 44 long term specific
 - o 149 long term/ short term
 - o 5 emergency
 - o 5 resilience (for children with more complex needs / stepping down from residential)
 - o 2 parent and child
 - o 3 respite only

As at August 22, the NCT foster carer utilisation rate was 67% , with 27% of places not currently available (for example due to awaiting child moving in, carer holiday or to meet needs of a child). This doesn't include friends and family carers.

Ethnicity of NCT foster carers (including family and friends foster carers)



* Ethnicity of Carer 1

89% of NCT foster carers are White British with the second largest group of Black Ethnicity, followed by Asian and then Mixed Ethnicity. **This suggests it would be beneficial to recruit more carers from global majority backgrounds to provide more options of a cultural match for our children.**

Ethnicity	% Of inhouse Foster Carers	% Of Children in Care
White British	91%	73%
Black	4%	6%
Mixed	2%	10%

Gender of NCT foster carers

Carer 1	
Gender	
Female	274
Male	33

Carer 2	
Gender	
Female	30
Male	185

This data suggests it would be beneficial to increase our number of male carers particularly as the proportion of boys in care is higher than girls.

Location of NCT foster carers

Area Breakdown	
North	159
Out of County	29
West	119

This data suggests it would be beneficial to have additional carers in the West as the proportion of children in care from North and West is around 50/50

Ages of NCT foster carers

Age of Carer 1 (years)	Number of foster carers
21-30	6
31-40	36
41-50	84
51-60	111
61-70	60
71-80	9
81-90	1

59% of our foster carers are aged 51+ and 22% are aged 61+ so our recruitment plans need to take into account the likelihood of retirement for these carers

External Independent Fostering Agencies

As at August 22, have the following numbers of providers on our IFA framework (NB placements are purchased on an as needed basis according to matching with children and other local authorities also use these providers, so the placements are not guaranteed for NCT)

- Standard: 41
- Specialist: 8

The vast majority of our external fostering placements are made with providers on our framework (live placements as at 15/8/22). Making placements with providers on our frameworks can mean we are able to achieve better value for money and already have assurance of the quality of provision.

	No. of Framework placements	% of Framework placements	No. of Non-Framework placements	% of Non-Framework placements	Total number
External IFAs	320	87%	48	13%	368

Children's Homes

NCT have 5 Children's Homes, with capacity for up to 21 children. In August 22 our children's homes were at 76% occupancy. The statements of purpose have been reviewed to ensure that the needs of our population of children in care are met and help us to operate at a higher rate of occupancy.

NCT also has a strong partnership through a **Block Contract arrangement** where we work closely with a provider to deliver high quality homes for children. This provides homes for 32 children across 9 Northamptonshire locations which we have sole use of. Utilisation rate was 91% at end of Aug 22. In addition:

- During Q3 of 22/23 a further out of county home, providing up to 5 places will be operational within the block contract.
- During Q3 of 22/23 2 new emergency children's homes will be operational (one in West, one in North) providing up to 6 places as a block contract

NCT Children's Home Framework

As at August 22, we have the following numbers of providers on our Children's Home framework (NB placements are purchased on an as needed basis according to matching with children and other local authorities also use these providers, so the placements are not guaranteed for NCT):

- Standard: 46
- Specialist – Children with complex social emotional and mental health needs and low-level disability: 30
- Specialist – Children with a disability and complex health needs: 12

52.5% of our external children's homes placements are made with providers on our framework (live placements as at 15/8/22). Making placements with providers on our frameworks can mean we are able to achieve better value for money and already have assurance of the quality of provision. **This data suggests our children's home framework provision is not able to meet the needs of our children or provide places as much as we would like.**

	No. of Framework placements	% of Framework placements	No. of Non-Framework placements	% of Non-Framework placements	Total number
External Children's Homes	53	52.5%	48	47.5%	101

Independent Supported Accommodation

Independent Supported Accommodation is suitable for children aged 16+ where this meets their needs to develop independent living skills and they no longer require care. All our commissioned ISA provision works to enable young people to achieve independent living outcomes

Training Flats

We have a block contract for 19 training flats in Northampton for up to 21 care leavers who need additional support to develop independent living skills. Capacity as at August 22 was 100%. At the end of Q4 21/22, only 2 care leavers living here were NEET. All young people who moved out did so in a planned way, however some young people have lived here for longer than intended suggesting there has been difficulty in securing them move on accommodation.

From summer 2023 we will have an additional 9 training flats for care leavers with additional needs in Northampton.

Other ISA placements

As at August 2022, we have the following numbers of providers on our ISA framework:

- Semi Supported Accommodation with 24 hour staffing (Accommodation Manager) and a minimum of 2 hours of 1:1 support per young person per week: 68
- Semi Independent Accommodation (solo or shared) with 2 hours of 1:1 Support per young person per week: 68
- Standard Additional Support hours: 71
- Specialist Additional Support hours: 36

The vast majority of our ISA placements are made with providers on our framework (live placements as at 15/8/22). Making placements with providers on our frameworks can mean we are able to achieve better value for money and already have assurance of the quality of provision.

	No. of Framework placements	% of Framework placements	No. of Non-Framework placements	% of Non-Framework placements	Total number
Independent Supported Accommodation	296	90%	32	10%	328

Independent supported accommodation **will become subject to Ofsted registration** from April 2023 and the first inspections are expected from April 2024. This will benefit young people and commissioners through external scrutiny of quality of provision. There could however be an adverse impact on sufficiency if providers choose not to register or fail to meet requirements.

In August / September 2022 we surveyed ISA providers that are currently supporting our 16-17 year olds. Of the 39 that responded, 59% indicated they are likely to register, 39% would like support to know more. Only 2 providers said they are unlikely / will definitely not register. We are planning to deliver support during Q3 and Q4 22/23.

There is a risk that landlords may not be willing to apply for this type of planning permission, if one is required, due to impact on neighbours and locality, and this may impact on provider's ability to source appropriate properties for this effect.

The final version of the national standards have not yet having been published, so it is currently unknown what costs will be associated with providers registering with Ofsted. This may present a challenge in growing the market and therefore drive costs up. When the government's response was first published, it was thought that at a regional level it could increase prices by up to 30%. This will require careful monitoring.

Staying Put

Care leavers people can remain with their foster carers until they are 21 years-old, through a staying put agreement between NCT, foster carers and the young person. As at Aug 22, there are 58 care leavers under this arrangement. This is a good outcome for young people as it allows them to remain where they live for longer while learning to prepare for independence. However, this scheme has a slight impact in the sufficiency of foster carers for children in care.

Shared Lives

Is a CQC (Care Quality Commission) registered scheme, where young people with complex needs, such as learning disabilities or mental health difficulties, live with approved carers. As at Aug 22, there are 7 care leavers in this arrangement.

Houses of Multiple Occupancy (HMOs)

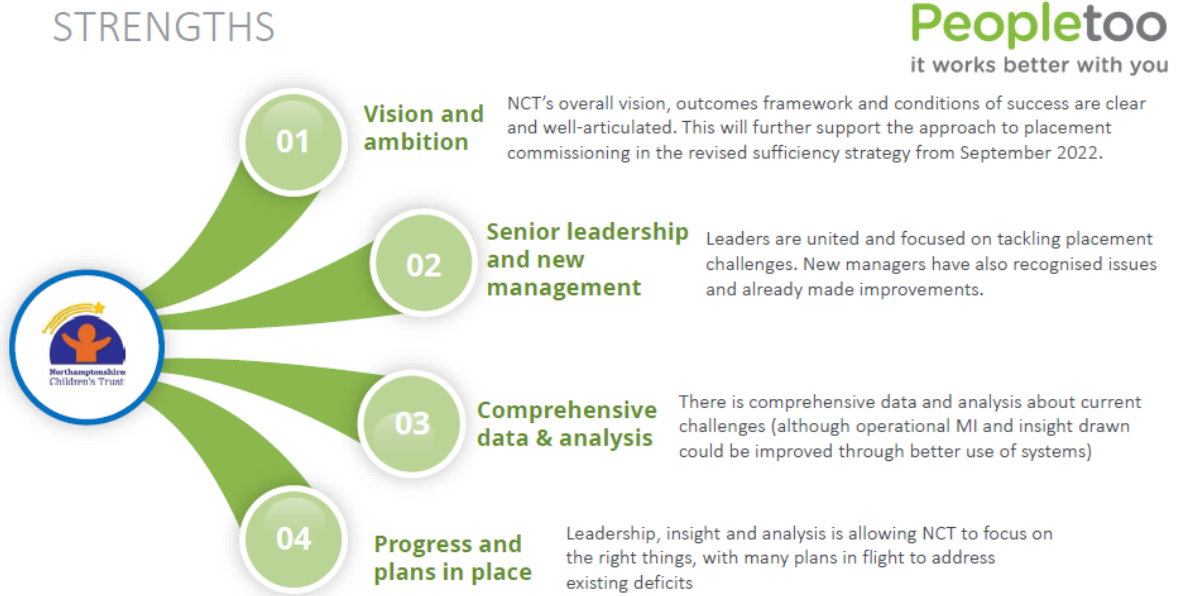
As at August 22, we have use of 3x HMO properties providing places for up to 16 care leavers in Northampton. These are suitable for care leavers who do not require support, particularly previously separated children. We have decided not to renew the lease of 1 of the properties in accordance with current needs and are considering future use of the HMOs in line with staying close proposals.

5. External review – Key messages

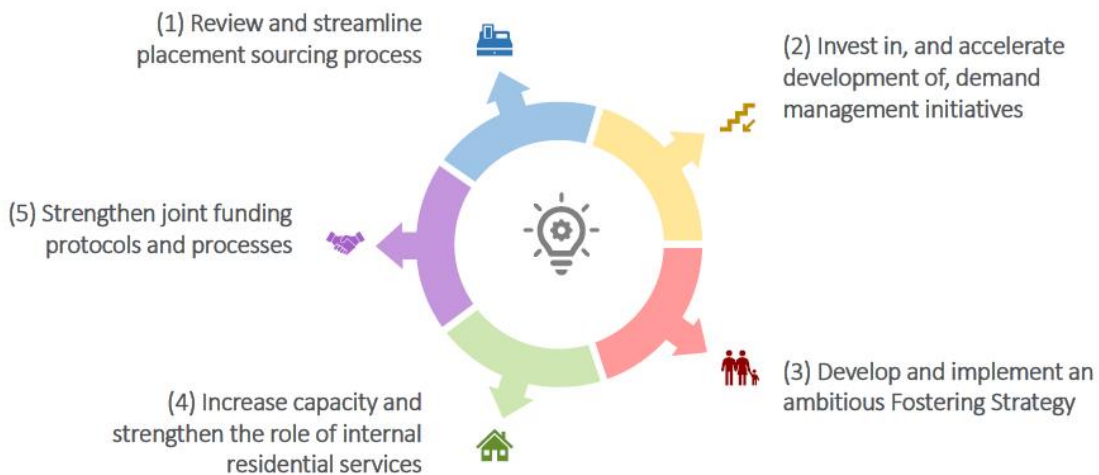
In 2022 we commissioned an external review of our placements commissioning to identify areas for improvement and inform the refresh of our Sufficiency Strategy. The review completed by People Too in February 2022, found:

- NCT has a good understanding of demand, sufficiency, and its key challenges and opportunities relating to children in care placements.
- In some areas, NCT is managing and meeting need as effectively as comparators. Despite this, some intractable issues are present that require creative and innovative solutions
- The provider market is not operating effectively to meet NCT's needs. Whilst some changes can be made to commissioning processes, this will still be insufficient. To make the step-change that NCT wishes to, in line with its strategic ambition, there are opportunities for a significant return on investment programme relating to internal fostering and residential services to increase capacity and their ability to support those with the most complex needs.
- There are also opportunities to streamline and increase the efficiency of placement sourcing processes, alongside a re-balancing of senior management and practitioner accountability, to reduce the delay in sourcing placements.
- Progress has been made to strengthen arrangements relating to joint funding of packages and this is evidenced in additional funding contributions; however, there are opportunities to embed this further and re-balance the proportionate contributions from different agencies, accompanied by clearer representation and accountability at decision-making panels.

- NCT should also consider opportunities to enhance its offer to reduce demand for placements, through a strengthened early help partnership offer, high quality social work practice, and edge of care services.



MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS



We have progressed actions to deliver these recommendations during 2022 (see Appendix 1) and will continue through the 2022-25 Sufficiency Strategy priorities and action plan.

6. What does our data tell us? – Key messages for our sufficiency plans:

Based on linear forecasts to 2024:

- We expect an increase in the total number of children in care between August 2022 – August 2024 of approx. 23 children and we continue to have a higher rate of children in care than our statistical neighbours and the national average. **We will need to continue to improve early intervention and practice to enable children to remain within or return to their families if this in their best interests.**
- We expect we will continue to see a higher proportion of boys in care and therefore will need placements that can meet their needs – **including more male foster carers**
- Of those likely to require a placement, we expect to see the number of babies reduce slightly, the numbers of 1-4 year olds and 16-18 year olds reduce and an increase in numbers of children aged 5-15. **We are therefore likely to need more placements for the 5 -15 age group and expect a high proportion will have a plan for long term fostering. We will need to improve likelihood of matching by recruiting and retaining and commissioning carers who reflect the demographics of our children (more from global majority backgrounds), and increase family finding activities.**
- Based on linear projections we expect our need for foster care to increase by approx. 14 places, however we are aware that currently we have not been able to identify suitable foster carers for some children whose plan is for foster care (approx. 70 places based on current patterns). **Therefore approx. 85 additional foster care placements are required to 2024, as well as replacing any NCT carers who retire. This includes those that can support children with more complex needs and those that can care for children in an emergency**
- We expect our need for residential placements to remain steady/ decrease slightly, however we are aware that currently we have not been able to identify suitable care homes for some children whose plan is residential care (approx. 20 places based on current patterns). **We will have an additional 11 places available in Q3 22/24, including 6 emergency places and are seeking capital funding and properties for additional NCT provision**
- In addition, given the current challenges in finding the right residential care for children with more complex needs we know we need to increase access to residential care that can support:
 - Children who need to access care in an emergency/ crisis situation
 - Children who require a solo or dual placement
 - Children with Social Emotional Mental Health (SEMH) needs
 - Children with disabilities including behaviour that challenges others
 - Children with disabilities with complex health needs
 - Children at risk of or experiencing violence, gangs, exploitation, including those returning from custody, secure remand, secure welfare
 - Children requiring step down or prevention from hospital with needs including trauma, suicide attempts/ ideation, self-harm, eating disorders, gender dysmorphia

We have plans in place to secure capital funding to increase NCT and external provision to meet this need and will need to review plans if this is not forthcoming.

- We do not want to continue being in the situation where we have to use unregulated/ unregistered provision for under 16s or over 16s where this is not in line with their care plan. In addition to increasing access to places that can meet the needs of children that we struggle to find regulated places for, **we need to continue to work across the system to reduce placement breakdowns and emergency / crisis (same day) placement requests**
- We expect our need for supported accommodation for 16 and 17 year olds to decrease by approx. 19 places, however our number of care leavers is expected to increase by approx. 127 by March 2024 and it is expected a proportion will continue to require supported accommodation, including those providing pathways to independence / training
- We will need to continue to support ISA providers to prepare for Ofsted registration (from April 23) and closely monitor the impact on sufficiency and costs of regulation, adjusting plans accordingly.
- We need to continue to work with colleagues in Housing to ensure there is suitable housing available for our care leavers to move on to their own tenancies
- We need to continue to improve our commissioning (understand, plan, do and review) to ensure we are making the best use of our total resources to improve outcomes for children and families in the most equitable, efficient, effective and sustainable way.

7. Sufficiency Strategy 2022 – 2025 Our 4 Priorities



Strengthening Families

Key Outcome: Children are able to remain within the care of their families and/ or network where this is in their best interests



Finding a Place Called Home

Key Outcome: Children are able to live in a setting that meets their needs and they benefit from improved outcomes



Promoting Stability & Permanence

Key Outcome: Children feel safe and secure in their home and their placement is stable



Pathways to independence

Key Outcome: Children and young people thrive and are on track to becoming independent

The delivery of our 4 key priorities will be enabled by:



Improved commissioning

We will use the total resources available for children, young people and families in order to improve outcomes in the most equitable, efficient, effective and sustainable way⁵



Strengthening Families

Key Outcome: Children are able to remain within the care of or return to their families and/ or network where this is in their best interests

What we will do:

This priority will be delivered through activity already identified in:

- NSCP's Early Help Strategy & action plan
- NSCP's Neglect Strategy & action plan
- NSCP's Exploitation Strategy & action plan
- NCT's Business Plan: *Strong, relationship based practice & Healthy Partnerships*
- NCT's Children in Care and Care Leavers Strategy Live Safe, Be Safe priority

In addition, we will:

- Continue to review the impact of the Pause programme in enabling women who have previously had children removed to improve their outcomes, and seek continuation of funding to continue beyond 2025 if it continues to have successful impact on preventing children from coming into care

⁵ Commissioning Support Programme, 2010

- Continue to review the impact of our commissioned targeted safeguarding support in achieving positive impact for children who are subject of children in need and child protection plans, and re-commission if it continues to have successful impact (current contract ends 31 Mar 24).
- Continue to review the impact of our commissioned targeted family support/ early intervention for children under 5 in Corby and re-commission if it continues to have successful impact (current contract ends 31 Mar 24).
- Implement re-designed model of short breaks and respite from children with disabilities from Apr 23 to improve access to impact of support for children with disabilities to remain within the care of their families or current placement.
- Commission respite care, particularly for teenagers, to prevent the need for children to come into care if a family is in crisis

How will we know if we've made a difference?

- Feedback from children, young people and families
- Our rate of children in care will reduce to reflect national / statistical neighbour averages – *NB we expect this will take place after a period as we know that strengthening early help is likely to lead to an initial increase in numbers of children in care*
- The need for emergency and crisis placements will continue to reduce from 2022 level



Finding a Place Called Home

Key Outcome: Children are able to live in a setting that meets their needs and they benefit from improved outcomes

What we will do:

Fostering:

- Deliver the NCT Fostering Improvement Plan with the aim of securing a 'good' Ofsted judgement
- Work with WNC and NNC to implement capital programme for NCT foster carers' homes to increase number of placements / placements for siblings and / or children with disabilities
- **Recruit NCT foster carers** in line with annually set targets. For 2022/23 this is 40 new households (specifically targeting carers for children aged 8+ and seeking to increase proportion of male and global majority carers) including:
 - 5 resilience carers
 - 3 households that can care for sibling groups
 - 5 households that can provide short breaks for children with disabilities
 - 3 households that can provide parent and child placements
 - 4 households who can offer emergency provision
- Improve the retention rate of **NCT foster carers**. Plans to be delivered in 22/23 include:
 - Review of financial allowances and enhanced payment scheme
 - Deliver revised training package
 - Introduce specific out of hours support

- Propose council tax reduced payment scheme
- Increase support for carers who are 'on hold'
- Expand therapeutic support to deliver proactive intervention
- Commission **external IFA emergency carer provision** in 22/23
- **Build and improve relationships with external IFAs** so that they are more aware of the needs of our children and so that we become a commissioner of choice
- Re-open our **IFA framework** on an annual basis and commission new framework for April 2025

Children's Homes:

- Work with WNC and NNC to open min. of 3 new NCT children's homes by 2025 to support children with more complex needs (children with disabilities and behaviour that challenges, mental health needs, those subject of exploitation)
- Review impact of additional block contract out of county and emergency homes – due to be operational in Q3 22/23
- Secure capital funding to open one externally delivered home by 2024
- **Build and improve relationships with external children's homes providers** so that they are more aware of the needs of our children and so that we become a commissioner of choice
- Re-open our **children's home framework** on an annual basis and commission new framework for April 2025
- Develop long term sustainable partnership in the re-commissioning of our **children's homes block contract**
- We will continually improve oversight of any unregulated/ unregistered placements that have had to be made for under 16s or over 16s where this is not in line with their care plan
- Support local providers of unregistered / unregulated provision to apply for Ofsted registration for children's homes.

Accommodation for Care Leavers:

- Continue to review impact and re-commission our 19 training flats for April 2024
- Open additional commissioned training flats in Summer 2023
- Review use of HMOs by Apr 23
- Support providers to be able to register with Ofsted by Apr 23, monitor likely impact on sufficiency and cost and take appropriate mitigating action

How will we know if we've made a difference?

- Feedback from children, young people and families
- All children will be able to live in the same type of placement as per the type requested, in line with their care plan
- We will not have to use unregulated/ unregistered provision for under 16s and over 16s where this is not in line with their care plan
- The % of children in care with 3+ moves in previous 12 months will reduce from Aug 22 figure of 13.1%
- We will reduce the number of high cost placements



Promoting Stability & Permanence

Key Outcome: Children feel safe and secure in their home and their placement is stable

What we will do:

- Continue to work across the system to intervene earlier and reduce need for police protection orders and crisis (same day) placement requests
- Taking actions to reduce placement breakdowns and need for emergency placements, informed by analysis completed on this in 2021 and 2022 (effective earlier intervention with families, effective multi disciplinary team and placement stability meetings, more effective and efficient placement request and brokerage processes, additional capacity to support NCT IFA and external placement stability)
- Monitor the impact of additional family support capacity intended to improve placement stability of NCT fostering and external placements (operational from Q3 22/23)
- Regular reviewing the impact of placement support packages
- Continue to monitor impact of public health funded therapeutic interventions for children in NCT foster care and identify means of mainstreaming this support if it continues to have positive impact
- Improving our understanding of the impact for children of therapeutic support within placements

How will we know if we've made a difference?

- Feedback from children, young people and families
- % of children in care for 2.5+ years who have been in the same placement for for 2+ years/ placed for adoption will increase from Aug 22 figure of 68.1% and remain in line or reach above comparators
- The % of children in care with 3+ moves in previous 12 months will reduce from Aug 22 figure of 13.1%



Pathways to independence

Key Outcome: Children and young people thrive and are on track to becoming independent

What we will do:

- Develop our leaving care data set to inform a needs analysis for the care leavers population
- Further analyse young people's needs and co-design commissioning models to further develop care leavers accommodation based on pathways; including development of supported lodgings

- Working with social housing providers to develop stages of supported accommodation from stage 1 working with young people to develop resilience and improve health and wellbeing, stage 2 training flats for independence to stage 3 young people moving onto their own tenancy with floating support.
- Develop our staying close offer to provide additional support for young people moving on from children’s homes.
- Developing the current ISA model for 18+ with the DWP (Department for Work and Pensions) and ISA providers so that young people are able to develop independence skills through being supported to claim benefits and seek work.
- Explore review of Staying Put arrangements to become ‘opt in’; Pre-tenancy agreements with private landlords, guarantor schemes (recommendation from Independent review of children’s social care)
- Further develop strategic relationships with the West and North Northamptonshire Housing departments to plan for the future and ensure sufficient housing for young people to move onto; and review the impact of the joint protocol for Care Leavers Housing
- Continue to develop our Mental Health Support Offer for Care Leavers, review the impact of public health funded provision and seek mainstreaming of this by 2024 if continues to have impact
- Review our current offer to support care leavers into education, employment or training to inform future commissioning by Apr 23

How will we know if we’ve made a difference?

- Feedback from young people
- The proportion of care leavers in suitable accommodation will maintain or improve upon Aug 22 level of 92.5%; and above statistical neighbour and national averages
- The proportion of care leavers in EET will maintain or improve upon Aug 22 level of 60.6%; and above statistical neighbour and national averages



Improved commissioning

We will use the total resources available for children, young people and families in order to improve outcomes in the most equitable, efficient, effective and sustainable way⁶

What we will do:

We will make improvements at each stage of the cycle, ensuring that we are taking a relationship based approach to commissioning:

Understand

- We will review children in care and care leaver forecasts every 3-6 months
- We will regularly analyse the range of data available within NCT to us to give us to better understanding of demand and use of placements
- We will review our demographic analysis after West and North unitary councils have produced and published their Joint Strategic Needs Assessments

⁶ Commissioning Support Programme, 2010

- We will better understand the views of our children and young people through a broader and deeper range of engagement with them; including consideration of any variation for those with protected characteristics, and co-develop commissioning projects with them
- We will work to develop information on protected characteristics by using data available on Care First and estimates based on census data to create a better understanding of our children in care population beyond age, gender and ethnicity which will enable us to better understand and consider what type of support we need to provide and commission for our children

Plan

- Our Sufficiency action plan will remain a live document, adapted over the course of the strategy as needs and/ or markets change, with progress overseen by the Sufficiency Board
- We will review NCT foster carer recruitment targets on an annual basis
- We will allow sufficient time to undertake commissioning projects
- We will produce market position statements and engage with the market prior to commissioning / re-opening frameworks to help providers plan for the needs of our children
- We will plan for any changes regarding regional commissioning and provision of placements that is introduced by government in response to the Independent Review of children's social care

Do

- We will fully implement improvements to our placements brokerage processes and review the impact
- We will commission a digital brokerage solution to improve the efficiency of our systems and reporting, reducing waste and enabling brokerage team to spend more time with providers
- We will focus on developing and improving relationships with external providers
- We will implement the revised joint funding protocol for placements

Review

- We will improve our understanding of experiences and outcomes for children in placements
- We will continue to utilise national and regional information to benchmark our progress and develop plans
- We will continue to regularly review packages to ensure provision meets the needs of children and young people and achieves the best value for money

How will we know if we've made a difference?

- Improved commissioning will enable us to achieve the four priorities for children and young people
- We will improve the value for money achieved in placements
- The proportion of partner contributions to placements will be in line with other areas

Appendix 1 – Summary of our delivery of 2020-2022 Sufficiency Strategy and impact for children

Improved Placement Stability	
<p>Compared with 2020/21, a higher proportion of children who have been in care for 2.5 years or more have been living in the same placement for 2+ years or placed for adoption (68% YTD at August 2022 compared with 63% in 2020/21), bringing us in line with our statistical neighbours.</p> <p>13% of children leaving NCT's care obtained permanence through a special guardianship order between Jan – June 22, this compares with the latest available data (2020/21) of 14% statistical neighbour and national averages</p> <p>This means more children have had stability of care which enables them to feel safe, secure and achieve outcomes</p>	
<i>What we did</i>	<i>Impact for children and young people</i>
<p>Following an analysis of placement breakdowns, we have identified a range of actions to improve placement stability and reduce the need for emergency placements which are being taken forward by managers across our services</p>	<p>More children will benefit from stability in their care</p>
<p>Created additional family support worker posts to support stability of NCT fostering placements, and commissioned a pilot to support stability of externally delivered placements</p>	<p>When these initiatives are operational (expected Q3 of 22/23) we expect placement breakdowns and emergency placement requests to reduce, this will improve stability for children</p>
<p>We implemented our Public Health funded project to support the mental health of children in NCT foster care which has had a positive impact on placement stability, and have secured funding to continue this to Dec 2023</p>	<p>Of 65 children who had received therapeutic support directly/via carer at end June 22, 6 (9%) had experienced a placement breakdown in comparison with the pre-project baseline of 30%<.</p>

Improved outcomes for children and young people	
<i>What we did</i>	<i>Impact for children and young people</i>
<p>Implemented an improved early help assessment tool. Early Help Strategy, board and networks developed across the multi-agency partnership.</p>	<p>Families are more likely to receive the right support at the right time, to prevent issues from escalating and enabling children to remain in the care of their families</p>

Improved outcomes for children and young people	
Reviewed the 16 – 17 Homelessness Joint Protocol to improve joint working and clarified responsibilities to young people	Once implemented, we expect more young people will receive the support they require, when they require it and the voice of the young person will be clearer in decision making about their future and legal status
We developed the Family Solutions (edge of care) service as part of our Children and Family Support Services (CFSS) to support families to stay together and we have supported the reunification of children to their families where this is in the best interests of the child.	<p>More children are being supported to remain with their families or return to their families after a period of being in care where this is in their best interests</p> <p>Between June 21 and June 22 CFSS worked with 93 children who were specifically identified as risk of care. 79 (85%) were able to remain in the care of their families.</p> <p>In 2020/21, the % of children returning to parents was 8%. This has doubled from 4% in 2018/19. The England average in 2020/21 was 7% and the regional average was 6%. As a the end of June 22, 74 children had left care in the last 6 months to return to their parents/ relatives, this was 37% of all children whose care episode ceased in the period</p>
<p>The Pause programme, funded by Big Lottery via Public Health until 2025, has worked with 24 women who have had 89 children removed into care, this equates to 3.7 removals per women. 35 women are being worked with from Q1 22/23</p> <p>14 women have completed the programme with 0 live births and 0 children taken into care.</p>	Women who have previously had children taken into care have been able to take a pause and improve their outcomes before having another child
Positive outcomes have been achieved for children and families supported by our commissioned targeted services: targeted family support/ early intervention for children under 5 in Corby and family support and MST for families known to safeguarding services	<p>Over 70% families accessing support at Corby Children’s Centre reported reduction in isolation, increased understanding of child development and relationship with their child, greater level of support from community services (Q1 22/23)</p> <p>96.5% of children supported by MST remained living at home at the end of the intervention</p>

Improved outcomes for children and young people	
	12 month follow up of families supported by Action for Children: 84% of children remained in the family home; 75% were no longer under a Social Care plan
<p>Family and friends fostering is always considered when case planning to enable a child to remain within their existing network where possible.</p> <p>At the end of July, there were 175 children in Family and Friends placements, which is a total of 38.8% of all fostering placements.</p>	<p>Children and young people who stay within their family or friends network have better outcomes than those in other placements and stability of these placements is good if not better than other foster placements (Family and friends foster care (England) The Fostering Network, 2022).</p>
<p>We reviewed foster care provision that can support step down from residential and children with more complex needs and have mainstreamed our NCT Resilience Foster Carer scheme as this has shown positive outcomes for children</p>	<p>In utilising our NCT Resilience foster care scheme for children and young people with more complex needs children's outcomes are more likely to improve</p>
<p>We have improved procedures for when unregulated placements absolutely have to be used, improved risk management, quality assurance and senior management oversight.</p>	<p>Children and young people living in unregulated/ unregistered provision where this is not in line with their care place are safe</p>
<p>We partnered with an external organisation, to provide an objective review of our commissioning and brokerage and are implementing a range of improvements to make our processes more effective and efficient.</p> <p>We have implemented a weekly Placements Planning Forum to review and prioritise the week's placement searches</p>	<p>The right placements for children will be found in a more timely manner</p>
<p>We have focused on establishing and improving relationships with local and specialist external providers that can support the needs of our children. Through 1-2-1 commissioner / provider relationships, regular communications and provider forums covering local and specialist topics</p>	<p>We are more likely to secure placements that can meet the needs of our children</p>

Improved outcomes for children and young people	
Our partnership with Homes to Inspire (H2I) and Prospects (both part of Shaw Trust) is enabling better co-ordination of support to improve outcomes for children living in our block contract homes	This is a relatively new initiative and we expect the education, employment and training outcomes of the children receiving this support will be maintained at a good level or improved
<p>In addition to Ofsted inspections,</p> <p>Regular monitoring of the external Residential Children’s Homes, Fostering and Independent Supported Accommodation frameworks demonstrates positive outcomes for our children and young people. ISAs are being supported to prepare for Ofsted registration from 2023</p> <p>We have improved performance monitoring within NCT’s IFA. Performance of NCT homes are monitored through an external regulation 44 visitor who provides monthly reports with recommendations/ actions and internal monitoring</p>	<p>Children’s outcomes are supported as any concerns relating to provision is addressed in a timely manner and improvements achieved</p> <p>The ISAs we commission work towards the same set of key performance indicators and outcomes for care leavers which help the young person develop independence skills.</p>
<p>To support pathways to independence for care leavers we have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Resumed NCT’s Independent Living Programme in July 22 following the pandemic - Established West and North Unitary Council Accommodation and Transitions Panels to ensure good advanced planning so that the right permanent homes are found - Agreed the Care Leavers Joint Housing protocol July 22. 	<p>Between July – Sept 22, 8 young people successfully completed the Independent living course and said that they felt more prepared for independence into adulthood as a result</p> <p>We expect the impact of the accommodation and transitions panel and Care Leavers Joint Housing protocol will enable more care leavers to move on to independence in a time that suits their needs, homelessness to be prevented and more effective management of housing crises for young people where they occur</p>

Improved Sufficiency of NCT Fostering	
<i>What we did</i>	<i>Impact for children and young people</i>
We have implemented our NCT fostering marketing and recruitment campaign including resilience, mainstream, Family Link, emergency, and short-term carers.	More children and young people can be cared for by NCT foster carers where this in line with their care plan and matching

Improved Sufficiency of NCT Fostering	
<p>At the end of August 22 there were 207 approved 'mainstream' fostering households as part of NCT's IFA. There has been a net gain of 9 additional households over the previous 2 years which has seen a national trend of carers leaving the profession post pandemic. In addition, there are 122 approved Family and Friend Carers</p> <p>A review of the approval status to maximise more internal foster homes for children has resulted in 15 additional placements</p> <p>We have also developed plans to increase the retention rate of NCT carers, which will be implemented during the second half of 2022/23</p>	
<p>Increasing the skills and number of NCT foster carers able to support children with more complex needs through our Resilience foster carers scheme. By end of Mar 22, 5 children were being cared for by 5 resilience carer households.</p>	<p>More children and young people with more complex needs are able to be cared for in a family setting where this is in line with their care plan</p>

Improved Sufficiency of Placements	
<p>73% of our children in care were placed in foster care at end June 22, in comparison with 71% in 20/21. The latest comparator data is 20/21 when 71% of both statistical neighbour and England averages were 71% children in foster care. The proportion of children living in residential care has remained consistently below statistical neighbour and England averages since 20/21</p>	
<i>What we did</i>	<i>Impact for children and young people</i>
<p>Reviewed the statements of purpose of NCT and block contract homes to better meet needs of our children.</p>	<p>Children and young people's needs can be better supported in local provision that is solely available for NCT children in care</p>
<p>Northamptonshire's Framework for Children's Homes and Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA) was established in 2020 and has been opened twice for additional providers to join. We have 48 children's home</p>	<p>More providers provide more placement options for children and young people, so they can be placed in homes that match their needs.</p>

Improved Sufficiency of Placements	
providers and 43 IFA providers currently on our framework following the reopening of the framework in July 22.	
As at Sept 22, we have secured an additional 11 residential care beds for the sole use of NCT by the end of 2022, including in emergency/ urgent situations (by commissioning 2 new emergency homes within the county and adding an additional out of county home to the block contract)	Once operational, we will have better access to residential care that can meet the needs of our children and young people
Submitted a partnership bid to the 2022 DfE Capital funding to provide a home for children with mental health / behavioural needs. We are working with NNC and WNC to secure capital funding and additional council owned properties to create additional NCT residential care and care leaver accommodation that will meet needs	If successful in securing funding, we will have increased access to local residential care and independent supported accommodation that can meet the needs of our children and young people
We have revised the criteria for our commissioned training flats for care leavers so that the referral process is more accessible to young people. This has resulted in higher levels of utilisation	More care leavers are able to live in our training flats which help them to achieve positive outcomes
We have commissioned an external provider to deliver supported accommodation for care leavers with additional needs. This will provide a steps to independence providing more intensive support to develop skills to move onto training flats and then to own tenancies. In development for delivery from summer 2023	Once operational, more care leavers with additional needs will receive support that helps them to achieve independence

Reduction of Placement Costs	
Achieving better value for money and appropriate contributions from partner agencies has helped mitigate some of the financial pressures experienced due to rising costs, inflation and a highly competitive market. This means we have been in a better position to manage the financial impact of increased demand for placements.	
<i>What we did</i>	<i>Impact for children and young people</i>
Children and young people's placements have been reviewed to ensure they are receiving the right level of support/care at the right time and their needs are supported as they change and develop in their placement.	Children and young people are receiving the right care/ support for their needs.

Renegotiation of packages achieved savings of £1.2m in 21/22 and £480k Apr – Aug 22.	
We commissioned an external review joint funding arrangements to ensure appropriate shared financial responsibility for placements	Children and young people are receiving the right care/ support for their needs.

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Northamptonshire Children's Trust

Commissioning Strategy & Framework 2021/25

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1. Introduction

At Northamptonshire Children's Trust we are dedicated to ensuring children, young people and families are at the heart of all we do – in every action we take and every decision we make. We know that what we do today affects children and young people's tomorrows and we are focused on helping children and young people to live safe, be safe; fulfil potential; develop resilience and enjoy good health and wellbeing.

Alongside the Early Help, Youth Offending & Social Care services that we deliver to achieve these outcomes, we also commission other organisations to work alongside us, to deliver support and achieve outcomes for children, young people and families on our behalf. We also commission 'enabling' goods and services that help our staff to work well with children, young people and families.

Northamptonshire Children's Trust's Commissioning Strategy and Framework sets out our overall vision and plan to use commissioning to contribute to the delivery of our Business Plan, and to improve outcomes for children, young people and families and to support our staff to do their work effectively and efficiently.

The Commissioning Strategy and Framework is also intended to inform our Board, stakeholders, partners and our staff of the purpose of our commissioning; our expectations of commissioned services; how they align with and support our service delivery function; our approach to commissioning; what good commissioning looks like; what we intend to commission over the next four years and how we will know what difference we have made for children, young people and families in Northamptonshire as a result.

In delivering this Strategy & Framework we will contribute to the achievement of the Trust Business Plan – to improve and sustain the experiences and outcomes for children, young people and families who need our support, and to make the best use of our resources.

What is commissioning?

Commissioning is the process for deciding how to use the total resources available for children, young people and families in order to improve outcomes in the most equitable, efficient, effective and sustainable way¹

Commissioning provides a framework to understand the outcomes, needs and experiences of a child or group of children; to plan the best approach to improve or sustain good outcomes; to do something to improve or sustain outcomes; and to review what impact has been achieved. However, like everything we do in the Trust, we know the best results are achieved by taking a strengths based, relationship based, collaborative approach with children, young people and families at the heart of all we do – in every action we take and every decision we make.

When we commission we follow the 4 stage cycle shown below. Effective commissioning absolutely needs to be led by voices of children, young people and families and by the practitioners who work with them, supported side by side by skilled commissioners who have children, young people and families at the heart of all they are doing.

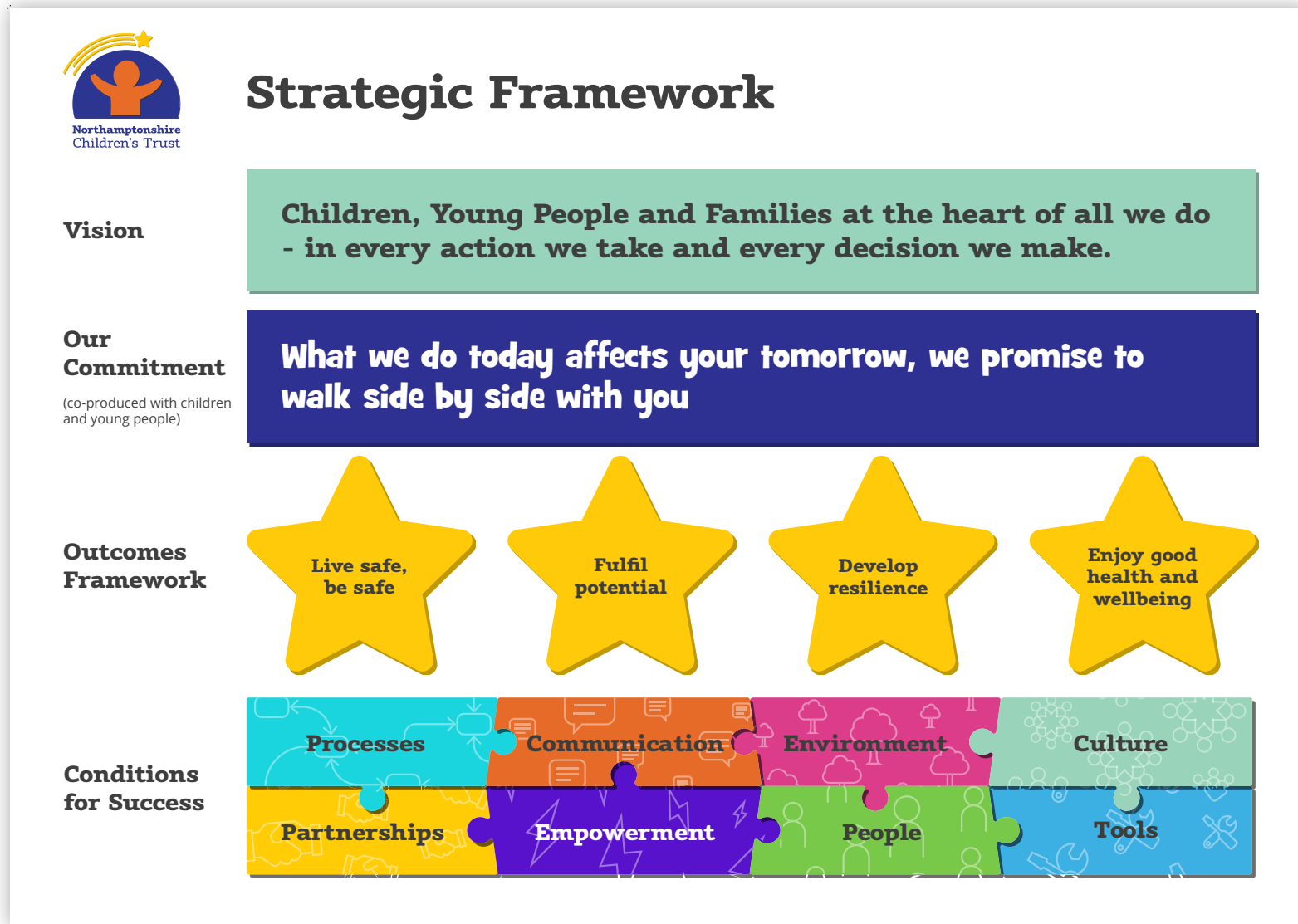
¹ Commissioning Support Programme, 2010

1. Introduction (cont)

Our Commissioning Cycle



2. Northamptonshire Children's Trust Strategic Framework



Like everything we do in the Trust, our commissioning activity needs to align with our Vision and our Commitment and focused on achieving the outcomes identified in our Strategic Framework.

2. Northamptonshire Children's Trust Strategic Framework (cont)

Our **Values** underpin all of our commissioning activity:

- Be child focused and work with the whole family
- Make a difference with trust and integrity
- Concentrate on the best solution
- Act with respect, kindness and compassion
- Communicate well
- Do the best job of your life every single day

And we are focused on contributing to our **Strategic Priorities** through our commissioning activity:

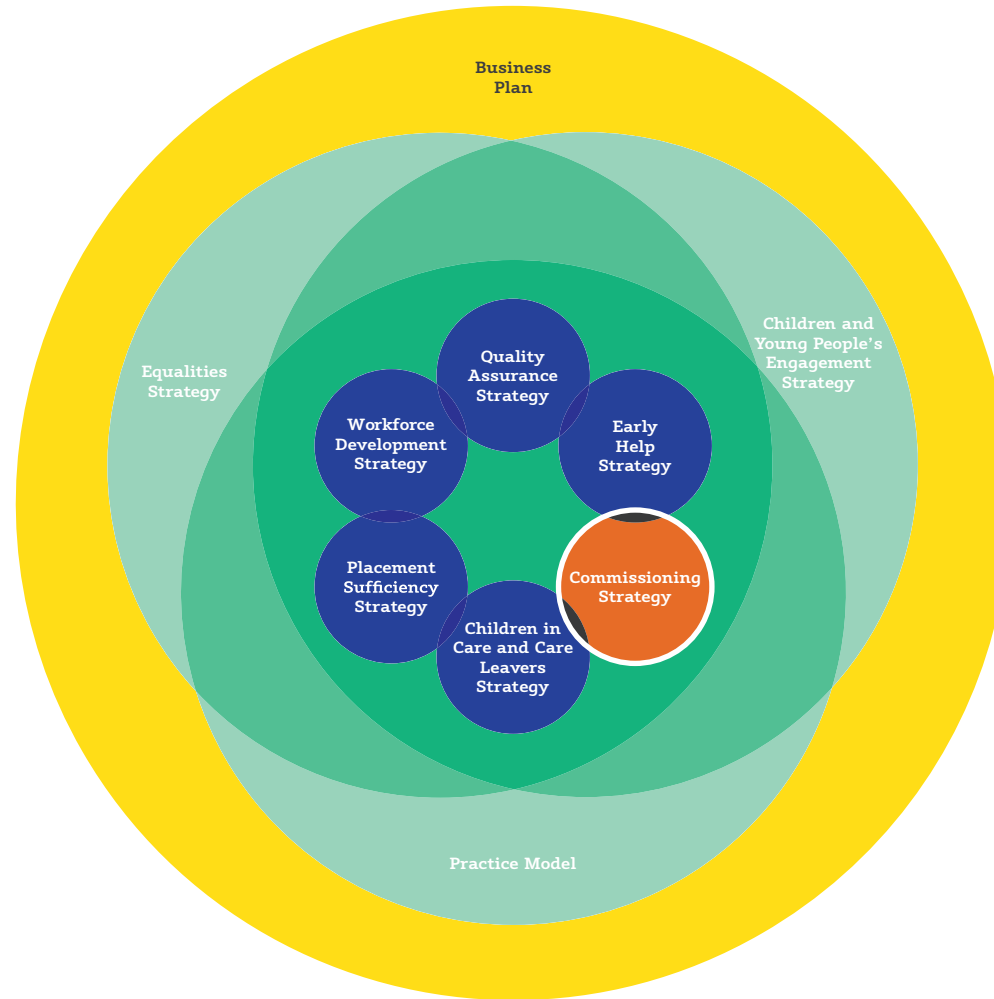


To meet the challenges faced by communities, we will have a relentless focus on our impact and outcomes for children and young people based on local needs and priorities. Our Business Plan states that to achieve this, we will:

- Ensure that the voice of children and young people drives all of our practice.
- Strengthen relationships with parents and carers, and our service offer will be shaped by them and by the direct involvement of children and young people. The co-production of effective solutions to local priorities, including financial challenges, will be evident in our successful delivery of the business plan, as well as our response to emerging issues.
- Focus our early help services on building resilience in families so that they are better able to help, support and protect their children without the need for statutory interventions.
- Consistently use reflective, collaborative and strengths-based approaches to working with the whole family so that parents are able to make positive and lasting changes to the care they provide to their children.
- Invest in integrated services and joint commissioning with our partners, bringing together our collective ideas, talent and resources to better meet the needs of children and young people, especially those with the most complex needs.
- Promote strong and meaningful relationships with our partner organisations and our whole-system approach to improving services and outcomes for children and young people.
- Have established strong and financially stable foundations.

2. Northamptonshire Children's Trust Strategic Framework (cont)

Our Commissioning Strategy and Framework is one of our core strategies to deliver the aims of our business plan.



3. Achieving Effective Commissioning

The purpose of our commissioning activity is to achieve and sustain the best outcomes and experiences for children, young people and families, and to support our workforce to do their work effectively and efficiently. We want to achieve the best use of the resources available to us and achieve excellent value for money.

Our commissioning activity relates to the children, young people and families who we work with at different points within the statutory framework; as well as enablers – these are goods or services that support staff to work effectively and efficiently. As such, our commissioners will be working alongside practitioners and partners with expertise in these areas to ensure that what we commission is in line with, complementary and adding value and is embedded within our practice so that the best use is made of our resources.



We will achieve effective commissioning by ensuring:

Throughout the Commissioning Cycle:

- Our commissioning is led by the voice of children, young people, families and the practitioners who work with them; facilitated and supported by skilled commissioners
- We work collaboratively with children, young people, families, practitioners, partners and providers throughout the commissioning cycle, co-producing and jointly designing services to maximise creativity and innovation whilst ensuring that services are fit for purpose and delivered through the most effective means to achieve results.
- We make full use of the commissioning cycle (understand, plan, do and review). We will forward plan and build in sufficient time for each stage so that we do this effectively and with partners, where applicable.
- We draw not only on our strengths and assets but also on those of children and families, our partners, providers and the community to work together to make things better for children, young people and families and enabling them to thrive.

3. Achieving Effective Commissioning (cont)

In the 'Understand' Stage

- We develop our understanding of the assets and needs of children, young people and their families and also consider what these may be in the future.
- We seek to ensure families can access the right support at the right time ensuring support is provided as soon as a problem emerges so that it does not get worse.

In the 'Plan' Stage

- We always explore whether it is better to collaborate with partners to achieve greater impact and better value for money. We will create joined up services with partners where this makes sense for families and we will seek to pool funding to work together for greater effect.
- We evaluate all options to identify the most suitable means of improving outcomes.

In the 'Do' Stage

- We work proactively with potential providers in the market place to help them develop skills for bidding, capacity, capability and innovation that will deliver the most benefit to children, young people and families.
- Where our commissioning involves delivery of services by external organisations, we will work collaboratively and in partnership. We will ensure that there are smooth processes in place so families receive the right support at the right time, and that commissioned and in house services work side by side as part of the Northamptonshire

Children's Trust family.

- We consider how further social value can be built into service delivery to provide additional economic, social or environmental benefit.
- We will be transparent and fair in commissioning decisions. We ensure that we meet legal and policy requirements and we use reasonable procurement processes and timescales.

In the 'Review' Stage

- We will use a variety of ways to understand the impact and what difference it has made (see our 'Commissioning Cycle Activities' on page 13 for more details).
- We ensure that, not only are our commissioned providers meeting their legal obligations with regard to Equalities, but that they are committed to ensuring that everyone is included, has a voice and is respected. This includes their own staff, the professionals that they work alongside and the children, young people and families that they support.
- We will use the review stage to inform future commissioning. We will stop doing things that aren't having an impact and seek new solutions.

4. Expectations of our Commissioned Services

We have the same expectation for services whether they are delivered from within the Trust or by a commissioned provider.



Making a difference

All activity is focused on making a difference for children and achieving the outcomes and ambitions of our Vision.



Collaboration

Services will work collaboratively as part of the Children's Trust family to improve lives of our children, young people and families.

Children, young people and parents/ carers are treated as partners and are involved actively in the planning, delivery and evaluation of support.

Providers contribute to relevant partnership groups and panels and share information and intelligence appropriately to improve practice and outcomes for children.



Safeguarding

Children are safeguarded effectively, Working Together to Safeguard Children statutory guidance and Northamptonshire's Safeguarding Children Partnership (NSCP) policies and procedures are followed.

4. Expectations of our Commissioned Services (cont)

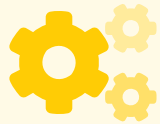


Equality & Diversity

Equality and diversity policies and procedures are implemented.

Equal opportunities are advanced, discrimination tackled and good relations are fostered between people of different characteristics and backgrounds.

Services and support are easily accessible from a child and/ or parent/ carer perspective and adapts to meet special needs of children and parents/ carers.



Doing what works

Work is designed and delivered in line with evidence of what works.

Support builds on children's and families' strengths and assets and enables them to develop positive connections in their community, resilience and sustained outcomes.

Services working with families will use the Signs of Safety practice model.

Assessments, planning and progress reviews are good quality and timely and children and their parents/ carers are involved actively in them



Knowing what difference we've made

Accurate performance and impact information is used to track progress of children and to develop and improve the service; and relevant information is shared with commissioners.

Providers and commissioners will work together to creatively identify solutions to any challenges in achieving outcomes and delivering good value for money.

Providers and commissioners will jointly quality assure activity.

The best use is made of resources.

5. How We Commission

The Commissioning and Strategy Service provides commissioning support and expertise in the Trust, co-ordinating commissioning projects and undertaking work at all stages of the commissioning cycle, working with partners where applicable. Commissioners will work side by side with practice leads for each commission; they are the expert practitioners with responsibility for ensuring that all stages are informed by professional and operational expertise and that commissioned services are embedded within the system. We will support our commissioners and service leads to continually develop skills and expertise in commissioning, leadership and change management. Equally important are the children, young people and families we work with; they are also key partners throughout the commissioning process and will be supported and enabled to contribute and participate alongside us. Decisions regarding procurement, grant funding and contract awards are taken in line with the Trust's scheme of delegation.

Our commissioning takes place at different levels:

- **Individual** child or family (i.e. care packages)
- **Groups** of children or families in similar circumstances or with similar needs - this can vary from relatively small in number or spend to high (ie mental health support for care leavers to foster placements for children in care)
- Goods or Services that **enable** our staff to get on with their work and do their work well

The figure on page 13 shows the commissioning cycle and the range of activities at each stage; which will vary according to the nature and size of the commission. 'Enabling' Goods or Services may only require a procurement (purchasing) process rather than a full commissioning process.



Sometimes, our commissioning at the individual level is reactionary. This can be for a variety of reasons, such as changes in demand, circumstances, or emergency situations. By its nature this means we are not always able to undertake work at the understand and plan stages, and our choices can be more limited when responding quickly. As part of our strategy we will closely monitor our reactionary commissioning to identify themes and patterns and identify how a more strategic and planned approach can be applied.

5. How We Commission (cont)

Commissioning Cycle Activities as a single organisation or with partners



5. How We Commission (cont)

Throughout the cycle we also consider the six stages identified by the Commissioning Academy (2013)

- What's the question?
- Get to know and work with your customers
- Define the outcome and priorities
- What will it look like?
- How will you get there?
- Measuring the impact



6. What We Commission

We commission services to support children, young people and families with a range of needs, to work alongside our practitioners and in-house services to improve outcomes.

As at April 2021, the following support is commissioned by the Trust:



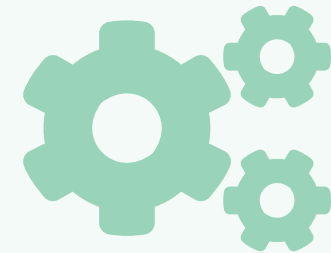
Support commissioned for individual children, young people or families

Support is spot purchased, procured via a framework or bought with a personal budget. Some spot purchasing is done directly by operational teams



Support commissioned for groups of children, young people or families

Support is commissioned via a 'block' contract for an identified number of children and families






Goods or services to enable staff to work effectively and efficiently




Goods or services are spot purchased, procured via a framework or via a block contract

6. What We Commission (cont)

Family Support Services & Youth Justice




Commission	Annual contract value or approximate annual spend	Approximate number of children/ young people/ families supported	What outcomes and activities is this commissioned to achieve?
 <p>Targeted Support for Children under 5 and their families in Corby</p>	£512,000	150	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve outcomes for children and families and prevent more serious issues arising through outreach and early help • Early Help for parents and children during pregnancy and first 2 years of a child's life; regarding domestic abuse/alcohol abuse and mental health; to support Parenting / keeping children safe/ improving the family routines • Identifying and providing access to early years support for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities • Being a hub for the local community, building social capital and community cohesion • Education and Learning outcomes for children and parents
 <p>Employment, education and training support</p>	£975,000	400 young people at any one time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in number of young people who are in education, employment and training. • The percentage of children and young people in Northamptonshire that are not in education, employment or training is now at its lowest level.
 <p>Mentoring for adolescents**</p>	<p>Total funding for this project is £253,370</p> <p>£35,000 used to commission training and equipping of mentors</p>	300 young people will be supported as mentees or as beneficiaries of our work in schools/colleges.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive impact on mentees' confidence and the enhancement of a range of skills • Reduce risky behaviours, exclusions, offending and victimisation amongst young people

6. What We Commission (cont)

Commission	Annual contract value or approximate annual spend	Approximate number of children/ young people/ families supported	What outcomes and activities is this commissioned to achieve?
 <p>Support for young carers ***</p>	£120,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 330 assessments for young carers • 200 young carers supported through group activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The service aims to give young carers the same life opportunities as their peers and feel supported at school/ college.
 <p>Appropriate Adult Services</p>	£30,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 360 young people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriate Adults safeguard the interest, rights, entitlements and welfare of children who are suspected of a criminal offence.
 <p>Family Support Services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • crisis intervention • medium term support • multi-systemic therapy 	£910,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 250 families 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prevent family breakdown and/ or children needing to come into care • Enable parents or carers of a young person to support positive change in relation to behaviour that challenges - Majority of young people have been able to remain at home and there were no new arrests following intervention • Improved parenting skills and confidence • Enable families to overcome and manage challenges such as domestic abuse, drug misuse, financial difficulties



6. What We Commission (cont)

Children in need and child protection




Commission	Annual contract value or approximate annual spend	Approximate number of children/ young people/ families supported	What outcomes and activities is this commissioned to achieve?
 <p>Family group conferencing</p>	£419,000	Approx. 20 families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To reduce the number of children and young people coming into care at the Public Law Outline (PLO) stage
 <p>Therapeutic support/ assessments</p>	£220,000	120 Assessments 60 Therapeutic support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Informs and supports the care planning process for children and the family
 <p>Support provided under s.17 Children Act 1989</p>	Varies	Varies	Varies

6. What We Commission (cont)

Children in Care, Care Leavers, Adopted Children




Commission	Annual Spend 2019/20 or Annual Contract Value 2020/21	Approximate number of children/ young people/ families supported	What outcomes and activities is this commissioned to achieve?
 <p>Fostering, children's homes and independent supported accommodation*</p>	<p>£58,590,000 (Total value allowed within frameworks. Spend varies) This is broken down as follows: £18m: Framework for Independent Supported Accommodation and spot purchases £35m Children's Home and Fostering Framework and spot purchases £ 5,143,193 Block Contract Children's Homes £ 446,133 Care Leavers Support Service Accommodation Northampton</p>	<p>As of 31.03.2021 there were 730 active external placements</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide care, support and accommodation to Children in Care and Care Leavers.
 <p>Therapeutic support</p>	<p>Please see Therapeutic support/ assessments above</p>		

6. What We Commission (cont)



Commission	Annual Spend 2019/20 or Annual Contract Value 2020/21	Approximate number of children/ young people/ families supported	What outcomes and activities is this commissioned to achieve?
 <p>Support for NCT foster carers**</p>	£661,000	Tbc – new service starting 21/22	<p>Interventions to support foster children aged 5-12 cope with their experiences of trauma and support their foster carers to best care for them</p> <p>Training and support for Social Workers supporting children and carers</p> <p>Sustained placements</p>
 <p>Mental health and wellbeing support for Care Leavers**</p>	<p>Total funding for this project £430,148</p> <p>A small proportion used for commissioned support</p>	Tbc total for project- new service starting 21/22	<p>Provision of mental health support and services to a cohort of 25 Care Leavers – delivered in partnership through Mental Health and Clinical Psychology practitioners; a Project Lead, 2 new Business Support apprentices (Care Leavers), who will focus on housing support and mental health support respectively; the delivery of Emotion Coaching to all frontline PA staff and their managers, ensuring a holistic and supportive culture is encouraged within this service.</p>
 <p>Adoption Support Fund</p>	£228, 327	69 children	<p>Assessment of need, a support plan will be agreed with the family. This will identify the support and or intervention required and what outcomes are being sought.</p>

6. What We Commission (cont)

Children with Disabilities




Commission	Annual Spend 2019/20 or Annual Contract Value 2020/21	Approximate number of children/ young people/ families supported	What outcomes and activities is this commissioned to achieve?
 <p>Residential Short breaks</p>	£2,150,000 including contribution from NHS	10 beds available at any time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To provide overnight breaks and activities to children and young people who need to receive breaks in a specialist environment To minimise the need for hospital admissions as well as facilitating early discharge from hospital To provide activities that will utilise appropriate venues, equipment and staffing to meet the needs of the children and young people
 <p>Non-residential Short-breaks</p>	£420,000	120 children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To provide a service that offers children and young people a multitude of opportunities for growth and development and give an opportunity to socialise with peers, build confidence, resilience and self-esteem, nurture independence, chance to try and learn new challenges and relax and have fun To work with parents to ensure that the service meets their needs including a sufficient break from caring, confidence that their child is well cared for and respond to needs and assurance that their child is undertaking positive and enjoyable activities.
 <p>Sleep Service</p>	£145,000 including contribution from NHS	510	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To provide family centred sleep advice to identify and address sleep disorders To work directly with parents and carers to ensure that the service suits their family's needs

6. What We Commission (cont)





Commission	Annual Spend 2019/20 or Annual Contract Value 2020/21	Approximate number of children/ young people/ families supported	What outcomes and activities is this commissioned to achieve?
 <p>Personal care and support</p>	£1,500,000	135	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To meet children and young people with disabilities' individual care and support needs in the home and community
 <p>Support for children with visual and hearing impairments</p>	£43,200	<p>Hearing impaired – 650 clients (note: this includes both children and adults)</p> <p>Visual impaired - 166 attendances at children and young people events.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To provide prevention services for deaf, deafened deaf-blind and hard of hearing people to prevent the need for more specialist support To provide advice, help and practical support to overcome emotional and practical challenges of living with sight loss.

6. What We Commission (cont)





Enablers

Commission	Annual Spend 2019/20 or Annual Contract Value 2020/21	Approximate number of children/ young people/ families supported	What outcomes and activities is this commissioned to achieve?
 <p>Language support service</p>	£112,500	4200 requests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To support children young people and families in the care system who speak, communicate or read languages other than English
 <p>Legal support for Independent Reviewing Officers</p>	£6,000	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides children's and young people's Independent Reviewing Officers with independent specialist legal advice in regards to Care Proceedings and Looked After Children. This ensures that the child's interests are being represented.
 <p>Youth Offending Service case management system</p>	£38,947	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduced re-offending, reduced risk of harm, improved well-being of young people and their families, effective risk management.


6. What We Commission (cont)

Commission	Annual Spend 2019/20 or Annual Contract Value 2020/21	Approximate number of children/ young people/ families supported	What outcomes and activities is this commissioned to achieve?
 <p>Drug and alcohol testing</p>	£100,000	Approx. 100 requests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supports to understand parents substance usage for assessment, support and decision making
 <p>DNA testing</p>	£12,000	Approx. 20 requests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To understand children's parentage
 <p>Social care case management system</p>	Part of overall contract for children's and adults services	All children and Families with Early Help or Social Care involvement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supporting practitioners with recording and case managing for families they are working with, allowing for secure data sharing between professionals.
 <p>Social care procedures manual</p>	£9,200	All children and Families with Early Help or Social Care involvement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The workforce has easy access to well written procedures that reflect current legislation, regulations, Statutory Guidance, and best practice. Improved consistency in practice and support offer to children and families.

6. What We Commission (cont)

Commission	Annual Spend 2019/20 or Annual Contract Value 2020/21	Approximate number of children/ young people/ families supported	What outcomes and activities is this commissioned to achieve?
 <p>Transport for children and families and for NCT children's homes</p>	£1,667,000	Approx. 300 children and young people in 2020/21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enable all children who require social care travel assistance to attend school, have contact with family and respite care.
 <p>Cashless payments</p>	£16,000	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To provide an efficient and low risk payment system to children, young people and families without relying on petty cash payments
 <p>Family Time booking system</p>	£30,000	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To provide efficient and effective appointment booking system, reducing administration
 <p>Equipment for children in the community</p>	£116,000	Varies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing equipment, minor adaptations, and repairs for children with disabilities and their families to promote their independence and equal opportunities.

6. What We Commission (cont)

Commission	Annual Spend 2019/20 or Annual Contract Value 2020/21	Approximate number of children/ young people/ families supported	What outcomes and activities is this commissioned to achieve?
 <p>Software to support children's participation</p>	£60,000 3 years	Available for all children supported by NCT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased engagement of children and young people • Increased influence of children and young people in developing and improving support • Reduced administration time • Earlier reporting of concerns by children to address any issues at earlier stage

*Our Sufficiency Strategy informs the commissioning of placements for children in care and care leavers

** Funded by Public Health to achieve public health outcomes

***Funded by Better Care Fund

7. Our Commissioning Plans

The following sets out our plans for 2021/22 and 2022/23. Our plans for 2023/24 are dependent on the outcome of the activity in the first two years of this strategy.

Our contracts register and commissioning forward plan detail the timeline for the understand, plan, do and review stages for each of these commissioning projects, and will be overseen by our Commissioning Board. The Commissioning Board reports to the Trust Senior Leadership Team and Trust Board, making recommendations for in relation to procuring services, awarding contracts and decommissioning. The Board has oversight of all our commissioning activity (including joint commissioning), the commissioning forward plan and the quality and outcomes of commissioned services.

2021/22

We will be working with commissioned providers to ensure we are working collaboratively for families and to monitor the impact of services.

We will work with partners to develop the Integrated Care System for children and young people, including joint commissioning.

We will undertake the following commissioning projects (this includes where current contracts are due to end or be extended this year or next year):

Family Support Services & Youth Justice

- Targeted employment, education and training support
- Support for young carers

Children In Need Of Help & Protection

- Family Group Conference Service
- Drug and alcohol and DNA testing

Children In Care, Care Leavers & Adopted Children

- NCT Fostering Family interventions
- Sufficiency Strategy Action Plan – re-open fostering, children’s homes and independent supported accommodation frameworks and training flats for care leavers; consider options for managed support service accommodation and emergency placements

Children With Disabilities

- Support for children with disabilities and their families

Enablers

- Language support

7. Our Commissioning Plans (cont)

2022/23 and beyond

We will be working with commissioned providers to ensure we are working collaboratively for families and to monitor the impact of services.

We will work with partners to develop the Integrated Care System for children and young people, including joint commissioning'.

We will undertake the following commissioning projects (this includes where current contracts are due to end or be extended this year or next year):

Family Support Services & Youth Justice

- Targeted safeguarding support
- Targeted Support for children under 5 and their families in Corby
- Appropriate Adult Service
- Mentoring for adolescents

Children In Care, Care Leavers & Adopted Children

- Sufficiency Strategy Action Plan – residential care, fostering and independent supported accommodation framework, residential block contract
- Fostering Family Support
- Support for Care Leavers' Mental Health and Wellbeing

Children With Disabilities

- Personal Care and Support framework

- Support for children with disabilities and their families

Enablers

- Legal advice for Independent Reviewing Officers

8. Measuring The Impact Of Our Commissioning Strategy And Framework

To understand the overall impact of our Commissioning Strategy and Framework, it is essential that we understand the difference each of our commissioned services has made. Performance monitoring is agreed with providers for each commissioned service, based on the outcomes and activity agreed in the service specification, and includes a variety of methods to understand activity and impact including quantitative and qualitative data on activity and outcomes, views of children, young people and families, views of practitioners and views of regulators where applicable. Performance monitoring is completed on a quarterly basis and impact reported annually.

All of our performance monitoring aims to answer the four Outcomes Based Accountability (Friedman) questions:

	Quantity	Quality
Effort	How much did we do?	How well did we do it?
Effect	<p>Is anyone better off – what difference did we make to the lives of children and their outcomes?</p> <p>Where do we need to focus our improvement efforts?</p>	

Here is some feedback from parents/ carers and our staff about our commissioned services:

“I have been supported massively by the Family Support Worker. The Family Support Worker has been amazing and supported us through a difficult time. She gave me practical and effective approaches to implementing routines and managing behaviours” (parent/carer)

“The Learning Mentor at the school has shared that child has seemed more settled in school and his behaviour has improved the past few weeks” (school)

“Thank you MST from the bottom of our hearts for helping our family re-think our communication and the way we approach behaviours” (parent/carer)

“You helped me behave better, mum has stopped getting phone calls from school every day because I behave more. The worksheets and bits you gave me on managing my emotions and anger really helped. It was good being able to talk with you. The family rules chart you introduced really help my younger brothers.” (young person)

8. Measuring The Impact Of Our Commissioning Strategy And Framework (cont)

“Family has been supported with relationship and positive discipline and routines for children, they had parenting support and emotional support, and parents reported they appreciated Family Intervention Project’s support” (social worker)

“I feel that without the care offered by short breaks, the young person would have been admitted to a hospital where behaviours would have intensified. In accessing a familiar, safe environment the young person has been able to be supported through this difficult period with positive results for both them and their family” (provider)

We will know we have achieved the objectives of this **strategy** when all of our commissioning is:

- Led by the voice of children, young people, families and practitioners
- Completed within good time to allow for each stage of the cycle to be undertaken effectively (in accordance with the size or nature of the commission)
- Achieving demonstrable impact and positive experiences for children, young people and families (or our staff in the case of ‘enabler’ goods and services); and best value for money
- Enabling us to achieve the objectives of our Business Plan





Northamptonshire
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Children in Care Profile and Forecasts to March 2024

End March 2023 data source, created 13/4/23, version 1



Key Points

- From **1124** CiC at end March 23 (excluding UASC), an increase to **1132** is forecast for March 2024, with lower confidence limit of **1104** and upper **1160**.
- The projected increase is largely due to the younger age groups which are forecast to increase by 2%
- The UASC total is at **104** currently, with the 0.1% threshold level for UASC being 173 for the county, so there is the potential to gain another 69 UASC before that threshold is reached.
- The majority of UASC in 2022/23 are in supported accommodation placements (78%) and 20% in foster placements so it's worth noting that they will add to the demand for those placement types.
- The forecasts in this presentation use a **1 year data trend**, assume no other actions are taken to reduce the care population and all exclude UASC (see "tool accuracy" slides for notes on forecasting with or without UASC)
- When forecasting the March 2023 figures using 2022 data, the total forecast non-UASC care figure was relatively close to the actual (1130 projected v 1124 actual). The harder to forecast elements of how the ages and placement types would be split varied in success, with aged 16+ projected to be much lower than actual and 10-15's predicted to be higher than they were.



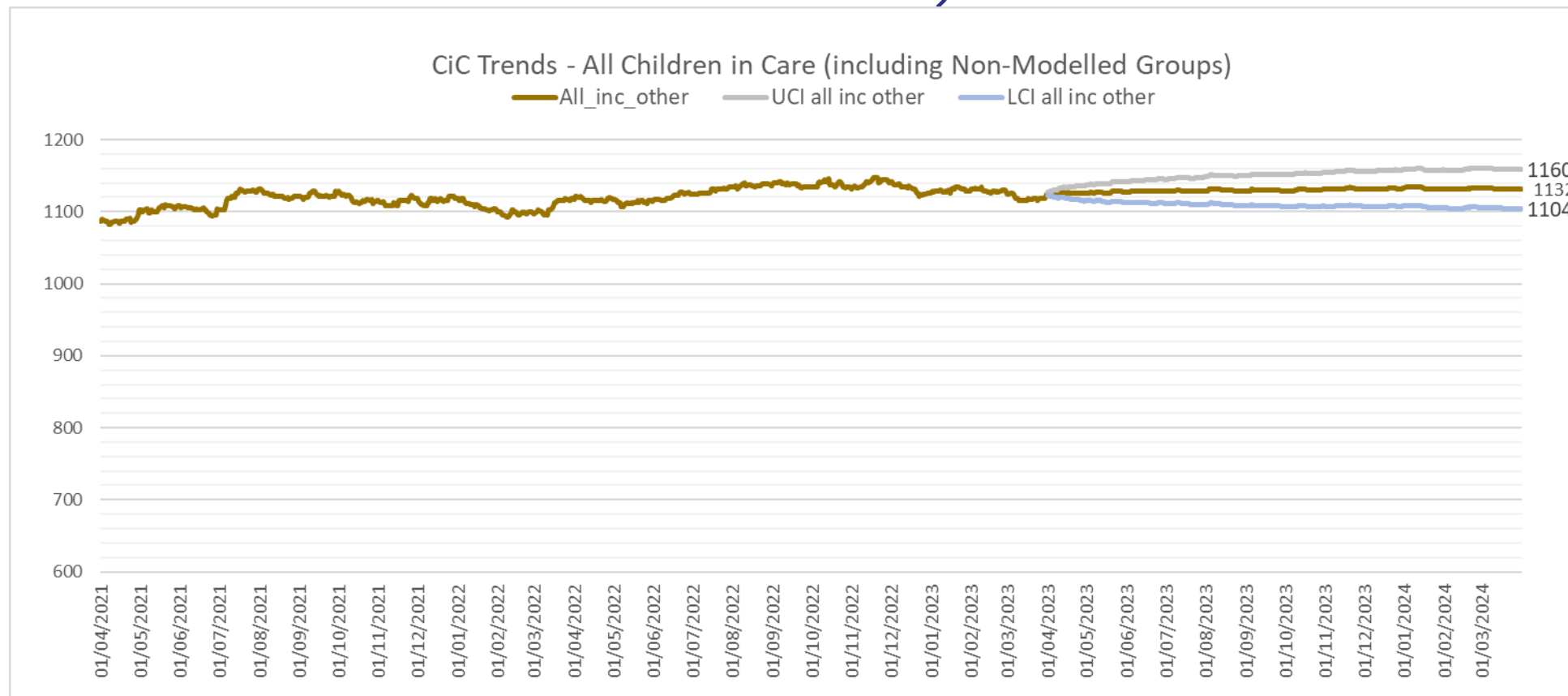
Summary Figures – Excluding UASC

Exc UASC	Total inc Unmodelled	total (Fos, Res, Supp)	Fos	Res	Supp	Age 0	Age 1_4	Age 5_9	Age 10_15	Age 16_18
Actual 31/03/2022	1118	995	823	134	38	57	114	207	436	181
Actual 31/3/2023	1124	996	799	137	60	45	124	205	398	224
Base Forecast 31/03/2024	1132	1004	795	141	68	41	135	201	382	245
Base LCI	1104	976	771	131	59	32	124	190	367	231
Base UCI	1160	1032	819	151	77	50	146	212	397	259
% Change from current to 31/03/24	0.7%	0.8%	-0.5%	2.9%	13.3%	-8.9%	8.9%	-2.0%	-4.0%	9.4%

Projections by age include only the modelled groups. The 'All-Total' include all children in care.



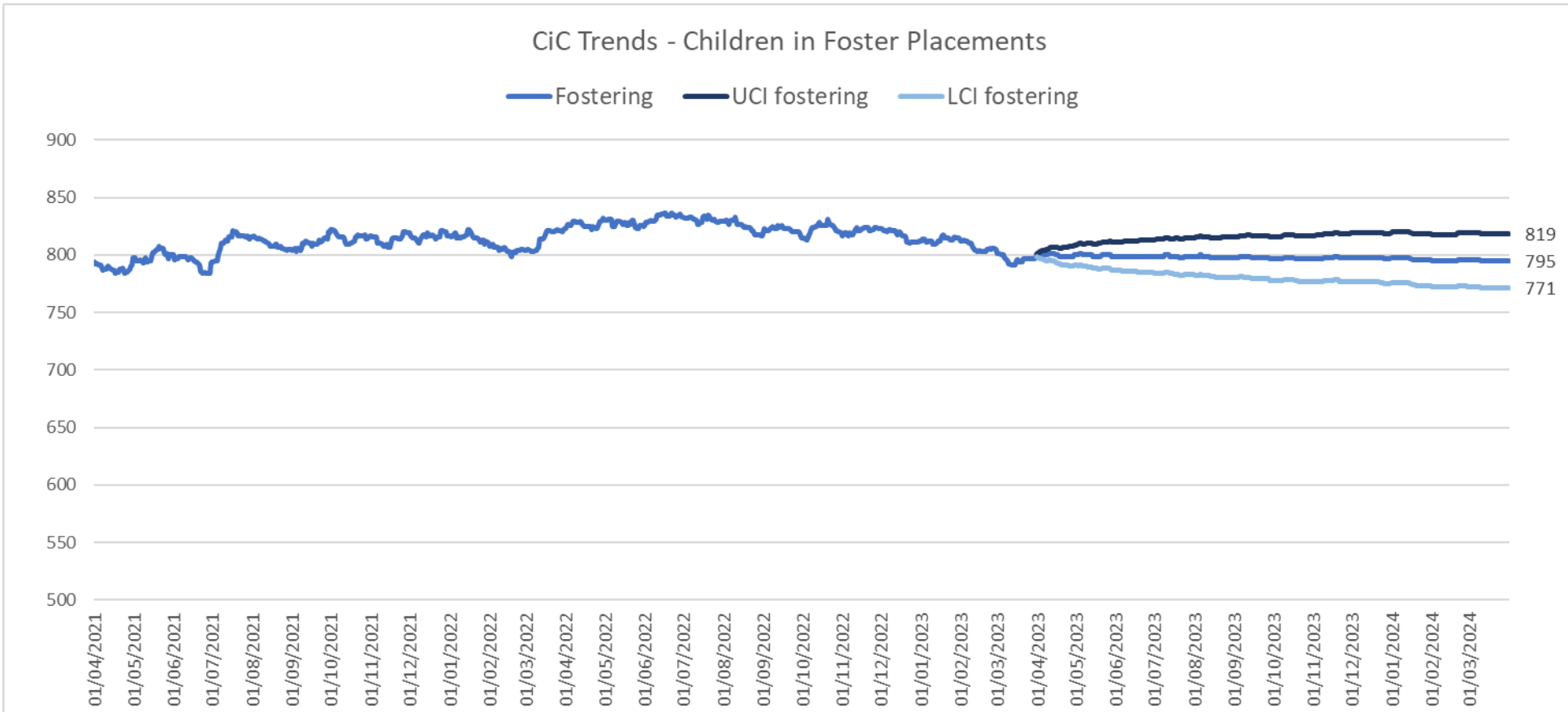
Trend- All Children in Care, Exc UASC



The care population (excluding UASC) has increased **1%** from **1118** at the end of March 2022 to **1124** at the end of March 2023. An increase of **1%** up to **1132** is forecast to March 2024.



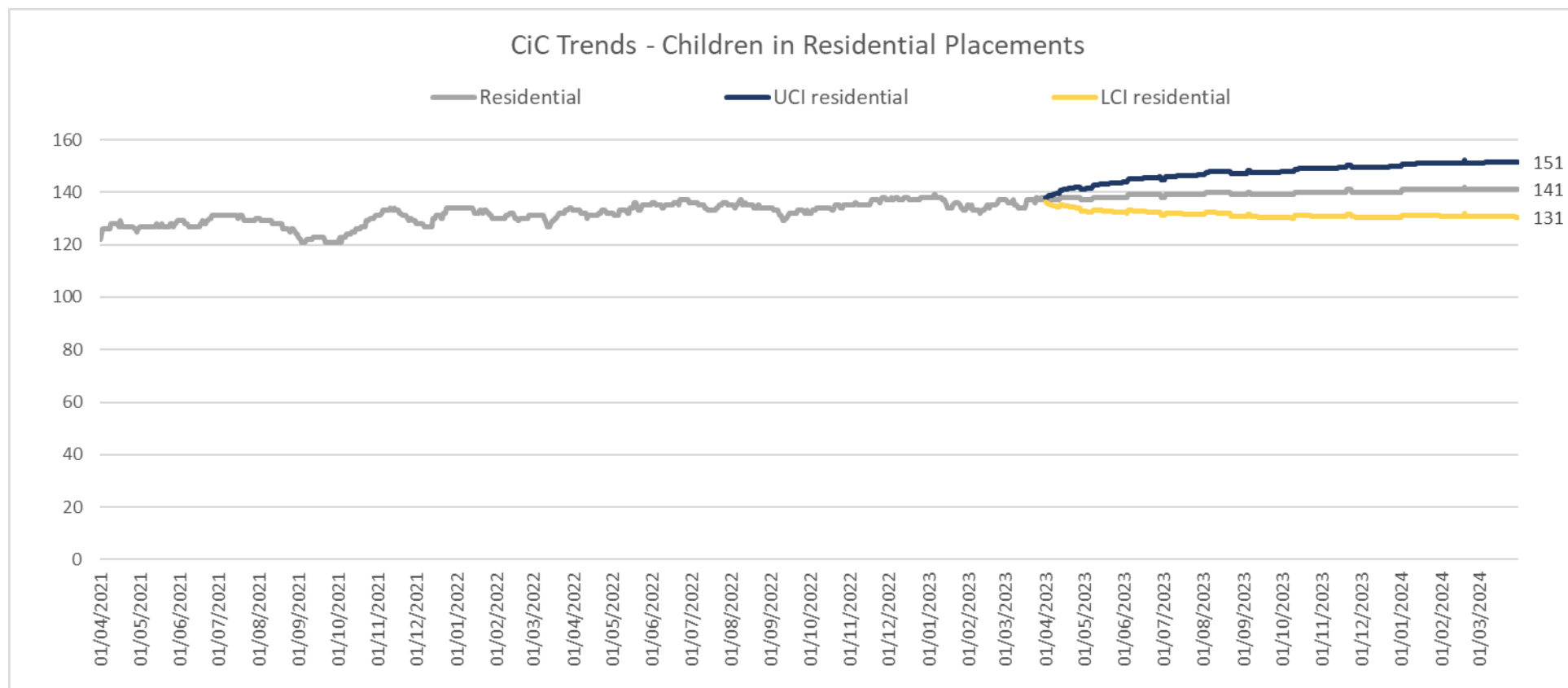
Foster Placements



Foster placements (which includes placements with a connected person) decreased **3%** from **823** children in March 2022, to **799** March 2023. A **0.5%** decrease to **795** is forecast at the end of March 2024.



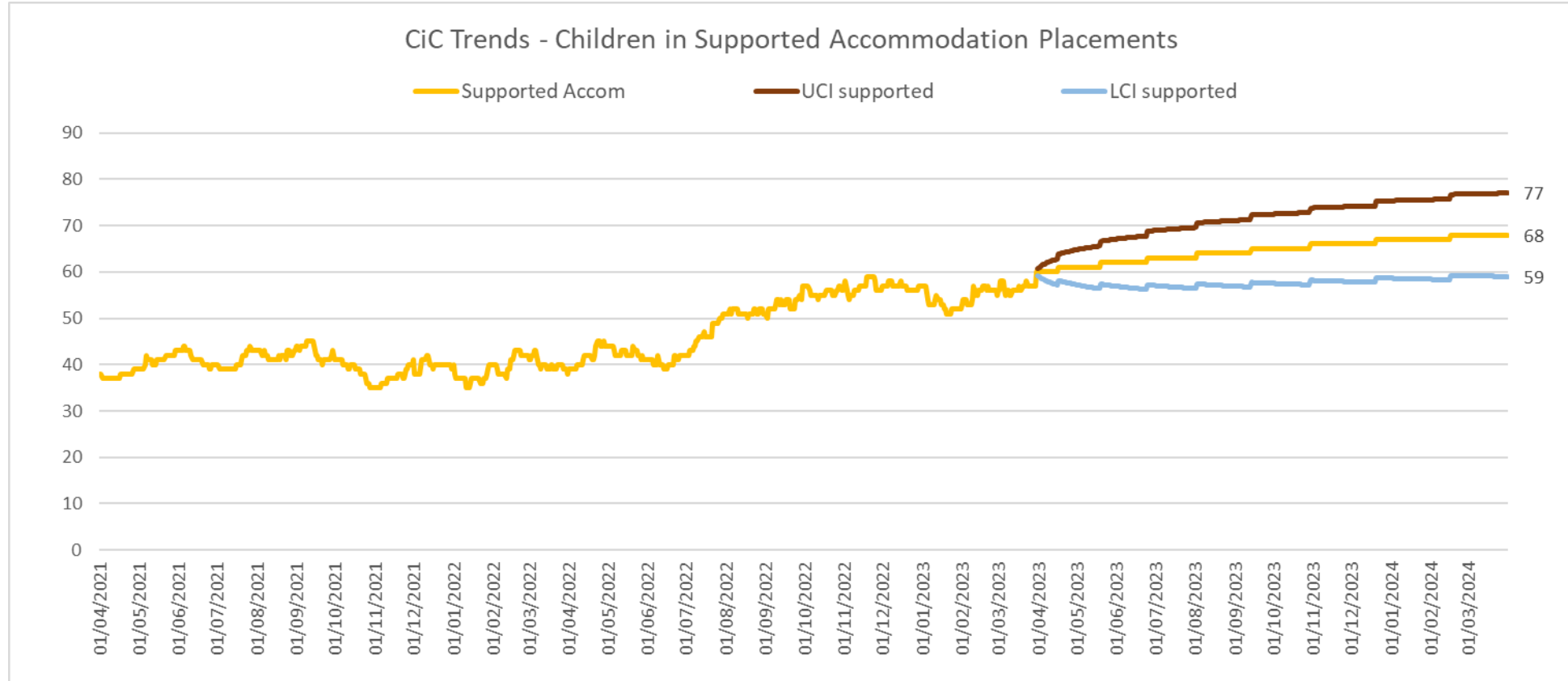
Residential Placements



Residential placements was at **134** children at end March 23, and remained relatively consistent at **137** end March 23. This is forecast to increase by 3% at the end of March 2024, to **141**.



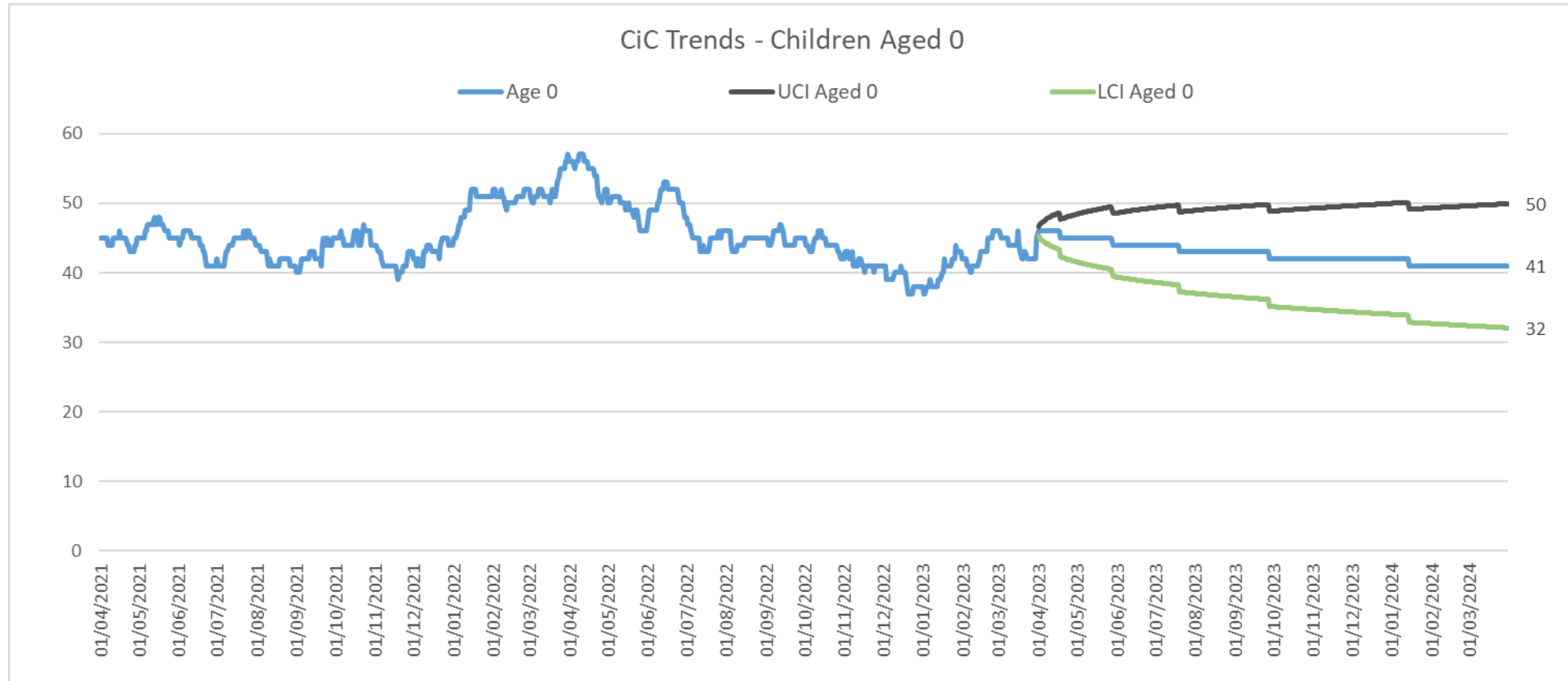
Supported Accommodation Placements



Supported Accommodation placements increased **58%** from **38** children in March 22, to **60** in March 23. A 13% increase to **68** is forecast at the end of March 2024.



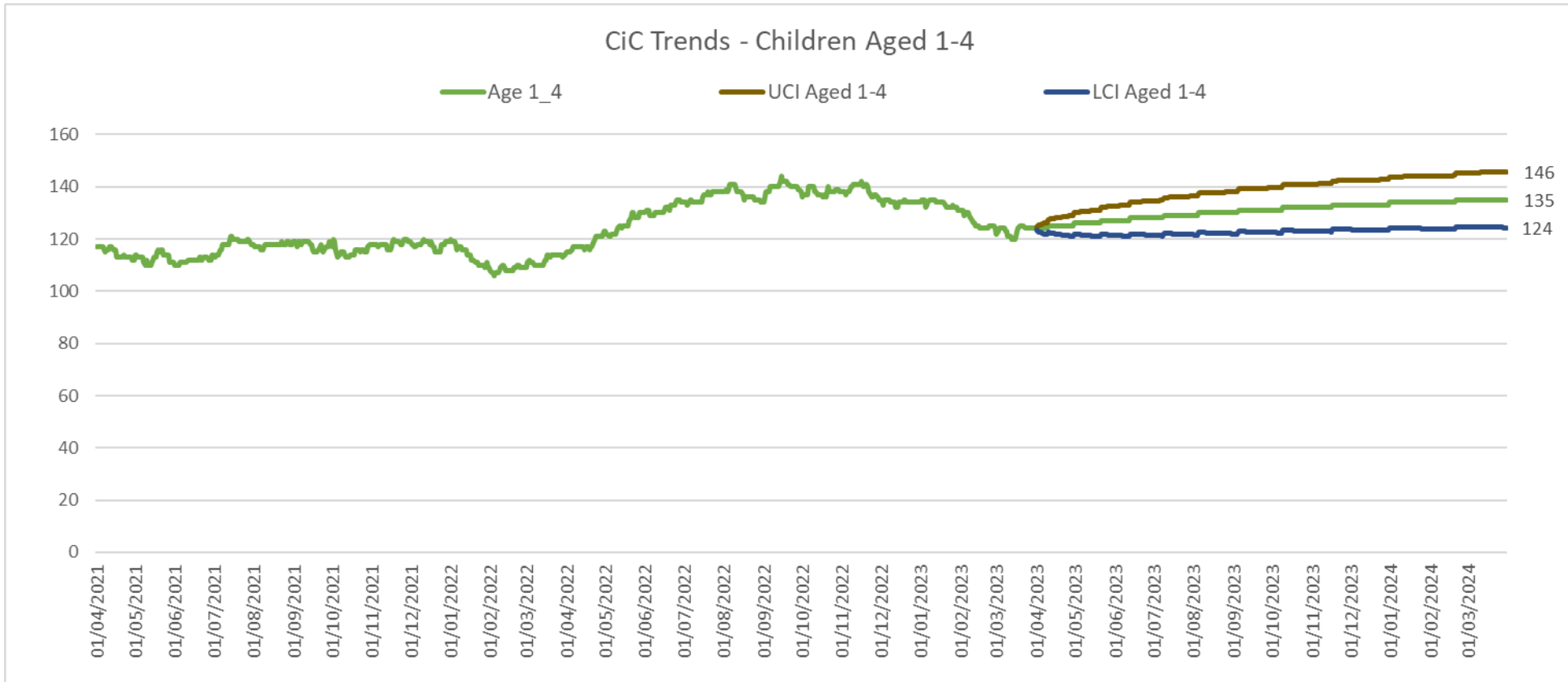
Age Under 1



Children in care aged under 1 has decreased **21%** from **57** in March 22 to **45** in March 23. A 9% decrease is forecast to **41** by March 2024.



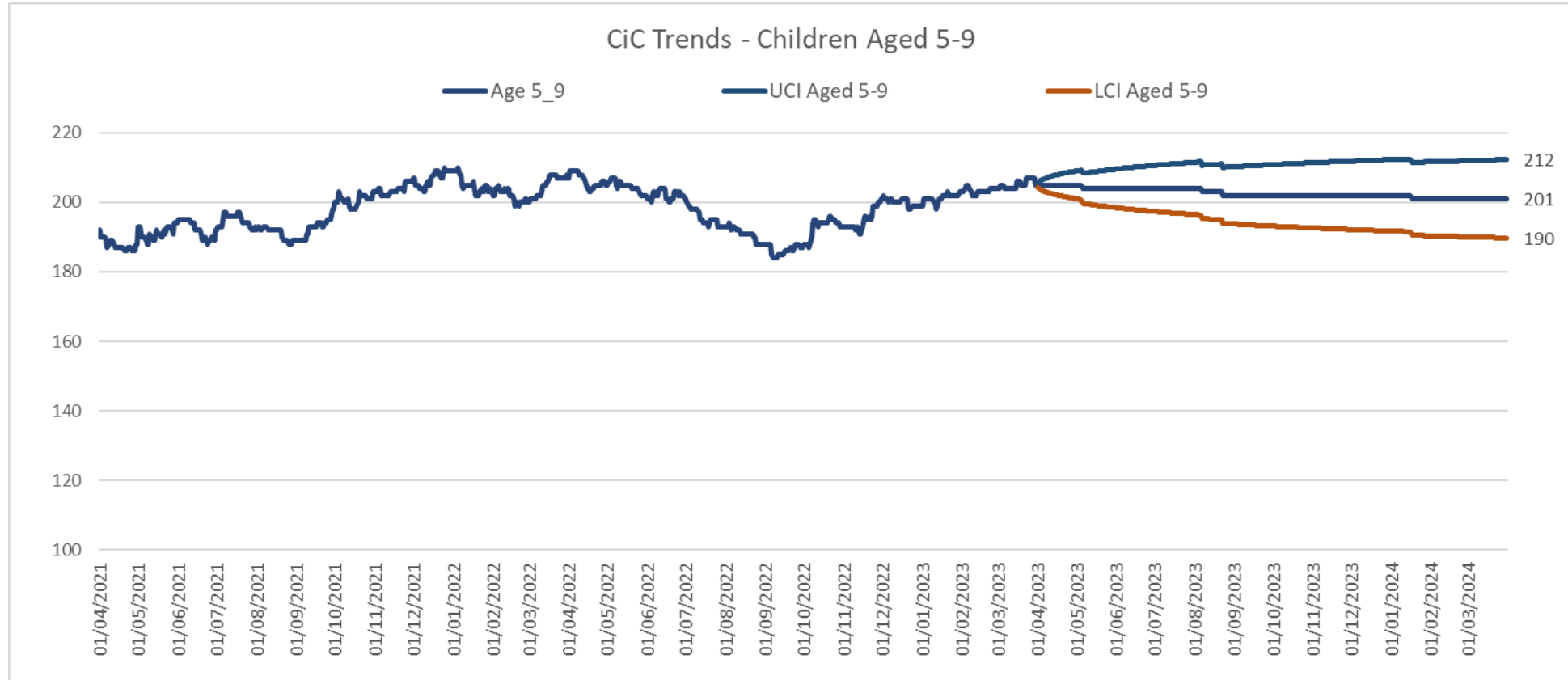
Age 1-4



Children in care aged 1-4 has increased **9%** from **114** on 31/3/22 to **124** on 31/3/23. An increase of **9%** is forecast to **135** by March 2024.



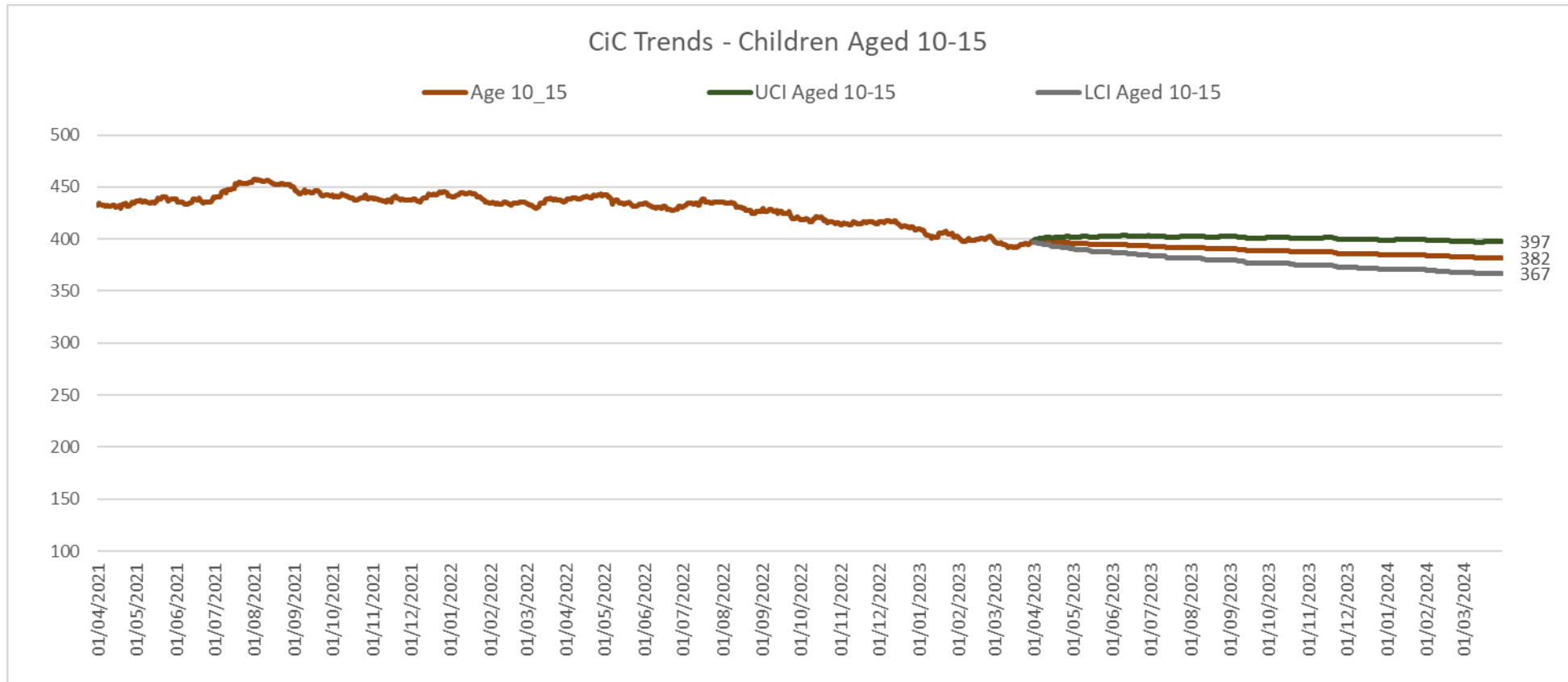
Age 5-9



Children in care aged 5-9 has decreased **1%** from **207** on 31/3/22 to **205** on 31/3/23. There is a **2%** decrease forecast to **201** by March 2024.



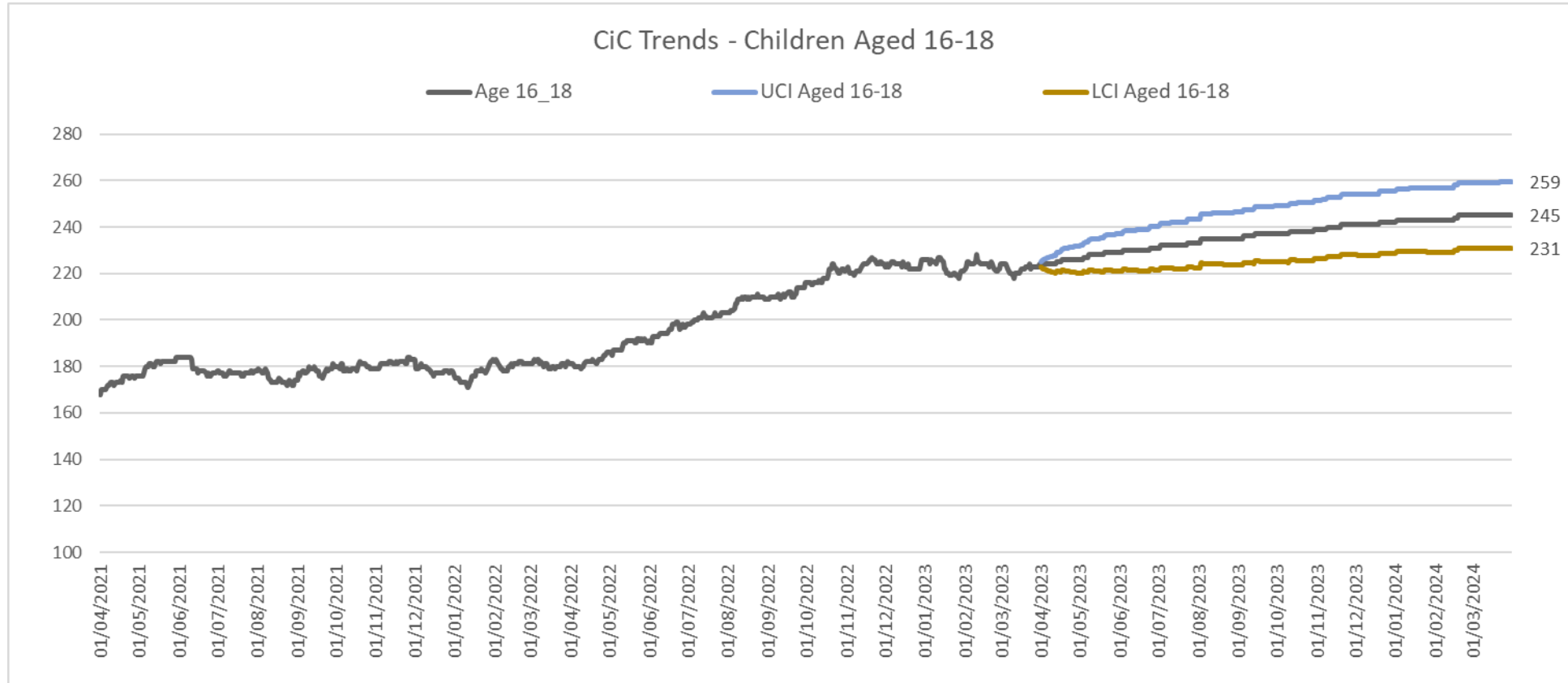
Age 10-15



Children in care aged 10-15 has decreased **11%** from **436** on 31/3/22 to **398** on 31/3/23. There is a 4% decrease forecast to **382** by March 2024.



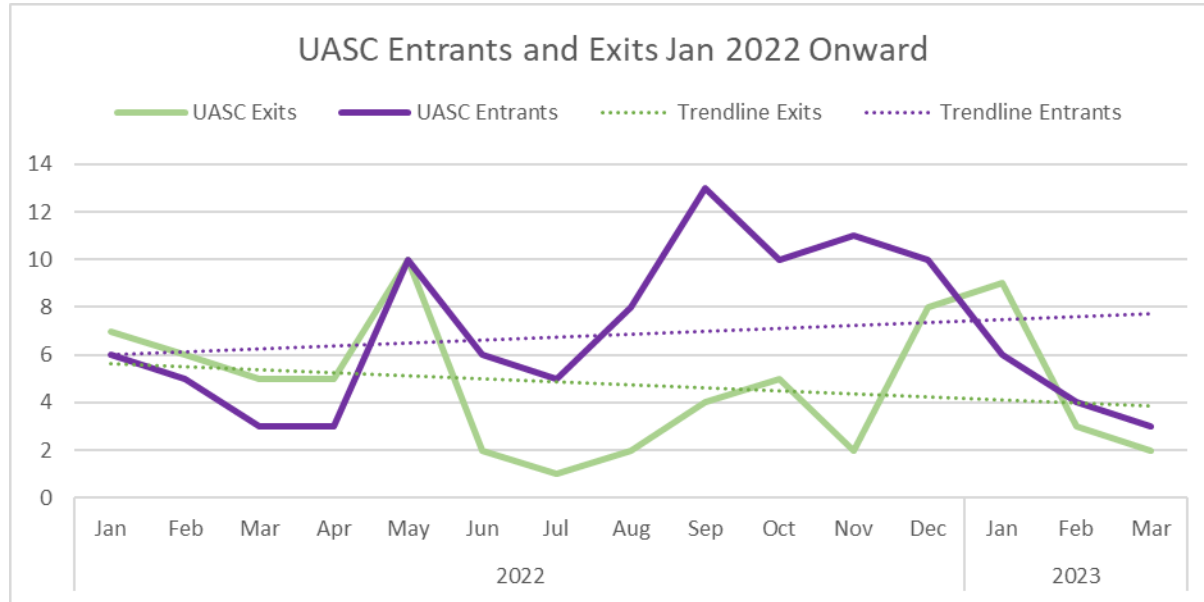
Age 16-18



Children in care aged 16-18 has increased **24%** from **181** on 31/3/22 to **224** on 31/3/23 with a 9% increase forecast to **245** by March 2024.



UASC exits/entrants



2022/23	UASC Entrants	UASC Exits	Net change
Apr	3	5	-2
May	10	10	0
Jun	6	2	4
Jul	5	1	4
Aug	8	2	6
Sep	13	4	9
Oct	10	5	5
Nov	11	2	9
Dec	10	8	2
Jan 23	6	9	-3
Feb	4	3	1
Mar	3	2	1
Total	89	53	36

UASC entering care since Jan 2022 year up until May 2022 kept a relatively even pace to those exiting care, with 27 entering and 33 exiting, but from June, entrants were significantly higher than those leaving. The last 3 months have seen the UASC numbers stabilise again.



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RAG Criteria	
Red	Major issues identified which may prevent delivered as expected
Amber	Issues identified which may delay the progress and require action but do not threaten overall delivery
Green	On track to deliver as expected
Completed	Successfully completed
Not Started	Not yet started

Partnership improvement priorities are shown in orange

What will good look like	Improvement Priorities	Responsibility	By when	Linked plans	How will we know if we've made a difference? <i>Baselines Jan 23</i>	RAG	Progress Update
1. Excellent Leadership							
Children's experiences and outcomes are improved as a result of consistently good quality management oversight and supervision	1.1 Consistently strong management oversight and supervision Improve the consistency of quality and timeliness of recorded management oversight and reflective case supervision across front line services; which includes trajectory planning, and evidences safety, progress and impact for children	AD Corporate Parenting AD Safeguarding AD CFSS & YOS	Mar 24	NCT Service Plans QAB action log	QA activity shows improved scaling for management oversight and outcomes for children <i>Baseline 68% CRPDs scaled 6 and above out of 10 management oversight; 79% scaled 6 and above out of 10 outcomes</i> Timeliness of supervision <i>Baseline 48%</i>		
	1.2 Impactful quality assurance of management oversight and supervision <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus on quality and impact of management oversight and supervision throughout QA programme Improve robustness of senior management oversight of children in unregistered placements 	AD QA & Commissioning AD Corporate Parenting AD Safeguarding AD CFSS & YOS	Mar 24	NCT Service Plans QAB action log	Increase number of NCT operational managers consistently completing QA activity QA moderation shows improvement in quality of QA activity Senior management oversight of unregistered homes evidenced on child's records		
	1.3 Effective recognition and response to current and emerging national pressures	NCT/ WNC/ NNC Operational Commissioning Group	Mar 24	OCG action log	Children achieve positive outcomes Social workers have manageable caseloads		
Sufficient resources are allocated and							

NCT IMPROVEMENT PLAN

What will good look like	Improvement Priorities	Responsibility	By when	Linked plans	How will we know if we've made a difference? <i>Baselines Jan 23</i>	RAG	Progress Update
managed to enable effective delivery of NCT services	(i.e - increased complexity of need and increased demand on statutory services – Valuing Care - ability of fostering and children’s homes market to meet needs - Social care workforce shortages - Increased costs (ie staff, transport, homes for children)						
2 Recruit, retain and develop an awesome workforce							
Children are supported by consistent practitioners who have the capacity and skills to develop effective relationships and undertake good quality work with them	2.1 Increased opportunities into social work posts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Step Up, Frontline, NQSWs, SW Apprentices, Social workers recruited from abroad 	Director of Finance & Resources AD Quality Assurance & Commissioning	Mar 24	NCT Workforce Strategy	Reduced SW vacancies Baseline 17.1%		
	2.2 Excellent CPD offer and conditions of success <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure the effectiveness and capacity of support services and business support to enable frontline practitioners and managers to focus on practice Progress new case management system to meet practice needs Refresh the practice model. Fully embed Signs of Safety and implement systemic practice 	AD Quality Assurance & Commissioning	Apr 23 – Mar 24	NCT Workforce Strategy	QA activity shows improved scaling for outcomes for children <i>Baseline 79% CRPDs scaled 6 and above out of 10 outcomes</i> Training take up and feedback Reduced turnover rate Baseline 17.1% Practitioners report work is manageable and they are well supported (annual social work health check)		
Children and families receive an appropriate response in an emergency out of hours	2.3 Complete disaggregation of EDT and ensure appropriate capacity	NNC/ WNC DCS Director of Finance & Resources AD Safeguarding	Sept 23	OCG action log	EDT will deliver services for children only		

What will good look like	Improvement Priorities	Responsibility	By when	Linked plans	How will we know if we've made a difference? <i>Baselines Jan 23</i>	RAG	Progress Update
3 Strong Relationship based practice							
<p>Children and families receive the right specialist and timely response that meets their needs and improves their outcomes</p>	<p>3.1 Strong assessment of need and appropriate response</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement systemic practice and Valuing Care assessment alongside embedding of Signs of Safety Ensure effective practice in transfer of cases from MASH to DAAT to increase timeliness of response for families Ensure good quality direct work is used to inform assessment and plans for all children, including through increased use of Mind of My Own app Efficient processes and sufficient resource in place to ensure children and young people in care, including those living out of county, receive timely initial and review health assessments. Continued dialogue with region and national NHS leaders regarding the revision of statutory guidance of initial health assessments 	<p>AD Safeguarding AD Corporate Parenting AD CFSS & YOS AD QA & Commissioning</p> <p>ICB Head of Safeguarding/Designated Nurses NHFT AD C&YP</p>	<p>Mar 24</p>	<p>NCT Service Plans</p> <p>CYP Transformation Programme</p>	<p>Appropriate and timely screening, decisions with robust rationale and transfer evidenced via performance data and QA activity (including multi agency practice review).</p> <p>Reduce re-referrals (baseline 29%) Reduce assessments with NFA (baseline 38%)</p> <p>CRPDs scaled 6+ out of 10 for voice of child, identity and culture (baseline 73%)</p> <p>CRPDs scaled 6+ for outcome for children (baseline 79%)</p> <p>Increase in percentage of children who receive IHA and RHA within statutory timeframes IHAs baseline 83.7% RHAs baseline 73.8%</p> <p>QA activity evidences good quality initial and review health assessments.</p>		

Final draft for approval

NCT IMPROVEMENT PLAN

What will good look like	Improvement Priorities	Responsibility	By when	Linked plans	How will we know if we've made a difference? <i>Baselines Jan 23</i>	RAG	Progress Update
Children are well cared for in a permanent and safe home at the earliest opportunity	<p>3.2 High quality effective permanency planning at earliest opportunity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve effectiveness of planning for children to come into care, including appropriate use of Police Powers and joint planning • Effective Family network meetings occur in every case where there are concerns about safety and welfare of a child • Clear trajectory and contingency planning • Good quality life story work with all children in care throughout their time of being looked after • All children in care have effective SMART permanence plans which consider all options for permanency 	AD Safeguarding AD Corporate Parenting Ivan Balhatchet – Crime & Justice NPCC Lead		NCT Service Plans LFJB Action Plan	Reduction of emergency admissions to care Increased use of PLO QA activity evidences effective joint planning and families are clear why we are involved and the changes they will be supported to make Families are supported to achieve and sustain change and more children remain in or return to their family's care (Baseline children in care rate 71 Baseline children in care returning home tbc Baseline children leaving care due to permanence 20%)		
Care leavers have access to support that meets their needs and improves their outcomes	<p>3.3 Appropriate out of hours and crisis support for care leavers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review and develop multi-agency local offer for care leavers including provision of an out of hours service and access to crisis support • Explore opportunities to develop a hub for care leavers living in North Northamptonshire 	AD Corporate Parenting NHFT AD CYP WNC & NNC Adults Services & Housing ADs ICB Senior Transformation Manager	Mar 24	Corporate Parenting Board	QA activity and feedback from young people shows access and impact		
4 Insightful quality assurance and learning							
Children's outcomes and experiences are improved as a result of improving practice	<p>4.1 Consistently impactful IRO and CP Chair escalations</p>	AD Quality Assurance & Commissioning AD Safeguarding AD Corporate Parenting	Sept 23	NCT Service Plans	Timely responses to escalations QA activity to evidence impact of escalations		
	<p>4.2 Learning from QA activity makes a difference for children</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actions and learning from individual CRPDs are progressed through 	Director of Social Care All ADs	Mar 24	QAB action log	QA activity to evidence impact		

NCT IMPROVEMENT PLAN

What will good look like	Improvement Priorities	Responsibility	By when	Linked plans	How will we know if we've made a difference? <i>Baselines Jan 23</i>	RAG	Progress Update
	supervision and evidence on child files of progress made <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Thematic learning from QA activity is shared through training and communications and impact is measured and demonstrated 						
	4.3 Impactful multi agency quality assurance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3x multi agency practice reviews (MAPRs) per year; thematic learning shared through NSCP Implement a process to enable review, learning and improvement of young people detained in police custody 	NSCP Quality and Governance sub group chair Ivan Balhatchet – Crime & Justice NPCC Lead Director of Social Care	Mar 24	NSCP business plan	Impact on practice and outcomes as a result of QA activity QA evidence that needs of children in police custody are closely monitored to ensure decision making conforms to current statutory guidance; good practice shared		
5 Healthy Partnerships that improve outcomes for children							
Risks for children who are experiencing contextual vulnerabilities are effectively managed and the impact on them is minimised	5.1 Improve our partnership response for children who are experiencing contextual vulnerabilities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve our partnership response to domestic abuse Improve our partnership response to exploitation Improve quality and impact of our response (including return home interviews) to children who go missing. 	Director of Social Care AD for CFSS WNC and NNC Community safety ADs Director of Social Care AD Safeguarding AD CFSS Ivan Balhatchet – Crime & Justice NPCC Lead ICB Head of Safeguarding/Designated Nurses representing health as a system	Timescales as per partnership action plans	Domestic abuse strategy West Northamptonshire Council (westnorthants.gov.uk) Domestic abuse strategy North Northamptonshire Council (northnorthants.gov.uk) NSCP exploitation strategy and action plan	Impact on child reduces evidenced by QA activity; supervision and MO. Timely access to DA services including for perpetrators Reduction of children coming into care due to exploitation Reduction in the numbers of children who go missing; and numbers who go repeatedly missing. Children in care have fewer missing episodes. Timely decision making in neglect cases evidenced by QA activity and reduced repeat CP plans for neglect		

NCT IMPROVEMENT PLAN

What will good look like	Improvement Priorities	Responsibility	By when	Linked plans	How will we know if we've made a difference? <i>Baselines Jan 23</i>	RAG	Progress Update
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve our partnership response to neglect Skilled workforce able to identify neglect factors; Increased use of GPC 2 tool 	<p>WNC and NNC Public Health children's leads</p> <p>NSCP Neglect Sub Group Chair</p> <p>NSCP Strategic Leads</p>		<p>NSCP Neglect Strategy and action plan</p> <p>NCT Service Plans</p>			
Children and families in need of additional help receive the right support at the right time which makes a difference to their lives	5.2 Further strengthen the partnership Early Help offer	<p>Director of Social Care AD CFSS & YOS</p> <p>ICB Head of Safeguarding/Designated Nurses representing health as a system</p> <p>WNC/ NNC ADs for Public Health Commissioning</p>	Timescales as per NSCP Early Help action plan	<p>Early Help Partnership Strategy and action plan</p> <p>CFSS Service Plan</p>	<p>Increased EHA submissions from schools, GPs and Health Visitors</p> <p>Better outcomes for children evidenced in more families receiving help early from a range of professionals</p>		
Children with additional and complex needs receive the right support at the right time which makes a difference to their lives	5.3 Appropriate and timely support for children with additional and complex needs	<p>NCT AD QA & Commissioning; ICB Senior Transformation Manager</p> <p>WNC/ NNC ADs Commissioning</p> <p>AD Corporate Parenting</p> <p>WNC and NNC ADs Adults Social Care</p> <p>WNC and NNC ADs Education</p>	<p>Mar 24</p> <p>Sept 23</p>	<p>West and North SEND Strategies and action plans</p> <p>CYP Transformation Programme</p> <p>CYP transformation programme</p>	<p>Reduction in the number of children with disabilities who become looked after and/or require acute care</p> <p>EHCP and EHC reviews shared in a timely manner with child/ families and considered by professionals involved with the child</p> <p>Pathway for accessing substance misuse, emotional well-being and mental health support is understood by all</p> <p>Swift access to appropriate support for children and support plan developed with family, network and professionals</p> <p>Multi agency QA activity (via NSCP Q&G subgroup) shows multi agency case discussions are used appropriately and have positive impact</p>		

NCT IMPROVEMENT PLAN

What will good look like	Improvement Priorities	Responsibility	By when	Linked plans	How will we know if we've made a difference? <i>Baselines Jan 23</i>	RAG	Progress Update
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Appropriate support and response for children who are exhibiting self injurious behaviour, suicide ideation, disordered eating, gender dysphoria Improve the consistency and quality of multi-agency decision making and ownership for children with complex needs to achieve positive outcomes for children 	<p>ICB Senior Transformation Manager WNC/ NNC AD Public Health Commissioning CYP Transformation Board Healthy Minds Healthy Brains pillar chair</p> <p>AD Corporate Parenting AD Safeguarding ICB Head of Safeguarding/Designated Nurses Ivan Balhatchet – Crime & Justice NPCC Lead</p>		NCT Service Plans			
Children in care and care leavers reach their potential in terms of educational attainment	<p>5.4 Increase access and attendance of small number of children in care currently not in appropriate education</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase sufficiency and quality of in county special school and alternative educational provision Care/Education pathway to be developed for children entering care and when moving placement to ensure that education needs are considered in timely way, prior to and immediately after children become looked after and moving placements Develop range of education, training and employment opportunities for post 16 children in care with additional needs, and care leavers Assessments for specific needs e.g. ASD/ADHD and SEND needs assessments are available to children in care and undertaken in a timely way 	<p>Director of Social Care AD Corporate Parenting</p> <p>NNC & WNC ADs for Education & for Commissioning</p> <p>Head of Virtual School</p> <p>ICB Senior Transformation Manager</p>	Sept 23	<p>Children in Care Strategy</p> <p>NCT Service Plans</p>	<p>Reduce length time in which any child in care is not in receipt of appropriate education</p> <p>Maintain at national average % of young people in care achieving 5 GCSE grade A*-C</p> <p>Maintain above national average care leavers who are EET</p> <p>Increase in numbers of apprenticeships, traineeships and employment opportunities for care leavers within NCT, NNC, WNC and partner agencies</p>		

6. Effective use of resources

NCT IMPROVEMENT PLAN

What will good look like	Improvement Priorities	Responsibility	By when	Linked plans	How will we know if we've made a difference? <i>Baselines Jan 23</i>	RAG	Progress Update
NCT commissioning and performance management has the best possible impact on outcomes for children	6.1 External review of commissioning and QA, performance management and assurance arrangements	NCT Chief Exec	May 23	QAB action log	Positive outcomes and value for money achieved		
Children in care are cared for in a home which meets their needs and improves their outcomes	6.2 Deliver sufficiency strategy action plan ensuring we have the right homes to meet the needs of our children and young people <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children and young people who live within residential care are provided with homes that are registered with a regulator appropriate for their needs Ensure cost of care is met appropriately Our ISA providers are registered with Ofsted (post 1st April 2023) 	Director of Social Care AD Quality Assurance & Commissioning AD Corporate Parenting NNC/WNC DCS NCT CEX	Aug 25 (project timescales in sufficiency strategy action plan)	Sufficiency Strategy and action plan	Increase in number of in house foster placements Increase in occupancy of in house residential homes Reduction in use of unregistered provision Improved placement stability <i>baseline 3+ moves in 12 months: 11%</i> <i>baseline same placement 2+ years / placed for adoption: 64.1%</i> Placement funding contributions are in line with other areas		
Older teenagers receive the right support and accommodation to meet their needs and help transition into adulthood	6.3 Appropriate range of accommodation and support is available and meet the needs of young people 16-25 years old <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work in partnership with Housing Needs to support accommodation requirements of 16/17 Youth Homelessness Views of young people who have experienced the Housing protocol to inform further developments and plans Housing support offer for care leavers 18+ and ensure any gaps in provision have actions to address 	NNC/WNC DCSs Director of Social Care WNC and NNC Housing ADs AD CFSS & YOS AD Corporate Parenting AD QA& Commissioning	September 23	16-17 homeless action plan NCT Service Plans	QA activity shows Care leavers are able to move into their own suitable accommodation at time that meets their needs 16-17 homeless young people receive an appropriate and timely response in accordance with their needs and views		



Northamptonshire Children's Trust

Self-Evaluation September 2022

Progress since Northamptonshire ILACS 2019

Our Vision:

“Children, young people and families at the heart of all we do - in every decision we make and every action we take”

Our Values:

- ❖ Be child focused and work with the whole family.
- ❖ Make a difference with trust and integrity.
- ❖ Concentrate on the best solution.
- ❖ Act with respect, kindness, and compassion.
- ❖ Communicate well.
- ❖ Do the best job of your life every single day.

Our Commitment to children and young people:

“What we do today affects your tomorrow. We promise to walk side by side with you”

Our Ambition:

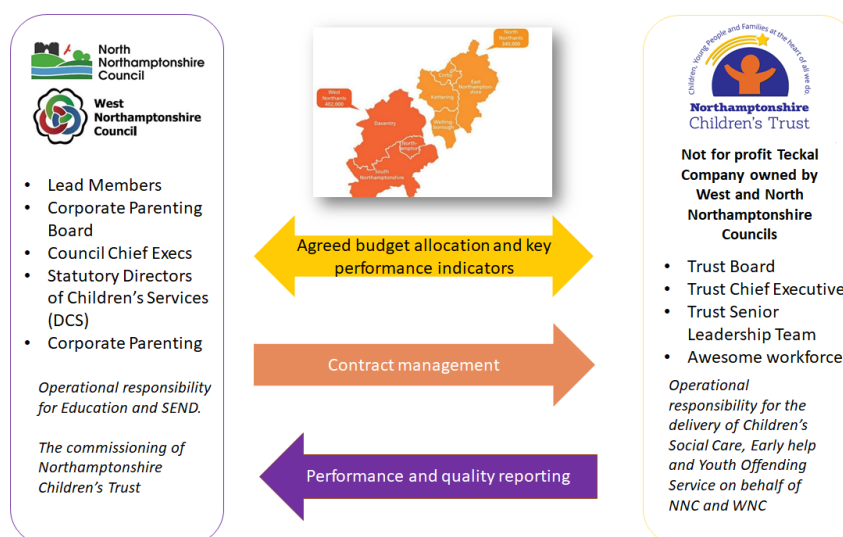
“Our ambition is to make a sustainable improvement to the lives of children, young people and families”

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Section 1 – Introduction

Northamptonshire Children’s Trust (NCT) delivers Children’s Early Help, Social Care and Youth Offending Services to West Northamptonshire (WNC) and North Northamptonshire (NNC) councils, serving the whole of Northamptonshire County since November 2020. In April 2021 Northamptonshire County Council was replaced by two unitary councils, WNC and NNC, each with a Lead Member for Children’s Services. The DCS was initially a joint post until summer 2022.



Since our 2019 ILACS we have had the following Ofsted monitoring visits, which document how we are improving experiences and outcomes for children and families:

- **January 2020:** Front door.
- **October 2020:** Focused Visit – delivery of child-centred practice and care within the context of restrictions placed on society during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **February 2021:** Children in Care, Placement Matching and Decision Making and Children with Disabilities who are looked after.
- **July 2021:** Child Protection (CP) and Child in Need (CiN).
- **November 2021:** Children in Care who are 16+, particularly planning for leaving care and Care Leavers.

There have also been the following Ofsted regulatory inspections:

- **November 2021:** Independent Fostering Agency– judged ‘Requires Improvement to be good’.
- **January/February 2022:** Voluntary Adoption Agency– judged ‘Good’
- We have also had inspections of all 5 of our Children's Homes- Grades: 4 x ‘Good’; 1 x ‘Requires Improvement to be Good’

This self-evaluation provides a summary of progress made against the findings of our 2019 ILACS; what we know about the quality and impact of our practice over the last 12 months, how we know it, and what we are doing to further improve.

This assessment reflects our Social Care Improvement Plan and Business Plan, addressing priorities identified following inspections, quality assurance activity and peer reviews. The Improvement Plan is regularly reported to the Northamptonshire Social Care Improvement Board, chaired by a Department for Education (DfE) appointed Independent Chair.

Section 2- Improvement in a challenging context

We are proud to have continued to drive and deliver improvements for children and families in Northamptonshire in a time of significant local, national, and global challenges:

- Global COVID-19 pandemic resulting in societal restrictions unprecedented in our times, and the impact of this on individuals, families, communities.
- Adaptation to virtual and hybrid ways of working as a result of the pandemic.
- War in Ukraine, withdrawal of allied troops from Afghanistan, and the associated impact on migration.
- Massive cost of living increases and impact on family income.
- Continued national shortage of social workers and other key worker professions, and an increasingly competitive labour market.
- A national placements market which is not meeting need – as identified in CMA report on Children’s Social Care¹ (March 22) and Independent Review of Children’s Social Care² (June 22).
- Brexit including the impact on the labour market.
- Local organisational changes – establishment of NCT, WNC and NNC.

During this time, we have achieved:

- **Improved quality of Social Care practice and management oversight**, which is helping to keep children safe, as evidenced in Ofsted visits and inspections, peer reviews and internal quality assurance.
- **More of our social worker posts are filled** 15.8% social worker vacancies in June 2022 (England average 17%) compared with 22.28% in October 2019 and no unallocated cases.
- **Improved working with our partners and a stronger strategic approach to early help, neglect and exploitation**; improved early help assessment, step down process and timeliness of support from NCT Children and Family Support Services.
- **An embedded quality assurance framework** working alongside practitioners to collaboratively reflect on practice, celebrate good practice and identify learning, which is ‘improving children’s experiences’³.
- **A permanent senior leadership team who ‘know the services well and are committed to improving the lives of children and young people’**⁴ bringing stability, positive culture change and sustained drive for continuous improvement.

In November 2021, the Children’s Commissioner for Northamptonshire advised the Minister ‘*Given the progress secured and trajectory the service is on, I still believe that a continuing commissioner presence with the statutory powers entailed is more than is necessary as things stand.*’

In January 2022, the DfE issued a revised statutory direction which included the appointment of an independent chair of the Council’s Children’s Service Improvement Board at the end of the Children’s Commissioner’s tenure.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/childrens-social-care-market-study-final-report/final-report>

² [Final Report - The Independent Review of Children's Social Care \(childrensocialcare.independent-review.uk\)](https://www.childrensocialcare.independent-review.uk)

³ Ofsted monitoring visits November 2021 and July 2021

⁴ Ofsted monitoring visit November 2021

Section 3 - Self-Evaluation at a glance

What difference have we made to Northamptonshire children since 2019?

- Children are safe and are experiencing better quality support and outcomes.
- Children and families now receive more effective help at an earlier stage, which is making a positive difference to their lives.
- Children and families receive a swifter, more appropriate and co-ordinated response to vulnerabilities, concerns and risks.
- Children's needs are now better understood and supported.
- The majority of our children are cared for in a stable placement that meets their needs and achieves good outcomes.
- More children have been supported to safely return home to their families.
- Care leavers and those who support them are now more likely to be clear on what their plans are seeking to achieve.
- Children and families are now more likely to have better experiences as a result of a more stable and sustained Social Care workforce.

What are we proud of?

- The strides we have made in strengthening our partnerships and developing early help.
- The good outcomes achieved by the vast majority of our children
- The achievements of Children in Care, including educational attainment, as celebrated at our first awards ceremony since 2017.
- Our awesome and resilient workforce who have kept children at the heart of all they do through some of the most challenging times in our living memory.
- The recognition of the quality and outcomes achieved by our Adoption Agency and Children's Homes.
- The fact that we know ourselves well and are focused on working together to continually improve.
- The positive, reflective, and empowering culture we have developed together which is making a difference to our practice and our workforce.

What do we want to do next?

- Continue to increase the consistency of good quality strengths-based relationship practice.
- Continue to listen to our children and have their voice at the centre of all we do.
- Enable more children to remain in or return to the care of their families.
- Continue working with partners on consistency in applying thresholds, ensuring proportionate and appropriate support to children and families.
- To continue our work with partners to have a greater impact for children at risk or involved in exploitation.
- To increase our access to good quality homes that can meet the needs and care for our children.
- Continue to work with system partners to ensure we have the best possible support for the mental health, employment, education and training, and accommodation needs of our Children in Care and care leavers.
- Empower more of our workforce, particularly those of diverse backgrounds, to develop their practice and careers in NCT.

Section 4 - Progress against 2019 ILACS Recommendations

We are confident that children are safe in Northamptonshire.

Compared to 2019, the needs of children and families are better understood and supported; their experiences and outcomes have improved. Whilst some children benefit from brilliant support, we know some still experience inconsistencies; we continue to work tirelessly to improve where we need to.

The embedded document provides a summary of the progress we have made against the 2019 ILACS recommendations.



progress on ILACS
2019 recommendatic

Section 5- Progress against our Strategic Priorities for Improvement

These are the areas we are focusing on to achieve our ambition of making a sustainable improvement to the lives of children, young people, and families. They reflect the thematic areas for improvement identified in the 2019 inspection and subsequent monitoring visits:



Our Ofsted Monitoring Visit (November 2021) found:

Senior leaders demonstrate in their recently updated self-assessment that they **know their services well** and are **committed to improving the lives of children and young people**. Improvement plans are realistic and continue to be implemented, with success, despite the ongoing challenges of the pandemic.

Our Ofsted Monitoring Visit (July 2021) found:

'SLT has an impressive energy and relentless commitment to improving the lives of children in Northamptonshire'

Excellent Leadership – Our improvement will be driven by a stable senior leadership team that provides strategic leadership and direction, clarity of the vision for the service and sets clear priorities and expectations. The senior leadership team will be visible to and engage with all staff.

- **Full, permanent NCT senior leadership team (SLT)** in place since April 2021 supported by strong NCT Board. All strategic and most service managers are permanent this provides stability, clarity of vision and relentless drive for improvement.

- In July 2022, we appointed NCT's first **Young Chief Exec**, who is currently in our care and aspires to be a social worker. She and Colin have agreed joint commitments and will develop the role together to ensure it is meaningful and able to have a positive impact on our organisation and practice.
- **Monthly QA board** chaired by NCT Chief Executive giving senior leadership oversight of practice in a systemic and consistent manner.
- **Strong line of sight of NNC/ WNC Lead Members and DCSs** through monthly strategic and operational groups, Social Care Improvement Board, QA assurance meeting, Practitioners Improvement Board.
- **Regular engagement and visibility** of SLT through open door approach, Chief Exec's 58-minute sessions, comms, attending team meetings and QA activity alongside practitioners.
- Senior leaders **championing recognition of good practice**, 'naming the issue', empowering colleagues to make improvements to systems and processes through open communication and collaborative working.
- Our workforce has clarity on **our vision, commitment and priorities**, developed through 58-minute sessions with further refinement by the Practitioners' Improvement Board and Equalities Steering Group.
- 9-month **Leadership Development Programme** completed for all NCT managers (including SLT) with positive impact on practice and culture. This was developed with University of Northampton, Research in Practice and Beyond Behaviour (Functional Fluency) and **focused on enabling managers to empower each other, staff, children, and families and build a positive culture**.
- The Leadership Development Programme consisted of monthly sessions led by the Chief Executive, one to one development sessions and cross organisational learning sets which included an incredibly **well received session designed and delivered by our Care Leaver Apprentices on Empathetic Leadership**. The programme set expectations and provided clarity on a strengths based, collaborative approach. Improvement in leadership skills was reported by delegates.
- Other **leadership development opportunities**, including Research in Practice's Practice Supervisor Development and Practice Leaders Programme, mentoring, coaching, Signs of Safety Practice Champion training, masterclasses and bespoke support from Partners in Practice and Research in Practice.
- Clarity of standards and expectations through **Practice Model, Practice Standards and Supervision Policy** (refreshed and relaunched September 2021) and best practice examples shared on Learning Hub.

Impact

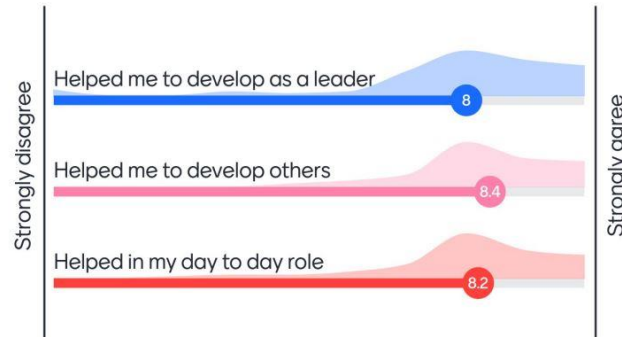
- **Continuing improvement trajectory** evidenced through Ofsted monitoring visits; as a result of strong support, positive challenge and drive for improvement from SLT, Lead Members, DCSs, NCT Board and Social Care Improvement Board
- Positive feedback received from colleagues attending the **Chief Executive's 58 minutes sessions** and via our Practitioners' Improvement Board about **SLT being visible, positive, and inspiring, and that communication has improved**.
- **QA activity shows an improvement in the quality of supervision**, and there is ongoing work with managers to ensure quality is consistently good across the board. Ofsted (July 2021) noted some signs of initial positive impact of revised supervision recording.
- **71% of Collaborative Reflective Practice Discussions (CRPDs) in last 12 months** scaled management oversight and supervision at 6 and above (out of 10)⁵ July 2022. Of this 12% scaled at 9-10; CRPDs since September 2020.

⁵ On a scale of 0-10, where 10 means management oversight is timely, effective and has a positive impact on the direction of work with the child and their family, and 0 means that management oversight is either missing or is ineffective

- **Staff consistently feedback** that they feel supported by managers in QA activity, peer reviews and Ofsted monitoring visits.

February 2022 Leadership Development Programme participant feedback

Leadership Development Programme



'It has helped me be more supportive in supervision. I had found some of the practitioners had a fixed mindset, so I am helping them to develop a growth mindset' - Manager about our Leadership Development Programme

What does this mean for children and families?

- Children and families are more likely to receive better quality, more timely support that meets their needs because our workforce is empowered, well supported, and clear about what is expected of them and what we're aiming to achieve.

Development of the Corporate Parenting Board (CPB)

- Newly elected Unitary councillors were provided with training on corporate parenting, safeguarding and the function of the CPB.
- Further training 'Corporate Parenting Through the Eyes of a Child' delivered in December 2021 to enhance CPB members' understanding of roles and responsibilities and the lived experience of Children in Care.
- Lead Member for WNC and joint chair of CPB has participated in the LGA Leadership of CPB training.
- The NCT performance scorecard is regularly reviewed by the CPB and training of Board members has been provided to help them understand the performance data and enable them to challenge effectively.
- Having two care leavers as members of the CPB provides a helpful perspective to the Board and challenges officers and members to be thinking differently.
- Updated terms of reference written in a young person friendly way.
- CPB is undertaking deep dive sessions on particular topics, led by subject matter experts including children and young people.
- CPB links closely with quarterly health network meetings, Virtual School Advisory Group and Children in Care and Care Leavers' participation groups.
- WNC and NNC Assistant Directors for Housing and Communities are members of the Board.

Impact

- CPB members' understanding of specific issues faced by children and young people in care has been strengthened.
- Council tax discount/ reduction scheme for care leavers in place from April 2021 NNC and WNC.
- Timeliness of Children in Care health reviews escalated within health services.

- An important function of the Board is to celebrate the achievements of children and young people and this is done at each Board meeting
- Young people’s participation on the board has led to officers being required to be more specific about what positive outcomes mean and has challenged officers and members’ thinking.

‘The corporate parenting board has been strengthened recently and is showing some signs of impact in improving services and support for care leavers.’ Ofsted Monitoring Visit November 21

What does this mean for children and families?

- The achievements, needs and issues experienced by Children in Care and Care Leavers are better understood by decision makers.

Recruit, Retain and Develop an Awesome Workforce – Improvement for children and families will be delivered by our workforce, who are therefore our most valuable resource

Recruitment

- **Significant improvements have been made since 2019** and as per the national picture, our workforce stability challenges are greater in duty and assessment and safeguarding social work teams. Vacancies, agency staff and caseloads are closely monitored, and managed service teams have been used to mitigate.
- We have **expanded the routes into social work roles** offering student placements, Step Up placements, frontline students (from September 22) who will become our NQSWs, SW apprenticeships and NQSWs.
- **Further 10 practice educators** being trained to support student placements.
- **Dedicated NCT recruitment team** and successful partnership with Opus providing relentless drive. All potential candidates are offered a conversation with the Chief Exec. **Improved processes to ensure social work vacancies** are filled quickly – ideally with permanent staff but utilising agency as required.
- The **partnership between NCT and Opus achieved a ‘Highly Commended’** award at the Annual PPMA Excellence in People Management 2022 Awards.

Successes:

- **4 social workers recruited** from outside the UK in 21/22; **6 joined April- July; 3 due to start in September**; 1 due to start in Jan and further 8 in pre- employment checks.
- **26 NQSWs** joined in 21/22 and 15 to date 22/23; 12 NQSWs completed their ASYE in May 22, with 11 more due to complete in September 2022. Positive feedback continues to be received about NQSWs from parents/ carers, children, and colleagues/ partners.
- **8 Step up Graduates** started as NQSWs in May 2021.
- **10 Step Up to Social Work students started** in January 2022, 6 were current NCT employees.
- **3 social work apprentices** in safeguarding service, who are due to qualify in June 2023.

Retention and development

- Improved social worker **career path** with senior social worker posts and increased number of Advanced Practitioner (AP) roles.
- Robust senior oversight on **caseloads**, with action taken to ensure they remain manageable, whilst also ensuring all children have an allocated worker. Including redeployment, managed service teams, temporary assessment (non-case holding) social workers. We have increased the

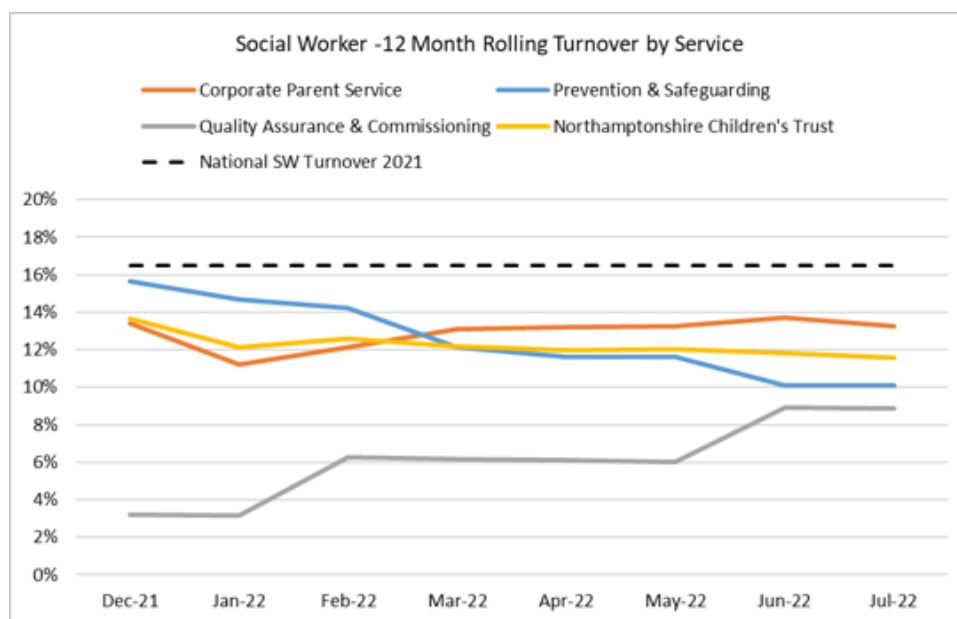
Advanced Practitioner posts to one per team. Social work teams are also each supported by a family support worker and business support colleague.

- **Continuous professional development (CPD)** of our workforce is strengthened via our online learning hub, providing access to NCT specific training programmes, resources, and good practice and **bespoke CPD to meet our needs**, developed by our workforce. Research in Practice and Making Research Count membership provides access to evidence, resources, tools, and training. From November 2022, the transfer of L&D functions from NNC to NCT will provide opportunity for a more flexible, cohesive and bespoke CPD offer for our workforce.
- **Formal Teaching Partnership** progressing following successful DfE bids for 21/22 and 22/23.
- Additional **Signs of Safety Practice Champions** trained and Signs of Safety training available for the whole workforce.
- Approx. **800 nominations** were received for **the inaugural NCT workforce awards** in December 2021.
- **Salary scale pay increments** introduced for all NCT staff on 1st April 2021 and was awarded again in 2022, plus 2% pay award in April 2022.
- From Dec 2021, a **retention bonus** was introduced for social worker posts in priority services, **positively received by staff**.
- Encouraging retention across NCT by **changing our culture to being strengths based and empowering**; improving processes and systems; investing in our staff, through our Leadership Development Programme and professional development opportunities. The implementation of our **'conditions for success'** are expected to improve our retention of staff.
- **Additional Advanced Practitioner (AP)** positions created in front line social work teams, managing a small number of cases as well as supporting less experienced team members to increase knowledge and skills through mentoring, coaching, support, and sharing their practice expertise.
- Further **career development opportunities** through the creation of consultant social worker and deputy consultant social worker roles for our Frontline hubs.



Impact

- 15.8% social worker vacancies in June 2022 (England average 17%) compared with 22.28% in October 2019.
- Our turnover rate of permanent social workers (11.57% 12 month rolling average) is lower than national average 16.6%, across all services (July 2022).



- 65% of agency and permanent social workers have been in post since NCT was formed (November 2020); and 71% of our permanent social workers started prior to November 2020.
- 20% of agency and permanent social workers have moved into more senior roles since November 2020.
- 6 NQSW's have moved into Qualified social worker positions in DAAT since January 2022.
- 15 previous NQSWs have now progressed into management roles.
- No unallocated cases in July 2022 compared with 199 in June 2019.
- Number of social workers above caseload targets⁶ has reduced across the board: June 2019 DAAT 25 above, safeguarding 37 above, Children in Care 7 above. Compared with July 2022 DAAT 12 above, safeguarding 18 above, Children in Care 3 above.

What does this mean for children and families?

- Children and families are now more likely to have better experiences as a result of a more stable and sustained Social Care workforce.

Equalities, Diversity, Inclusion & Equity

- Our **Equalities Forum** was set up at the request of colleagues, to inform, educate and support each other and provide a safe space to share experiences and views. **Open for the whole workforce** and attendance has been up to 110. A real success of the forum are sessions designed and delivered by colleagues based on lived experiences, including My Gender and Me; My Prejudice and Me; My Life in a Bubble (living with Autism); My Identity, Heritage and Me.
- **Dyslexia network** was set up following My Dyslexia and Me session .
- **Equalities week** (Nov 2021) ran **12 sessions** open for all to attend; Practice related training with a focus on equalities; 'Me and My...' lived experience sessions; fun session on learning sign

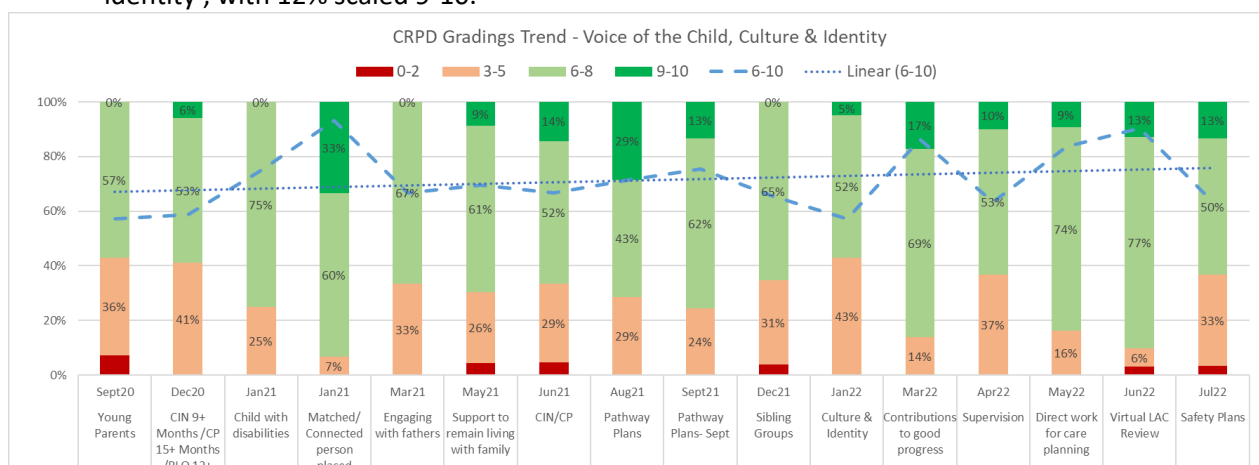
⁶ Caseload targets are DAAT: 35; Safeguarding: 22; Children in Care: 20

language. The week also included a virtual exhibition of our culture and identity, a map of NCT's heritage, equalities conversations in teams and sharing of resources. Good level of engagement from workforce and positive feedback received. **Equalities Week 2022** is taking place again in September with a greater range of sessions being delivered by practitioners and foster carers.

- **Equalities Influencers** throughout NCT to **champion equalities issues**, share resources and best practice, signpost colleagues and listen to any concerns. Equalities Influencers in place across service and role description agreed.
- **Culturally sensitive practice training** developed by members of steering group with young people, available for all practitioners.
- **Workforce communications** increasingly sharing and celebrating a more diverse range of events and festivals.
- **'Leading in Colour'** session held as part of Leadership Development Programme in March 2022 – positive feedback received.
- 3 managers successfully applied **Black and Asian Leadership Initiative (BALI)** programme in 22/23.
- NCT asked to be part of **Research in Practice anti-racist practice resources and conference**.
- We have recently established an **over-representation steering group** to specifically look at children who are overrepresented in matters of concern e.g.: violent crime, CSE, CCE, Children in Care, exclusions. We will reflect on our current approaches and determine what needs to change to ensure any support is tailored to the cultural, diverse and inclusion needs of each individual child and their family.

Impact

- 77% feel equality, diversity and inclusion has become more of a priority since we became NCT.
- 66% feel supported to progress their career in NCT.
- Membership of the forum is building confidence to work with diverse families.
- Since the forum started, it has been found that E & D is not just an overlooked agenda item / afterthought, it is becoming more prominent as a discussion topic.
- Collaborative Reflective Practice Discussions (CRPDs) since September 2020 show an improvement trend for voice of the child, culture and identity.
- 74% of CRPDs over last 12 months scaled 6 and above out of 10⁷ for voice of the child, culture and identity ; with 12% scaled 9-10.



⁷ On a scale of 0-10, where 10 means the child's voice is clear throughout their record, their cultural and identity needs are explicitly captured and understood, and these elements are considered and influence our work with the child and their family, and 0 means we cannot hear the child's voice and their cultural and identity needs are not understood, considered or supported

"It's one of the most inspirational, informative meetings I've attended. I am truly humbled to have listened to the experiences of these courageous and awesome people". Member of NCT workforce about the Equalities Forum

What does this mean for children and families?

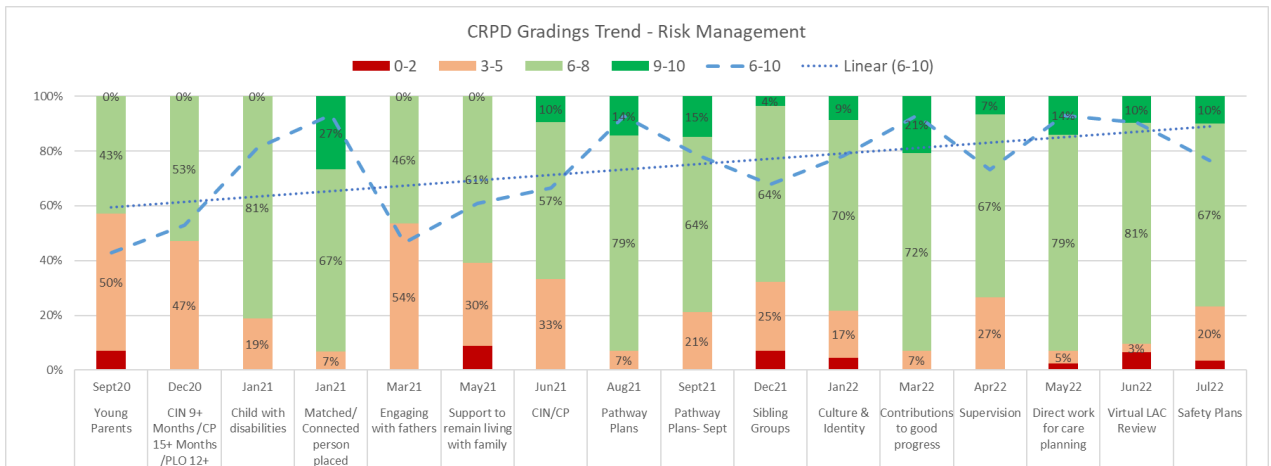
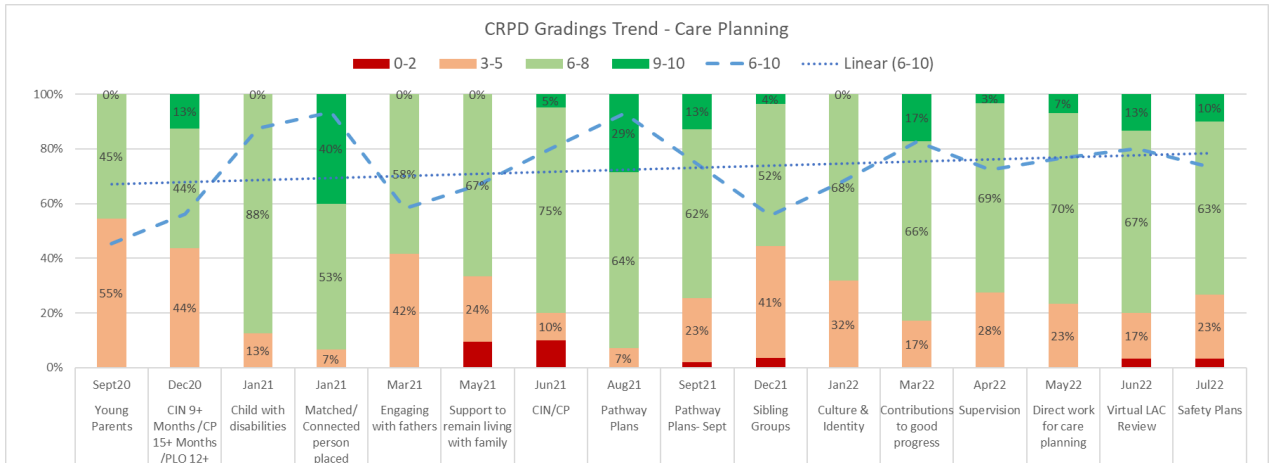
- Children and families' individual needs are now better understood and supported.

Strong Relationship Based Practice- We are focused upon evidence-based practice that works with children, young people, and families to help them achieve positive changes. Our practice model is child-centred at its heart and evidenced through all we do.

- Relentless focus on **improving consistency in the quality of assessments and plans.**
- **Increasing confidence and skills in using Signs of Safety.** Additional Practice Champions trained, resources and best practice on our Learning Hub and Signs of Safety training (including bespoke and bite size) available for all workforce and partners. Following short term funding we have now been able to mainstream SofS AP and Project Manager posts. University of Northampton undertaking 12–18-month research project into the **impact of Signs of Safety in NCT.**
- **Partners in Practice** have provided support alongside services to improve practice, bespoke support from Research in Practice for 7 team managers and 3 service managers. Additional 20 managers supported through this programme from Jan 2022, and coaching/ mentoring from PIP and Social Work Academy. Colleagues identified for Frontline Pathways programme 22/23.
- **Good practice celebrated and shared** through a range of channels such as: Learning Hub, emails from Chief Exec, PSW newsletter, 58 minute sessions.
- **Refreshed and relaunched our Practice Standards, Practice Model and Supervision Policy** to provide clarity of expectations. Ofsted (July 2021) noted some signs of initial positive impact of revised supervision recording.
- We benefit from **strong engagement of children and young people through our formal participation groups** - Children in Care Council, Care Leavers Council and Shooting Stars for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), Young Inspectors, and the recently formed Dynamic Youth (children who are subject of CIN or CP plan) whose voice shape our vision, transformation and review of services.
- Reinforcement that **voice of the child** is considered and recorded by all practitioners. Engagement of children and young people has been expanded through commissioning the **Mind of My Own app** and establishment (from April 2022) of groups for children who are the subject of CIN and CP. Our **CYP Engagement Strategy** is helping us to focus on improving our engagement at individual, service, and strategic levels to improve practice and support.
- We have an excellent **Advocacy service** who support children and young people with plans, meetings, complaints etc. This includes specialist support for children with SEND.
- We have developed '**language that cares**' to assist us in using language that is appropriate and meaningful to children and young people, rather than jargon or labelling language; our QA activity shows more case records are being written to the child which is helping them to be more child and outcome focused.
- **Cultural competency training** developed with input from children and young people, available for all practitioners.
- Further training has been made available to support **working with families to develop safety plans.**
- '**We are NCT...Being great at what we do**' campaign where each month has a focus on particular areas of practice with resources and good practice shared.
- Family Support Workers deliver **direct work opportunities** alongside social workers and offer engagement activities with children forming **positive and meaningful relationships.**
- **APs, now in every front-line team,** are supporting colleagues in strengthening quality of practice.

Impact

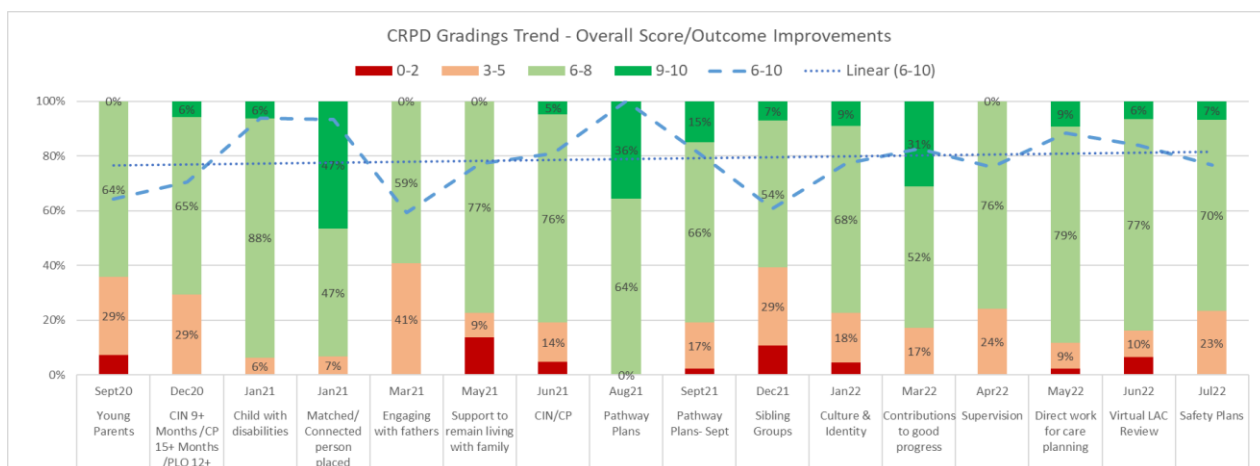
- 75% of CRPDs: audits over last 12 months scaled 6 and above (out of 10)⁸ for care planning quality (July 2022); with 10% scaled at 9-10.
- 81% of CRPDs in last 12 months scaled risk management at 6 and above (out of 10)⁹ July 2022. 11% scaled at 9-10.
- 81% of CRPDs over last 12 months scaled 6 and above (out of 10)¹⁰ for outcomes (July 2022); with 12% scaled at 9-10.
- CRPDs since September 2020 show an improvement trend for outcomes, risk management and care planning.



⁸ On a scale of 0-10 where 10 means the child has a good quality, outcome focused plan which is progressing effectively in a timely way, and 0 means that the child has a plan which is not clear about outcomes, is not progressing quickly enough, and is not of a standard we would expect for the child

⁹ On a scale of 0-10 where 10 means any risks to the child have been identified quickly, responded to in a timely way, we have worked alongside the child's network to manage the risk and the child is safe, and 0 means that we have not identified risk, our response has been too slow, the child's network has not been supported well enough to manage the risk, and the child is at risk of harm

¹⁰ Thinking about the overall experience of the child and the impact of our work with them over the last 6 months; on a scale of 0-10, if 10 means the child is safe and happy, enjoys good health and wellbeing, and their outcomes show they are resilient and fulfilling their potential, and 0 means the child is not safe and healthy, has low resilience, and are not fulfilling their potential



What does this mean for children and families?

- Children are receiving timely support that better meets their needs.

Insightful Quality Assurance and Learning – We know ourselves and our practice well through rigorous quality assurance.

- **Strong and improving Quality Assurance**, which social workers value, with oversight of a monthly Quality Assurance Board, chaired by Chief Exec, which reviews feedback from service led performance clinics, CRPDs, practice weeks, voice of the child, learning from complaints and escalations, and other QA activity.
- **Practice Weeks (including our Young Inspectors and teams drawn from across services)** have been held across the majority of services providing a rich, qualitative picture of practice. Young Inspectors design their methodology and feedback their findings directly to senior leaders, providing valuable insight and ideas for improvement. Action plans have been developed to implement actions.
- Developed our **quality and performance analysis at team level**. This includes continuing to develop managers' skills and confidence in quality assuring work alongside practitioners, focusing on the impact of our work on children's experiences and outcomes.
- We have benefitted from expertise of our **Partners in Practice** and **Regional Improvement and Innovation Alliance** to provide objective views of the quality of our practice and identify improvement actions, which we have implemented
- **Learning from quality assurance** is shared and bespoke continuous professional development delivered to improve practice, for example culturally sensitive practice training. Briefings used to disseminate audit findings.
- The **quality of our quality assurance has improved**, through training, bespoke support, and reflective moderation, meaning we have confidence in what it tells us.
- NCT quality assurance activity generally reflects findings of peer reviews and Ofsted visits and **moderation, reflective discussions and training is helping to increase the quality of QA** activity undertaken by managers.

Impact

- Practitioners report that CRPDs and Practice Weeks provide positive reflective learning experiences.
- Ofsted monitoring visits (July and November 2021) identified our comprehensive quality assurance framework is improving children's experiences.
- CRPDs since September 2020 show an improvement trend for overall outcomes for children.

"I have learnt so much this week and it has been such a pleasure to not only witness great practice, but also the strong relationships the team have with their young people, it was lovely to see! I have definitely took some ideas back, that we can use in our team"

**Leaving Care Practice week team member.
Sept 22.**

What does this mean for children and families?

- Children and families are experiencing better quality support and outcomes.

Healthy Partnerships – Effective partnership working is essential to good practice

- **Strengthened strategic partnerships** through NSCP, Social Care Improvement Board and CYP Transformation Board (ICS).
- **NSCP Early Help, Neglect and Exploitation strategies** in place and action plans being developed / driven by NSCP sub groups.
- Exploitation strategy and action plan informed by **multi agency Tackling Child Exploitation project** involving Research in Practice, Children's Society and University of Bedfordshire.
- **Early Help Strategy and Action plan** informed by Dept. Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Early Help System Guide and DWP Reducing Parental Conflict Planning Tool.
- **Early Help Strategic Board** and West and North networks established with positive levels of attendance, continuous professional development, and networking.
- Projects supported by Public Health (PH) funding improving **mental health and wellbeing** of care leavers and children in NCT foster care.
- **Partner SofS, EHA and thresholds training** being delivered.
- **2 education posts** in place in the MASH to provide additional support to schools.
- **Closer working relationships between DCT and Adult Social Care** and processes and timescales for children referred to Adult Social care have been strengthened.
- **Improved working with unitary Housing leads** – NCT CFSS has led on 16/17-year-olds Housing Options / Homelessness establishing a steering group, action plan informed by colleagues at Department for Levelling up, Housing and Communities and joint protocol for 16/17-year-olds refreshed.
- **Improved multi agency working and co-ordination** through establishment of partnership missing steering group.
- **Multi agency resource panel** and improving use of multi-disciplinary teams have improved shared responsibilities for children's placements.
- **Strong partnership with Homes 2 Inspire**, provider of our residential care block contract, and focus on strengthening partnerships with other local and specialist placement providers.

Impact

- Working together to develop and agree strategies has led to a shared understanding of issues facing children, young people, and families, what we are collectively seeking to achieve and shared responsibilities for doing so.
- Strengthened relationships means any issues are identified and resolved more quickly, and good practice and learning is shared.

- Improved co-ordination of work to support children and families across agencies.

What does this mean for children and families?

- Children and families receive a swifter and more appropriate response to concerns and risks; and children now receive a more co-ordinated and appropriate response to their vulnerabilities.

Robust and Effective Resource Management – We understand the key drivers of the budget and budget managers understand the financial impact of their decisions. Budget managers are equipped with support and systems to effectively monitor and forecast.

- We are dealing with the **national placement sufficiency challenge to improve experiences and outcomes for children** and achieve better value for money. With success to date in increasing NCT mainstream and resilience foster carers in 21/22; increasing number of external providers on our frameworks; improved quality of our NCT fostering agency; delivering 5 NCT Children’s Homes; adding an additional home to our block contract; commissioning of two new emergency Children’s Homes and YMCA supported accommodation; bidding for DfE capital funding in partnership with trusted and ethical partner; improving support to sustain placements.
- **Work to improve the efficiency and effectiveness** of placements, commissioning, and brokerage processes, following external review by People Too.
- NCT Fostering recruitment and marketing strategy with **clear plan of recruitment activity** in 22/23.
- Working with WNC and NNC to secure **additional properties and capital funding** to increase residential care provision.
- **Collaborative redesign** of short breaks provision for children with disabilities to enable more of the right support at the right time.
- Improvements being made to organisational **processes and procedures** to improve efficiencies and experiences for workforce, including freeing up time for practitioners and frontline managers.
- Improvement in **budget oversight and forecasting** supported by Finance and Resources in place from April 2021. Effective use of resources has enabled us to **commission managed service teams** to address capacity issues. Like all areas we are facing significant pressures on placement budgets due to the national sufficiency challenges.
- NCT is considered a **responsible Data Controller** for the purposes of the UK GDPR, following ICO self-assessment, and have met standards required.
- NHS Data Security & Protection **compliance**.
- **98.3% of NCT’s workforce had completed Data Protection Essentials & Cyber Security training** as of June 2022. This meets and exceeds the NHS DSPT compliance requirement of 95% of total workforce.

Impact

- To date we have secured an additional 11 residential care beds for sole use of NCT by the end of 2022, including in emergency/ urgent situations.
- The proportion of Children in Care for 2.5+years in the same placement for 2+years/ placed for adoption has increased from 61% in 2019 to 68.3% in 2022; our focus is on reducing the proportion of children who have had 3+ moves in the last 12 months.
- 94.7% of care leavers are in suitable accommodation (YTD July 22) which is above the England and stat neighbour average.

- Net gain of 2 NCT fostering households in 22/23 despite challenges of the pandemic and national shortage of carers.
- Of 65 children who had received therapeutic support directly/via carer at end of June 6 (9%) had experienced a placement breakdown against a baseline of 30%<.
- NCT foster carers who have completed Therapeutic Parenting with a clinical psychologist reported going from a 70% chance that the placement would end, to a 70% chance it will continue.
- Review and negotiation of existing placements has resulted in better suited support for children and young people's needs and achieved £1.2m savings in 21/22.
- People Too review of placements commissioning and brokerage (February 2022) found:

'In some areas, NCT is managing, and meeting need as effectively as comparators. Despite this, some intractable issues are present that require creative and innovative solutions.

Leadership, insight, and analysis is allowing NCT to focus on the right things, with many plans in flight to address existing deficits.

What does this mean for children and families? The majority of our children are cared for in stable placements that meet their needs and achieve good outcomes.

Section 6- What difference are we making for the children we support?

Children in need of Early Help

What do we know about the quality and impact of our practice?

- Improved partnership approach, driven by NSCP Early Help Strategy as highlighted above, is enabling a more co-ordinated and effective early help offer across Northamptonshire.
- A simplified, more accessible EHA and Support Plan, developed with partners, was launched in February 2022.
- Permanent Children & Family Support Services (CFSS) AD has strengthened leadership, providing a clear and robust framework for overseeing the quality and impact of the service, ensuring it is child-centred from the moment we start working with a child.
- One referral pathway for external partners through Partnership Coordinators, integrated into the MASH and simplified step-down process has enabled children and families to receive the support they need more quickly.
- The strengthened and enhanced Partnership co-ordinator roles in MASH enables more children and families to be supported early with the right level of intervention that meets their needs promoting right support, right time, right service principles.
- All children worked with are seen alone at least once per month, their voice is heard and lived experience is incorporated into support plans. This is monitored by team managers and supervisors and progressed in team meetings and regular peer support/group supervision sessions.
- We understand that strong anti-discriminatory practice has a positive impact on children and young people, strengthening their positive sense of identity, and that they can participate fully when their diverse needs are understood and met. This practice is promoted through case reflection in supervision, group supervision activities and team meetings.
- Significant improvement in number of families achieving outcomes via Supporting Families Programme in 21/22 compared with previous years.
- All CFSS staff are fully Signs of Safety trained and complete annual safeguarding training; and senior practitioners and managers are Signs of Safety Practice Champions. The use of Graded Care Profile resources is encouraged to support practitioners to identify and evidence neglect.
- We've implemented a CFSS performance scorecard and QA activity to better understand activity and impact.
- Families in Corby (area of high deprivation) are able to access additional targeted commissioned support through Corby Children's Centres, which achieves positive impact for families.
- Since its inception in June 2021, CFSS' Family Solutions team has improved children's lives by working in partnership with families and other agencies to strengthen family resilience and achieve sustainable change, and enabled children/young people to remain within their own family.

CFSS

<u>Partnership Co-ordinator</u>	<u>Strengthening Families</u>	<u>Young People's Service</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole Family Working • Drive EHA • Community Connectors • Support Network VCSE • Partnership Collaboration • Training • Events / Programme Delivery • MASH Contribution • Initial support to families 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole Family Working • Shared delivery with partners • Children Centre Activity • Parenting Programmes • Domestic abuse support groups • Children with additional needs - SEND Support • Domestic abuse support groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole Family Working • Contextual safeguarding -Exploitation • Missing RHI • Attendance & Exclusions • Gangs / Crime • Youth Homelessness • Family Solutions – Edge of Care • Mentoring Support Team

“I have had a lot of troubles this year with my mental health and wellbeing, also K my daughter has had a lot of struggles this year, but Jo has been there to help and support both of us. We are sad that your involvement is finishing but like all good things they have to end, we cannot thank you enough for your time effort patience and understanding it means so much to all of us.”

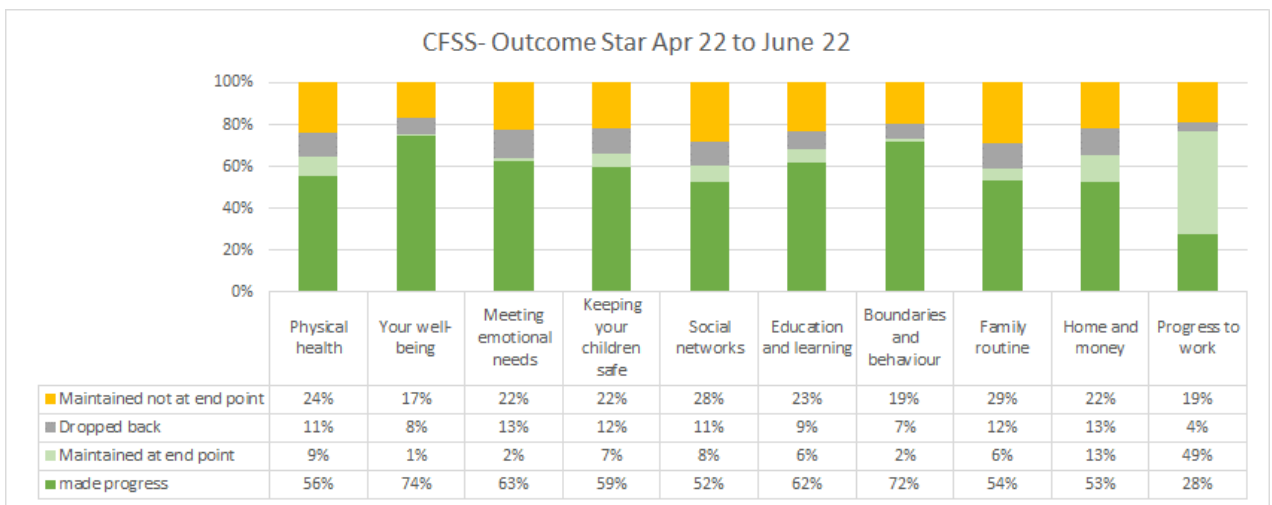
Letter from a parent to CFSS

How do we know?

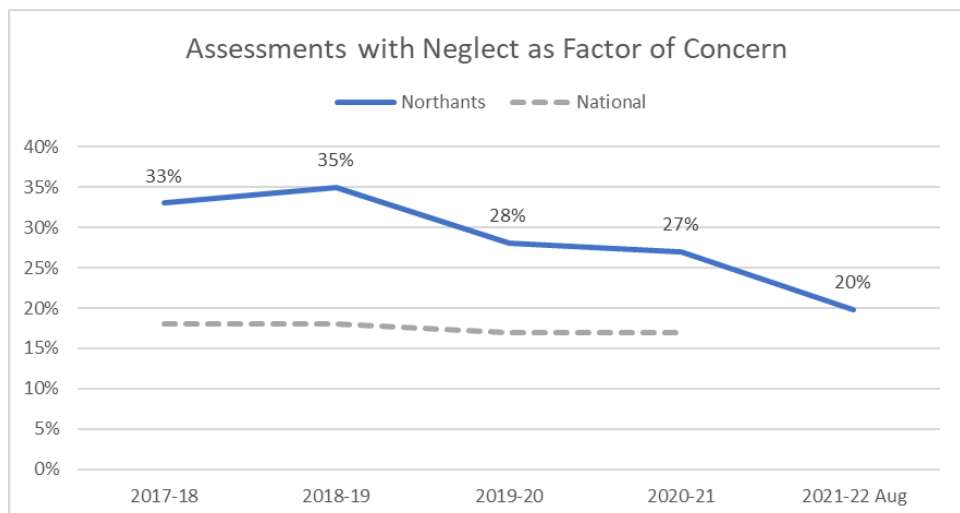
- More timely intervention with 82% of families allocated a CFSS worker within 2 days of receipt (YTD July 2022).
- 100% Strengthening Families payment by results target achieved 21/22 and on target to reach 100% for 22/23.
- 63% families as successful closure to CFSS (July 2022).
- Only 4% of children escalated to CP and 4% to CiN with 12 months of CFSS EHA (YTD June 2022).
- 63% of children (n. 79) at risk of care remained at home following support from the Family Solutions team (July 2022).
- 66% of young people and families supported by Family Solutions Team (edge of care) reported improvements (July 2022).
- **Partners in Practice Review (January 2022)** found that Partnership Coordinators are “*very experienced and passionate about the role of EH and the impact that this level of support and intervention can have on children and families.*”
- **CFSS Practice Week (February 2022)** findings included:
 - 67% of children considered were scaled 7, 8, or 9 which shows that these children have assessments and plans which demonstrate good multi agency support is in place.
 - Children’s assessments and plans evidence good multi agency working. CFSS workers are motivated, dedicated, and skilled at building relationships; they are working alongside partners with some complex families, and consent is managed appropriately.
 - A CFSS strength is finding support in the community for families – alongside this there needs to be more focused work exploring the family network, finding the safety there, and engaging family members in safety planning; this will help families be their own resource to sustain change.
 - Practitioners work in an open, honest way and children and families told the Practice Week team they appreciated this; they trusted the workers because of this. In every

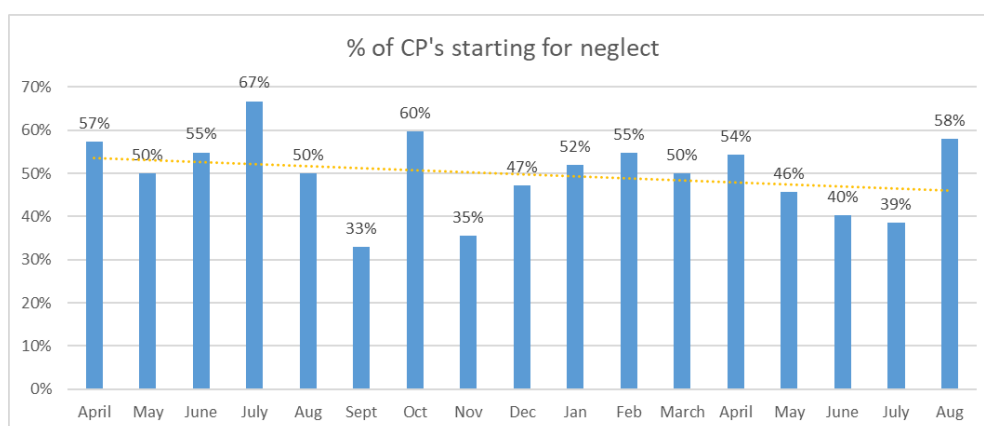
piece of work the Practice Week Team looked at, practitioners knew and understood the individual needs of each child in the family.

- The timeliness and quality of supervision and management oversight was variable on the children’s records reviewed and discussed. Managers are knowledgeable about children’s circumstances and always available for case discussions; sometimes these are not captured on the child’s record.
- The Practice Week Team saw multiagency practice in CFSS that supported better outcomes for children and young people and examples of outstanding CFSS practice were seen.
- Over 70% of families accessing support at Corby Children’s Centres reported reduction in isolation, increased understanding of child development and relationships with their child, greater level of support from community services.
- Over 50% of families supported by CFSS in Q1 22/23 made progress in all outcome star domains, except progress to work where 28% made progress and 49% maintained (see graph below).



Earlier and better identification of neglect means we have made some headway with closing the gap between Northamptonshire and National data, and know there is a way to go (graphs below)





What does this mean for children and families?

- Children and families now receive appropriate help at an earlier stage, which is making a difference to their lives.

What are we doing to further improve?

- CFSS Service Plan shows key performance indicators for the service, with timescales to ensure the momentum for improvement is maintained.
- Management oversight on casework was identified in Practice Week as an area for improvement. This will be managed through case supervision observation as part of CFSS QA Activity.
- Strengthening of communication, safety planning, documented family stories at step down to avoid families telling stories again and to help CFSS to pick up quickly.
- Increase use of Family Network Meetings to work with the child's networks to help build the safety plan.
- Improve age-appropriate engagement in team around the family meetings.
- Improve how we use the voice of the child and families to inform changes in service delivery.
- CFSS Staff will be offered Level 4 Accreditation in Working with Complex Families to improve their competence and capabilities for improving outcomes for children.
- Solution Focused Practice training is planned for Autumn 2022.
- Developing closer working relationships between councils' school attendance support teams and the Strengthening Families team to facilitate a seamless approach to addressing school attendance and behaviour issues, including increasing use of EHAs by school attendance.

Children and young people experiencing risks from outside of the home and exploitation

What do we know about the quality and impact of our practice?

- **Improved partnership approach**, driven by NSCP Exploitation Strategy as highlighted above, is enabling a more co-ordinated and effective response across Northamptonshire.
- RISE (Reducing Incidents of Sexual Exploitation) and Missing Teams moved into the NCT Young People's Service (September 2020) to ensure a **continuum of support across tiers**, meaning our response to missing and exploitation can target both high and medium risk. This will enable **high level contextual support** right through to prevention work.
- All children assessed as high risk of sexual exploitation receive a **health, police and allocated NCT practitioner as a minimum**.

- **Multi agency RISE school's prevention package** commenced in September 2021 including staff training, and Sarah's story (CSE survivor) shared from year 7 and a parent's event. Schools are using this for lesson plans and 3 schools have requested additional support re groups of children where there are emerging exploitation concerns at a lower level.
- **Exploitation / Missing training tailored for Children's Homes** delivered to 2 NCT homes and 54 external placement providers in Q1 22/23. This has been beneficial for relationship building and indirectly supporting our children in care.
- **Northamptonshire Police are leading Operation Makesafe**, supported by partners and local businesses, which aims to **raise awareness of Child Sexual Exploitation within the business community** including hotels, taxi companies, fast food outlets and licensed premises. Operation HOTELWATCH has also been set up to ensure that hoteliers are both aware of and proactive in tackling CSE/CCE and potential linked offences that criminals may either carry out or seek to facilitate on their premises. Additional training targeted at hotels that fail test purchases or where there are other concerns.
- **CE Specialist Nurse continues to act as a source of expertise** for health agencies across the county. Including a **liaison line for advice and support to practitioners**, dissemination of relevant research and resources to health agencies and provision of safeguarding supervision and training to health practitioners across the health economy. Also representing NHFT/RISE at the Vulnerable Adolescent Panel to give health advice and recommendations for the lead professionals as appropriate.
- **Young people** supported by RISE **receive an up-to-date, in-depth health assessment** offered either face to face in school/clinic or via telephone/video. Emerging and unmet health needs are addressed quickly.
- **Good communication is evident between the Young People's Service, RISE case workers and health professionals** to identify any emerging needs including sexual health, emotional health, trauma, physical health, drug and alcohol, smoking cessation, sleep, eating disorders, bereavement, ADHD/ASD referrals.
- We take a **"whole family approach"** to support the young person and we offer support to families in mitigating risks that their child faces, such as by increased supervision, or supporting the CYP into alternative peer networks.
- **Trained all Young People's Service and Family Solutions practitioners** in exploitation, RISE, and to conduct home return interviews.
- **Implemented partnership Vulnerable Adolescents Panel (VAP)** and a co-ordinator who triangulates our missing, exploitation and vulnerable adolescent data.
- NYOS have developed a **vulnerability screening tool**, alongside asset+ to identify needs and required referrals.
- NYOS and police gang and violent crime pilot project in Wellingborough has identified several young people that are suspects of multiple offences that have never been in receipt of a positive intervention or formal outcome. NYOS are working with these young people through prevention and diversion to provide **positive interventions to reduce the likelihood of further offending**.
- **Close work with Barnardo's** to ensure that professionals understand the National Referral Mechanism (NRM), the Independent Child Trafficking Guardianship Service (IGVA) and what reasonable and conclusive grounds mean. This will **ensure professionals will have a full understanding** of the referral process into NRM and the support that Barnardo's can offer to us. It will ensure that all professionals will be able to recognise the signs of exploitation. NYOS and CYPSS have developed a group of NRM champions who are receiving additional training and support in this area that can assist practitioners in and across NCT to make referrals.
- Established a missing steering group reviewing end to end processes and top 10 missing children. **Support from CFSS offered at every HRI** to any top 10 missing children who do not have an allocated worker.
- **Home return interview (HRI) format changed to reflect SoS model**, outlining worries and what is working well, for the professional and the young person. There is an **emphasis on the voice of the child** and asking individually tailored questions to each child, young person and family to establish individual cultural, ethnicity and identity needs and support offers. By doing so, we can make accurate recommendations and actions from this.

- In the past 6 months, 13% of children in care have had a missing episode, a slight rise from the previous year. Work is required to understand the reasons for this, but hypotheses include an increase in the number of young people being accommodated who are at risk of criminal exploitation and the **increasing needs of young people relating to their emotional well-being exacerbated by the pandemic.**
- Outcome Star tool and the RISE risk wheel allows practitioners to effectively risk assess families and young people, while **capturing their voice and understanding their strengths and needs.**
- **Multi agency review** of the Adolescent Risk Management (ARM) process dealing with exploitation and extra familial harm in June 2022 has identified key areas for improvement now being taken forward.
- **Increased use of multi-disciplinary teams/ complex case discussions** to oversee and manage risks for Children in Care.
- Participation of the MASH decision makers in Channel Panel enable informed decisions to be made
- **Positive partnership working** between the separated children's team and relevant agencies has led to better decision making when considering the safety and welfare of young people who might be at risk of or have been identified as being trafficked and/or are likely to go missing.
- The use of NRPF Connect identifies unaccompanied young people who present to or from another local authority which **helps to identify missing young people quickly.**
- **Missing episodes for separated children have been reduced** by consistently listening to young people's wishes and feelings. Where appropriate changes have been made, this has contributed towards overall stability and safety.

How do we know?

- Increase in referrals seen and an increase in knowledge of the local picture as a result of school's prevention package.
- 80% of home return interviews were completed within 72 hours of being found in 21/22.
- ARM Review (June 2022) found that all agencies found the VAP valuable and felt that it was able to progress and accelerate a multi-agency response for young people at risk of exploitation.
- ARM Review (June 2022) found the current process is not well understood by partners; risk assessments and plans can be more consistently and effectively used and there is opportunity to improve trusted relationships with young people.
- All agencies working closer together to improve response to exploitation e.g., improved information sharing to ensure effective joint decision making and planning.
- Increased knowledge and expertise in practice.
- Police arrested 14 men in Q1 21/22 for child sexual exploitation related offences, with a further 43 live investigations; 34 arrests for online offences and 43 children safeguarded online.

What does this mean for children and families?

- **Children now receive a more co-ordinated and appropriate response to their vulnerabilities.**

What are we doing to further improve?

- Implement actions arising from ARM review recommendations, including a new operating model, exploitation guidance and toolkit (developed by University of Bedfordshire and Hackney and aligned to Signs of Safety), and scoping development of a multi-agency team for criminal and sexual exploitation. Timescales and leads to be agreed by NSCP exploitation subgroup in September 2022.
- Continue mapping of young people, and their associates via monitoring of missing episodes, community incidents, and referrals into RISE function and / or the Young People's Service. We continue to monitor themes, places, and people of concern and share these across the partnership to improve the joint approaches to combatting issues where we anticipate they may arise.

- As a result of learning from the Wellingborough pilot we are implanting a countywide Prevention Partnership Panel - multiagency triage approach that will mobilise services to respond and support children suspected to be involved in violence at the earliest opportunity
- Broaden our community response by continuing to offer training packages and bespoke resources to a wide variety of organisations across Northamptonshire and strengthen work across hospitals, CFSS, residential homes, Children in Care teams and leaving care to support vulnerable children and young people. Also, to identify an accessible training package for adults services who support over 18s.
- RISE plan to develop a more preventative, contextual approach to working with groups of young people in their own places and spaces and address current gaps in police capacity.
- NYOS are looking to gain a further understanding of the use of section 45 defence in court in relation to exploited children, to enable a more appropriate response for them.
- Risk register for Children in Care where concerns of significant harm exist in relation to missing, criminal and sexual exploitation and offending behaviours to improve oversight and risk management.
- Whilst Children in Care and Leaving Care services are working more closely with YOS when young people are remanded or sentenced to custody and keeping more in touch with the young people themselves through visits and calls, the increase in gang cultures within Northamptonshire is meaning further work is needed to divert young people from crime. This has been recognised by the Children Safeguarding Partnership and work is planned between the services to better understand the situation and action needed.

Children in need of help and protection

Robust Front door - MASH & EDT

What do we know about the quality and impact of our practice?

- **Threshold and Pathways multi-agency training is improving partnership knowledge** of thresholds and awareness of pathways to early help support; quality of referrals is improving.
- **Revised operating model to enable a better management of the contacts and referrals** in the MASH and achieve more consistency in decision making together with better application of thresholds by all professionals was introduced in 2021.
- **A professional consultation line** is in place and any young people calling the general number are transferred to a specific line providing prompt access to a social worker who they can talk to about their worries.
- **RAG rating system used and all cases meeting threshold for a Social Care assessment are allocated timely to a social worker**, with a 4-hour window to progress red rated cases for strategy meeting where appropriate.
- All contacts relating to child **safeguarding concerns have social work oversight.**
- Through **screening domestic abuse notifications daily**, we ensure that risks are understood, and safety plans are implemented in a timely manner.
- **Re-referral audit completed by service managers in May 2022.** We now only record concerns relating to an individual child for the specific child only. DAAT consider strategy discussions being held in cases where there have been multiple closures due to non-engagement and the concerns remain evident.
- **EDT workers are confident in applying a threshold decision** for new referrals.
- **EDT has positive relationships with partners** meaning children in need of immediate protection are responded to promptly and interim safety plans are agreed and implemented.
- **The Golden Hour policy** (designed by EDT and the custody inspector) ensures that on every occasion a child is arrested and taken to custody, Social Care is informed and within the first hour share information with custody officers. This provides police with a social perspective of a child's needs and feeds into the wider police policy of ensuring that their custody suites are 'trauma

informed' and each communication with the child is mindful of their history, and seeks a way to divert them from offending.

"She is so excellent just want to say how well she handled today and helped me & my children. I could not have asked for a nicer and professional worker lovely person thank "you TK. And this country needs more people like her."

Feedback on our MASH

How do we know?

- 683 partners participated in thresholds and pathways training in 21/22 and gave it an average rating of 4.7 out of 5.
- Rate of referrals to MASH is now in line with stat neighbour and England averages.
- MASH referrals given an outcome within 2 working days has been strong (95% in April 2022) but currently impacted by police dealing with backlogs- close joint working and plans in place to address this.
- PIP review Jan 2022 found '*evidence of substantial improvements in the systems and process and good progress across the front door in relation to the improvement journey*'.
- PIP review May 2022 found '*Cases dip sampled by the review team, thresholds for Early Help were appropriate and observations of calls demonstrated that time and care is taken to discuss the worries with the caller*'.
- PIP found evidence of more consistent application of thresholds surrounding cases being progressed for assessment.
- In May 2022, PIP identified improvements made following their first review in Jan 2022.
- Whilst we still have further to go to bring in line with statistical neighbour and England averages, re-referrals have reduced from 35.6% in 21/22 to 30.3% July 2022.
- Complaints received by the MASH regarding threshold and feedback have reduced significantly and compliments have increased.

What does this mean for children and young people?

- Children and families receive a swifter and more appropriate response to concerns and risks.

What are we doing to further improve?

- Supporting partners to further improve quality of referrals, including through provision of clear analysis and recommendations lined to threshold document to referrers.
- We continue to focus on improving quality of danger statements (analysis of assessments) in MASH and EDT; better use of signs of safety in strategy discussions in EDT; and group supervision and voice of the child in MASH; helping to further improve the quality of our practice.
- Consistency of threshold application for strategy discussions.
- Outcomes of NFA remain higher than we would like, and it remains an area of priority focus; although % of s.47s leading to ICPC is in line with statistical neighbour and England averages.

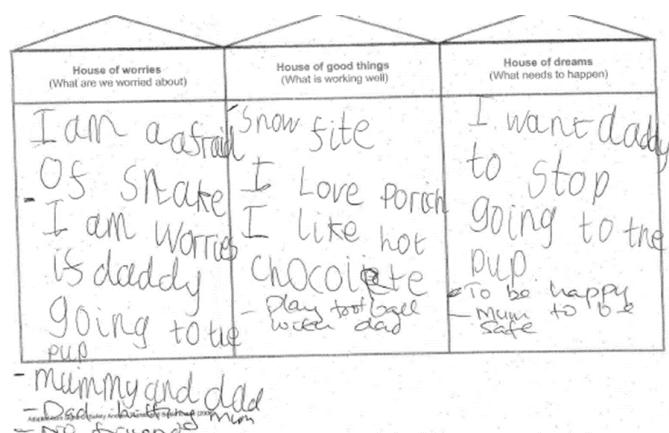
Children in need of help and protection

Robust Front door – Duty and Assessment (DAAT)

What do we know about the quality and impact of our practice?

- Leadership capacity has been strengthened with a second permanent service manager post enabling better support for social work teams
- The increase of AP positions has increased experienced social work capacity within the teams.

- DAAT social workers have more manageable caseloads than previously, allowing them to spend time with children to understand and better assess their needs and better identify risks.
- Buddy system is effective in offering support to the team on duty. This ensures that strategy meetings are timely, children are seen promptly, and responses are proportionate to the presenting issues.
- Learning and reflections from group supervisions and audits are contributing to an improvement in practice in DAAT.
- Individualised actions for each child at the end of a section 47 enquiry.
- Family Support Workers and other professionals known to the child completing direct work in DAAT to inform assessments and plans.
- All families supported by DAAT have an initial safety plan.
- Section 47 NFA Audit (February 2022) found sufficient identification of risks in 90% of the cases audited. In the 10% where risks were not sufficiently identified, birth parents not living in the family home were not always consulted as part of the assessment; history had not been robustly considered, whilst for some, the voice of the child was not consistently evident on the child's file. Subsequently, there were reflective learning sessions held across the service which has contributed to an improvement in this area of practice.



"Just wanted to thank you for your contribution and very good presentation during ICPC for XX family. I really appreciated you getting in touch with me way before the conference to discuss X and X participation. Their attendance made a massive difference to the outcome and quality of the conference. I was so pleased with your practice- safety plan had been completed with the family prior to the conference and saved on the records, genogram and chronology had also been updated before the conference. Well done and keep up the good work"

Feedback on our DAAT

How do we know?

- 78% of DAAT visits happened within 5 days in 21/22 and above 74% in April & May; the recent decrease is seen due to impact of police PPN backlog, increasing complexity, and staff change.
- 96% of single assessments are completed in timescales (YTD July 2022) compared to 86% in June 2019.
- Management oversight at the point of allocation within DAAT is consistently over 95%.
- 38% of single assessments lead to no further action and 30% to early help/ universal (YTD July 22)
- 36% s.47s leading to an Initial Child Protection Conference (YTD July 22), in line with statistical neighbours and England averages of 37%.
- PIP review, Jan 2022 found Social Care Assessments consider the child's history and there is evidence of them being more child focused.
- PIP review, May 2022 found 'performance is being used to continue to support and drive practice and there is an enhanced understanding of statutory timescales'.

- Audit activity and feedback from the Child Protection Chairs has shown the quality of danger statements is improving.
- 60% of DAAT staff are agency workers. However, 50% of the agency workers have been in the service for over 18 months and some for over five years.

What does this mean for children and families?

- Children are now receiving timely support that better meets their needs.

What are we doing to further improve?

- Continue our relentless drive to achieve a stable workforce in DAAT.
- Ensure good quality and timeliness of all assessments.
- We continue to focus on ensuring that direct work is consistently available on children's records, that plans are SMART and developed with families and work with families is explicitly linked to plans.
- We continue to identify ways to reduce workload pressures for DAAT teams.
- Recording of what is written to children within CareFirst is being expanded to include assessment documents etc and has enhanced child-focused practice.
- Further reflective learning sessions regarding risk identification to further support and improve practice.

Children in need of help and protection

Children subject of a child in need or child protection plan

What do we know about the quality and impact of our practice?

- We are focused on **quality and consistent practice**, relationship based social work that empowers families, whilst maintaining performance and compliance.
- **Decision making is prompt by managers** escalating children's circumstances to strategy meetings and section 47 investigations.
- **Social workers take pride in their work and know their children well.** They show commitment and dedication to supporting children and their families to make and sustain positive changes in their lives.
- **Direct work is used to understand the wishes and feelings of children and young people to achieve positive changes** that are in the best interest of children. We use a strengths-based approach to work purposely, openly, and considerately with the whole family network which includes extended family members in our assessments and planning. All families are encouraged and supported to take the lead in making a safe plan for their child when concerns are identified.
- **The vast majority of children and families have timely visits** providing meaningful contact with a social worker, a plan that is regularly discussed and updated so actions are meaningful, and progress is made.
- **Capturing the voice of the child within visits** has improved and our recording is child focused.
- **Child in Need plans and visits are monitored weekly** to ensure timescales are met and plans progress. Managers have oversight to ensure that plans do not drift, that families are only subject to plans as required and that families step down to CFSS at the appropriate stage.
- **Advanced Practitioners support individual social workers** and deliver SoS support to the teams as a group. This has had a positive impact on plans and danger statements and there is noticeable improvement, however it is not yet consistent across all the teams which is the outcome we are striving for.
- As part of our Leadership Development Programme action learning, our **SoS AP led an initiative with the Corby Safeguarding teams during Q4 21/22, focused on implementing safety plans devised with families and children**, with the aim of reducing subsequent re-referrals. Through this,

other areas of development were also achieved, such as increased use and confidence in SofS mapping. Learning from this project has been implemented across other parts of the service.

- The Child Protection Chairs duty system **enables social workers to discuss and reflect on need** for ICPC, this is valued by social workers.
- Having Child Protection Chairs allocated to a 'linked' DAAT or safeguarding team and sharing good practice **has significantly improved relationships and enhanced the common and shared goals we all hold towards those we work with, and for.** Case escalations are dealt with in a more collaborative way which has positive impact for the child and family and supports our learning.
- Reviews of CP cases at 9 and 15 months (then quarterly) by Service Managers ensure **there is a clear trajectory for the case** to either step down from a child protection plan or to progress into PLO.
- Additional consideration by Service Managers for appropriateness of repeat CP plans in chronic neglect cases **is enabling improved decision making.**
- **Action for Children provide valuable additional support** to families known to safeguarding services through short or medium-term interventions and multi systemic therapy which has a positive impact for children and families, enabling families to stay together. Additional value is brought through partnership with Aldi to distribute surplus and essential food and clothing to families in need.
- When the councils receive new elective home education requests, a check is made if the child has a CIN or CP plan, or are known on other reporting systems (ie domestic abuse or missing persons), discussions with partners are held to review the suitability of the EHE request. For those children who are known to the Children's Trust who want to reintegrate back into school, officers work closely with admissions and with families/social worker to support school placement and successful transitions. **All new EHE requests are offered a home visit from an Inclusion officer who will also seek the voice of the child.**
- **Council CME Tracking Officers keep in direct contact with the child's social worker** until it is known where the child is living and confirmed as attending the school allocated. MASH are also informed of a new address and new school if the case has been open to NCT during the past 12 months (but currently closed).
- **13 of our children known to safeguarding services took part in a camping trip in Summer 2022,** helping to increase self-esteem, kindness, patience, teamwork, self-awareness, and confidence.

"I would like to thank Brian for the report for today's conference. I like how you write to the girls rather than about them in a very child friendly and simple language. You are explaining clearly the reason and the journey the girls have been through during social care intervention including their views. I am impressed by your child focussed approach. Well done and keep up good work."

CP chair regarding a Safeguarding Social Worker

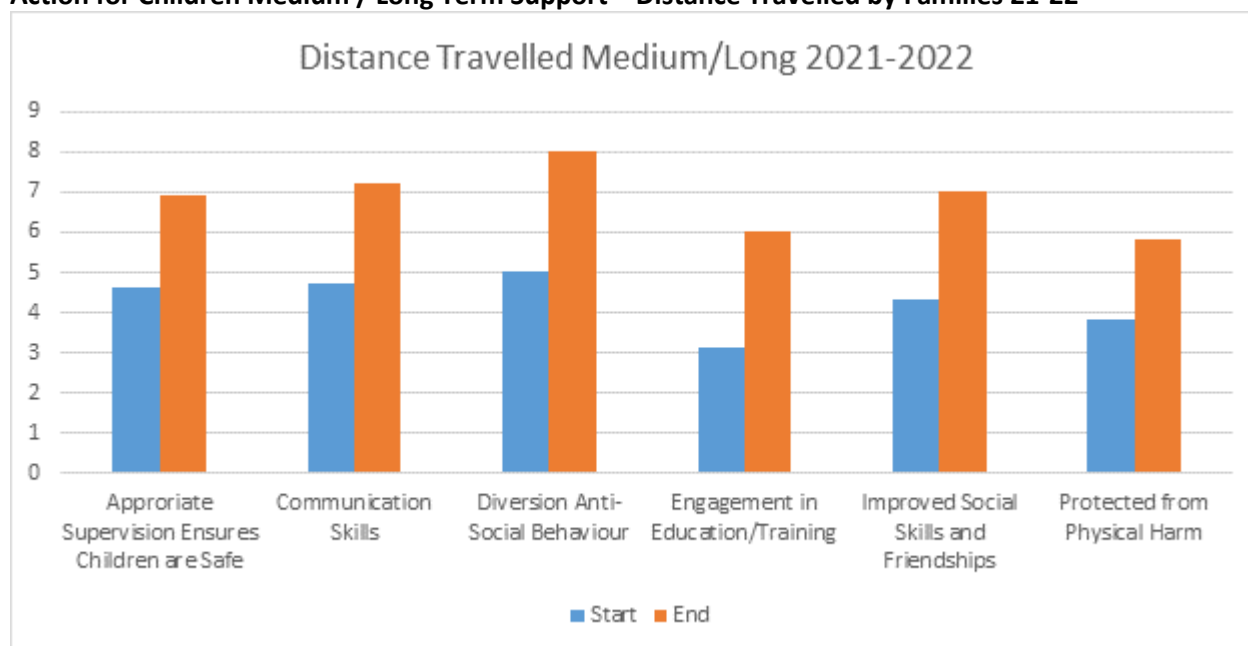
How do we know?

- CIN visits were 79.7% on time; 81.5% up to date CIN plan (YTD July 2022).
- CP visits were 89.4% on time (YTD July 2022).
- 82.7% Initial Child Protection Conferences held on time (July 22); in line with England average of 83%
- 98.9% CP reviews completed within timescale YTD July 2022, above national and stat neighbour averages.
- The proportion of repeat CP plans is higher than we would like at 32%, above comparators.

Timeframe	September 2020	January 2022	March 2022
CP plans 9+ months	269	190	166
CP plans above that were 15+ months	78 (29%)	50 (26%)	57 (34%)

- The proportion of neglect CP plans open for more than 15 months reduced by more than a half, from 23% to 11% between January 2021 and August 2022.
- Neglect audit (August 2022) found there is more progress to be made in consistent use of Graded Care Profile, up to date chronologies to provide full picture, greater focus on unique characteristics of a child and their family to appropriately address concerns, focus on neglect in supervision. Strengths were evidenced in practitioners' commitment to building positive, effective working relationships with those children and young people they are supporting, involvement of partners, detailed plans which are being regularly reviewed, the actions on plans are mostly SMART.
- The proportion of children subject of a CP plan for 2+ years has been below comparators for some time, however, there have been higher proportions in a couple of months this year, likely due to sibling groups.
- Since last year, there has been an increase in children of longer-term child protection plans to progress to PLO from 16% to 40%.
- 35% of the children reviewed subject to long term child protection plans were also subject to PLO or legal proceedings which is a significant increase on the previous year (May 2022).
- CP Conference Practice Week (June/July 2022) findings included:
 - Child Protection Chairs support clear planning with SMART actions so everyone understands their roles and responsibilities; check that parents understand and enable their participation and ensure meetings stay focused on the child and impact for the child.
 - Diversity, culture, and language are considered but it would be even better if we explored how this linked to engagement and progress for our young people.
 - Whilst training for DSLs to advocate for children in conferences has taken place, we are yet to see this result in increased advocacy for children by someone with an existing relationship with them; and wider use of Mind of My Own could also help more young people to participate.
- Reduction in formal escalations by CP Chairs down to 6 in the last quarter compared to 15 in the previous quarter. 89% of all issue raised were resolved within 5 working days.
- The number of complaints about Safeguarding services has reduced.
- 29 families receiving medium/ long term interventions or MST from Action for Children in 21/22 de-escalated from CIN or CP plan; further 8 de-escalated in Q1 22/23, 3 escalated and 21 maintained their status. Two further cases due to be de-escalated within 1 month of intervention closure.
- 96.5% of children supported by MST remained living at home at the end of the intervention
- 12 month follow up of families supported by Action for Children: 84% of children remained in the family home; 75% were no longer under a Social Care plan

Action for Children Medium / Long Term Support – Distance Travelled by Families 21-22



What does this mean for children and families?

- Children and families are receiving better quality support that is improving their experiences and outcomes.

What are we doing to further improve?

- Continuing our relentless drive to achieve a stable workforce to reduce likelihood of families having changes of workers and plans drifting. As well as continuing to recruit NQSWs, our two new Frontline hubs in the Safeguarding Service from Sep 2022 will provide another means of 'growing our own' social workers.
- Continue to encourage better use of chronologies to demonstrate and evidence neglectful parenting. An action plan is also being developed in response to neglect audit (August 2022) findings.
- Continuing to focus on ensuring all visits are purposeful and drive planning for the child.
- Further development work in respect of safety plans and ensuring that the voice of the child strongly influences the plan and what is needed to ensure the child feels safe within the family environment. The plan is agreed with parents and the extended family and is regularly reviewed.
- Continue to improve the quality of plans across the teams, and ensure we evidence within the plans the impact and outcomes for children, the voice of the child is prevalent and informs and influences the plan.
- AP's will continue to work with individual social workers and the teams to consistently incorporate signs of safety.
- To continue to improve and sustain key performance indicators and ensure that children are seen in a timely manner, visits are recorded promptly, and CiN meetings are held in timescale.
- Using feedback from our young inspectors see how we can make venues for our child protection conferences more child friendly.
- Reduce the likelihood of repeat CP Plans by ensuring safety plans are robust and have been tested when stepping cases down.
- We will continue to develop and grow our 'Dynamic Youth' group for children known to safeguarding services, whose input will help us further improve our practice and support.

Children with Disabilities

What do we know about the quality and impact of our practice?

- **DCT social workers now have more manageable caseloads of 11-21**; this has led to greater quality in practice for children and families, as they are more able to deliver high quality relationship-based practice and direct work.
- Children who are assessed as requiring a small package of support to meet their needs well with no other support needs identified now have an annual review and updated assessment where the child and family are seen. **This means that families receive an appropriate level of intervention and SW capacity can be focused on children with the highest levels of needs.**
- **Assessments are signed off by managers** to ensure quality and any actions completed as necessary.
- **Performance is generally good** with children being seen regularly and having up to date CiN. All Children in Care have and up to date care plan.
- Whilst there have been challenges with health assessments being completed in timescale, **this has been much more positive for disabled children who are in care** with the figure for Children in Care allocated to the Disabled Children's Teams sitting at 71.4% (DCT 1) and 82.4% (DCT 2).
- **Supervision and management oversight is notable area of improvement** and has been a focus area having previously been identified as an area for improvement in CRPDs. Managers have undertaken the Research in Practice PSDP programme which has enhanced their supervision and management skills in terms of quality supervision which understands and promotes equality diversity and inclusion for families and also our workforce.
- **Writing to the child has shifted the focus and lens through which we view children and families** and how we work in partnership with children and families. Children and young people and their lived experiences are at the centre of the work completed. Their records now reflect this more. There is evidence that young people are increasingly attending their meetings, how and where appropriate, and this ensures that children are at the centre of everything that we do.
- **Social stories are well used within the Disabled Children's Team** with some key practitioners being very skilled in doing this. These will often be used to support young people to understand their plans, what is happening next and changes and transitions.
- **Commissioned short breaks continued to be highly valued by families.** However, we know families could be better supported and less reliant on overnight short breaks through a more comprehensive and appropriate offer of non-residential short breaks.
- **There are a small number of children with disabilities living in unregistered placements** due to sufficiency challenges in residential care / residential schools to meet these children's specific and complex needs.
- Children and young people are referred to Adult Social Care when they are 16 years old, to improve co-working and smooth transitions, with children's social workers retaining case responsibility. Team Managers **track this is being completed within their teams.**
- **Adult Social Care allocate a social worker as soon as possible**, at least by the age of 17 years, and the Care Act assessment will commence, usually jointly with the allocated social worker in DCT.
- **North and West Transitions Managers are now in post in Adults Social Care** in the councils – reviewing 16 and 17 year olds to ensure they are on track for assessment and planning in adults – this will allow issues to be identified more proactively.
- **Monthly meeting between DCT Service Manager and Transitions Managers**, quarterly meetings with DCT and Adult Social Care team managers being established for North and West.
- **Transitions Managers are also members of Multi-Agency Resource and Residential Short Breaks Panels** which provides early notification of young people who may require continued services from Adult Social Care.

How do we know?

- Children in Care with an up-to-date health assessment stood at 71.4% (DCT 1) and 82.4% (DCT 2) (July 2022).
- 61% of children have an up-to-date assessment (July 2022).
- NCT QA September 2021 found outcomes improving for the majority of children reviewed.
- DCT are currently supporting 86 16- and 17-year-olds (August 2022). Of these, 63 (73%) have been referred to Adult Social Care. Of those not yet referred, 3 are 17 years old and high priority; and 18 are 16-year-olds (of whom 8 turned 16 in the last 3 months). 1 of these children is a Child in Care who turned 16 in the last 3 months and a referral is in progress. 4 of the children who have not yet been referred receive resource only support from DCT so have fewer complex needs.
- 70.8% of families receiving support from the sleep service said there had been changes in the quality of family life.
- Complaints have significantly reduced within DCT.
- Compliments for DCT often highlight the 'above and beyond' work that many social workers do and also the strength and importance of relationships with parents/carers and children and young people and the difference this makes.
- Ofsted monitoring visit (November 2021) found '*when disabled children in care reach 16, they benefit from pathway plans that identify their strengths and needs for the future*'; and '*some disabled children experience delay in transition to adults services*'

What does this mean for children and families?

- Children with disabilities and their families are receiving better quality social work support that is improving their experiences and outcomes.

What are we doing to improve?

- Continuing with our focus on ensuring children have an up to date, quality assessment.
- Increase the recording of management oversight and supervision.
- Following decision of NNC and WNC to have their own transition managers in Adults Social Care services, we will develop transition strategies with each council.
- Transitions guide for parents in development, to be co-produced with Northamptonshire Parent Forum Group.
- Implement redesign of our short breaks and respite services, which has been developed in conjunction with parents and practitioners.
- Continue to work with providers and explore all options to address challenges faced as result of workforce shortages in the personal care sector and placement sufficiency for children with complex needs. This includes supporting unregistered providers to apply for Ofsted registration.
- Expand the membership of our 'Shooting Stars' participation group to include more children and young people supported by DCT. Also, develop a short and long-term plan for this group to shape developments overseen by the SEND Accountability Board and the CYP Transformation Board as well as NCT services and support.

Children in Care

What do we know about the quality and impact of our practice?

- **Staffing within the Children in Care service remains predominantly stable** with permanent & agency social workers who report being well supported by their teams and managers.
- **We held our first celebration event since May 2017** for our children and young people in care to receive awards that recognise their achievements, thanks to sponsorship secured by the Chief Exec. The feedback from children and carers was overwhelmingly positive, with areas for improvement relating to administrative and logistical points. 175 children attended along with 177 carers **“Look at our kids just being kids 😊”**
- Summer 2022 also **saw NCT’s first camping trip for 20 of our Children in Care**, helping to increase self-esteem, kindness, patience, teamwork, self-awareness, and confidence.
- **Our Children in Care Council helped the DfE by providing feedback on their report to UNCRC on how the UK is addressing Children’s Rights** and helped create a young person’s version and 3 videos that can be found at [How we are working with the United Nations to protect children’s rights - The Education Hub \(blog.gov.uk\)](https://www.blog.gov.uk/2022/07/28/how-we-are-working-with-the-united-nations-to-protect-childrens-rights/)
- **Strong senior management oversight** on all new admissions into care through either AD agreement or presentation at a weekly gateway panel.
- Legal Gateway Panel and Case Progression Team enable a lean process, **ensuring the right cases are escalated into PLO and legal proceedings**, and their progression and outcomes are closely monitored and reviewed. Our work during the PLO process means we are better prepared going into court, resulting in fewer independent assessments being completed during proceedings, and children achieving permanence in a timelier way.
- To ensure the correct level of support prior to birth, **we are now encouraging consideration for unborn children to become subject to the PLO processes earlier in the pregnancy** where appropriate, to allow for purposeful partnership with parents to effect change and support earlier permanence.
- By working with families within pre-proceedings, **around half of the children who met threshold have stepped down from pre-proceedings without going to court.**
- **There has been a rise in the number of children subject to interim care orders** over the last 12 months (from 258 to 280). This included a number of large sibling groups. A Public Law Court subgroup review of children subject to care proceedings for an extended period of time found the unavailability of judicial capacity to timetable final hearings and the instruction of experts were the main cause for the longest delay. Other factors included complexities where there are international issues, such as assessing family members who live abroad.
- The Director of Children’s Social Care is the chair of the Local Family Justice board and has monthly meetings with the Designated Family Judge, alongside meetings with the Assistant Director of CAFCASS. This **provides an opportunity for discussion around strategic opportunities, learning, any issue of concern or challenges, and ensures open and positive communication and continued progress is made.**
- Since its inception in June 2021, **CFSS’ Family Solutions team has improved children’s lives** by working in partnership with families and other agencies to strengthen family resilience and achieve sustainable change. This has enabled children to return to their family after a period in care, provided it is safe and, in the child /young person’s best interests to do so.
- Since the launch in January 2021, the Separated Children’s Team has been working under the auspices of Operation Innerste. This means that **children and young people are no longer detained by the police which has helped to eliminate any unnecessary trauma.** This has provided a much slicker process for admitting the young person into s20 care with the bonus of resource savings which instead can be invested in the young person.

- **We have introduced clear reunification assessment tools** (adopting NSPCC framework) to support the safe return home for children, trained champions and the Family Time Service now positively supports reunification plans.
- **We have strengthened the SGO pathway** through improved joint working, information and training for prospective SGO carers and training for staff to enable families to make informed decisions.
- Strong performance management has **maintained regular visits to our children** with those in more fragile care arrangements benefiting from more regular visits and contact.
- In January 2022, we introduced a more **child friendly format for ‘My Care Plan’** combined with social work assessment, designed to be completed with children. It outlines the overarching aims and steps needed to achieve them. This has been received positively by children as easier to use.
- **IRO service is now tangibly (seen in young people’s records) overseeing and driving plans with increased focus on timely responsive actions** that make tangible improvement to children’s lives. The introduction of ‘Link’ IROs has led to improved relationships, communication, and sharing of good practice between IRO and Children in Care services. Targeted escalations in June 2022 as a result of feedback from children about co-producing care plans have had a positive impact, with an increase in plans being completed with children.
- **Children’s reviews are usually only held outside of timescales if it is deemed to be in the best interest** of the child or young person, and action is taken if there are any administrative delays.
- The IV service facilitates special and long-lasting friendships for young people and their IV’s. Many of our matches **last into the young person’s adulthood as a consistent & trusted friend**, outside of professional roles / responsibilities.
- Targeted signs of safety training for Corporate Parenting Service on priority areas to have **greater impact for Children in Care**.
- **Greater support and modelling from corporate parenting management** and experienced staff to improve depth and analysis within social work assessments.
- Introduction of corporate parenting service permanency tracking arrangements providing **both oversight and drive to ensure timely planning for children**.
- Learning from our time in lockdown, and following feedback from children and young people, the IROs use a variety of methods to conduct children’s reviews, (in person, virtual or hybrid), **this is supporting greater attendance of children at their reviews**.
- Children and young people have fed back to IRO’s that they find having the IRO’s one-page profile prior to their first review as it helps to make it feel more informal. The timeliness of first reviews has improved with the timeliness of subsequent reviews remaining stable and positive – **this means the vast majority of our children have their plans reviewed in a timely manner**, and the vast majority participate in their reviews.

“Thank you for just being there for whenever I need you and even when I don’t need you.”

A child in care about their social worker

“The actions you have taken have helped us to stay focused and gave us hope, as all we asked for was a 2nd chance and support, we are proud of the journey we have taken and all the obstacles we had to overcome, and we are so, so grateful for everyone who has supported our children. Be proud of yourself because what u do brings family’s like ours a bit closer and that’s priceless”

Feedback from a parent about an IRO

“I would like to say thank you to A, for keeping me up to date with my children and for treating me with respect and like a mother.” **A parent regarding their child’s social worker**

- The Virtual School (VS) places works with partners to **optimise the quality of children’s personal education plans** (PEPs). In the best PEPs, there is a golden thread running through, detailing the aspirations and needs of the child, progress made, and the ongoing support professionals are putting in place to help the child realise their ambitions
- The VS helps **children to achieve positive educational outcomes** through regular monitoring of attendance with schools. Regular liaison with Designated Teachers for early identification of attendance issues, ensuring timely Personal Education Plan (PEP) meetings take place, discussing gaps in learning and ensuring SMART targets are in place to address them, including appropriate use of PP+ and recovery funding. **Children’s skills** are increased through a range of VS activities including sports, arts, and outdoor education, with 139 children attending sessions in 2021/22 academic year
- VS Officers’ work is evidence-led, based on analyses of patterns in the cohort’s PEPs to address issues and improve outcomes; eg quality of PEPs
- The VS has a **robust quality assurance and audit process** in place for PEPs and regular training for officers, school staff, parents/ carers which participants say provides a stronger understanding of how to develop and implement strategies for supporting currently and previously looked-after children within the school environment. VS officers are using an increased understanding of the impact of trauma and attachment issues on education achieved through training to support colleagues. Training on exclusions appeals has also enabled VS officers to better advocate for children in care
- WNC/NNC Education colleagues **not commission any unregistered alternative provision** for Children in Care.
- For those Children in Care who are not on a school roll, i.e. children missing education (CME), **the VS has an increased focus on their support** including more frequent PEPs (6 times a year), a single point of contact within the service, increased management oversight, and multi-agency discussions. The VS works with partners to ensure children have access to full time DfE registered school places.
- For those young people in care who are NEET, the VS **hold monthly multi-agency meetings, have a single point of contact, and have regular contact with Prospects** (NCT commissioned careers advice and guidance service).
- **VS’s support ensures that children transitioning to adoptive parents are out of education for the shortest time possible** and fosters relationships between adoptive parents and their children’s school.
- Our partnership with Homes to Inspire (H2I) and Prospects (both part of Shaw Trust) is enabling **more flexible use of resources to improve outcomes for Children in Care**. Prospects Advisers and H2I Education Officer review the plans of young people living in our block contract homes monthly, and co-ordinate support from both organisations, including careers guidance from Yr 9 - 11.

Health

- The vast majority of our Children in Care have a completed **SDQ, with a higher proportion than nationally scoring within the ‘normal’ range**. Our focus is on ensuring they are used effectively within care planning for Children in Care by all agencies. A trial of a new pathway has seen some evidence of SDQs being considered within review health assessments and supervision.
- **A higher proportion of Children in Care have an up-to-date dental assessment so far in 22/23**, in comparison with the previous two years when the pandemic impacted. However, it remains lower than we would like.

- We are worried about the low proportion of our Children in Care who have had an initial health assessment on time, and although there has been some improvement in timeliness of review health assessments, this remains lower than we would like. **We have reviewed and improved our internal processes** to ensure timely referrals are made and understand the issue relates to capacity within health and availability of appointments. We have escalated through NSCP and Social Care Improvement Board.

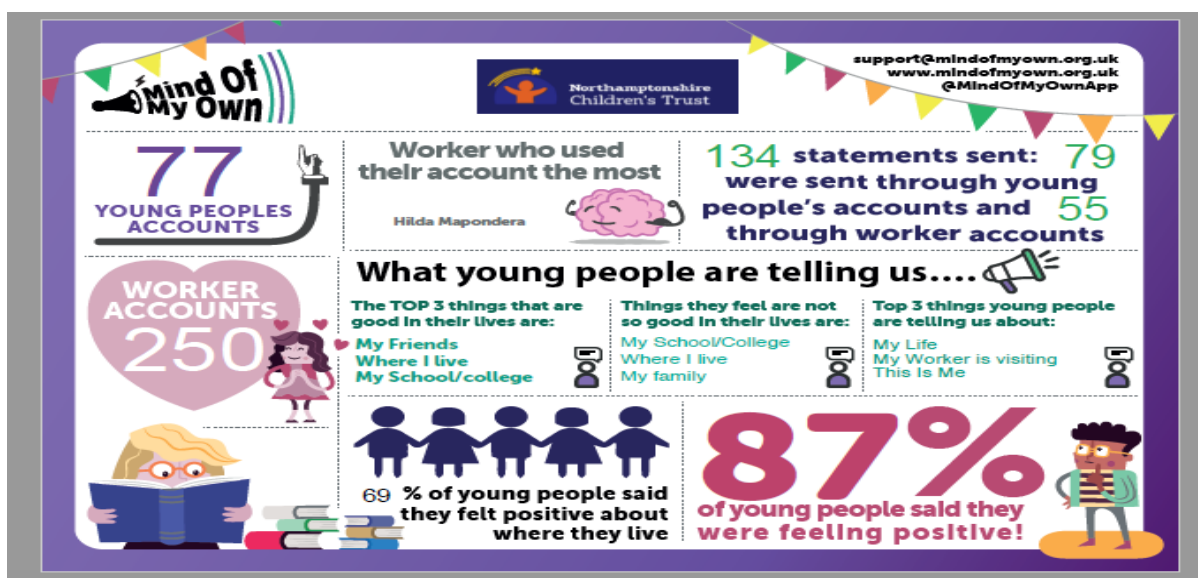
Placements

- **While the majority of our children are living in stable homes** that are meeting their needs and improving their outcomes, we are impacted by the national market which is not meeting the needs of children.
- **The use of emergency unregistered and/or unregulated provision is closely monitored** to ensure they are only used when absolutely necessary. The length of such arrangement is kept to a minimum and are managed through regular review and risk management arrangements. During our Children in Care monitoring visit, it was seen that the rationale for the use of these placements was not clearly explained in the children's records. Now, senior management authorisation is captured on all records. Children in such arrangements are considered at multi-disciplinary meetings where all relevant agencies, the young people and their family are brought together regularly to ensure oversight and dynamic risk management arrangements are in place. All is being done to secure a suitable home for the young person and contingency plans are considered.
- Recent review of the procedures and pathway to the assessment of connected persons which has enabled a more fluid process. **This has resulted in improved communication between the connected persons fostering service and the social work teams.**
- **Our Quality & Outcomes Team provide effective quality assurance of unregulated and unregistered provision** and of placements where concerns have been raised (including seeking the voice of the child). They also support and encourage unregistered providers to register with Ofsted.
- **We are addressing the local impact of a national market** which is not meeting the needs of our children, and a national shortage of foster carers, with the following actions to increase access to homes that can meet the needs of our children:
 - Improved the quality of our NCT fostering agency (now judged RI) and continue to drive improvement.
 - Implemented our NCT fostering marketing and recruitment campaign including resilience, mainstream, Family Link, emergency, and short-term carers.
 - Implemented our Public Health funded project to support the mental health of children in NCT foster care which has had a positive impact on placement stability.
 - Re-opened our Fostering and Children's Homes frameworks in Summer 2022 with 11 additional providers joining.
 - Exploring options with IFAs to increase access to emergency carers.
 - Jointly reviewed the statement of purposes of homes on our block contract so they are better able to meet the needs of our children.
 - Residential homes block contract extended to include an additional out of county children's home – places will start being available from September 2022.
 - Contract for 2x new emergency Children's Homes – planning applications approved, due to be operational December 2022.
 - Work with WNC and NNC on capital funding proposals for additional inhouse residential care provision.
 - Submitted a partnership bid with Homes to Inspire to the 2022 DfE Capital funding, proposing refurbishment of a previous adult group care home to provide a home for children with mental health / behavioural needs.
 - Building stronger relationships with external providers.

- External review of placements, commissioning, and brokerage completed, and improvement actions being taken.
- Improving support to sustain placements through multi-disciplinary teams, placement stability meetings, commissioning action for children to pilot additional support to prevent external placement breakdown (expected to be operational by November 2022); recruitment of 2x FSWs to support stability of NCT foster placements.

How do we know?

- Significant improvement from 2019 inspection to Monitoring Visit in February 2021 when “*too many*” had become “*a few*” children still come into care too late or in an emergency and finding suitable placements for those children remains a challenge. However, the Monitoring Visit in July 2021 raised concerns that “*some*” cases have been subject to drift and delay as a result of the lack of focus on what positive change would look like.
- The number of children subject to pre proceedings has increased from an average of 30 families per month a year ago to an average of 40 families, an increase of 25% over the course of the year (August 2022).
- The improvements in the length of time families are within PLO have been maintained in the last year and have improved further from an average of 19 weeks in February 2022 to 16 weeks in June 2022, with the aim to still have most pre-proceedings within 12 weeks.
- Of those families where the PLO process has ended in 2022, 54% have stepped down.
- The length of care proceedings was 58.9 weeks in October 2020 (a significant rise likely due to the pandemic and unavailability of court time and experts). In January 2021, this reduced to 38.6 weeks and the current average has been consistent at 35 weeks (August 2022).
- Escalations from the court have reduced and there has been a noticeable improvement in the quality of assessments completed in pre-birth, PLO pre-proceedings and in care proceedings.
- 48% (12 children) of children the Family Solutions team have worked who were in a care placement have been able to safely return home (July 2022).
- 74 Children in Care returned home January – June 2022 compared with 48 between November 2019 – April 2020.
- Over the past 6 months, 9% of children leaving care have been adopted, comparable to the national average.
- 83.4% of children have an up-to-date care plan (YTD July 2022).
- During June 2022, IRO escalations raised regarding young people having their care plan completed with them led to an increase of co-produced plans to 65%.
- 86.9% of children had their first review on time (YTD July 2022), an improvement from 78.9% in 21/22.
- 38% increase in the number children attending their reviews in the year 21/22 in comparison to the previous year and a 27% decrease in numbers of young people who did not attend and chose not to convey their views in their review process.
- 92% of children aged 4 and above participated in their reviews, either by attending their review and / or providing views in consultation forms or through IRO and / or social worker.
- 77 young people have Mind of My Own accounts with 134 statements from young people having been received to inform visits and discussions (YTD July 2022).



Education

North Northants:

- Statutory school age PEPs compliance: 90% in 2019-2020, 97% in 2020-2021 and 97% in 2021-2022
- Statutory school age PEPs quality assured as good: 56% in 2019-2020, 64% in 2020-2021 and 79% in 2021-2022
- Early Years PEPs compliance: 82% in 2019-2020, 91% in 2020-2021 and 93% in 2021-2022.
- Early Years PEPs quality assured as good: 77% in 2019-2020, 80% in 2020-2021; 80% 2021-22
- Post 16 PEPs compliance and quality has been more variable over the last 3 years:
 - Post 16 PEPs compliance: 83% in 2019-20, 97% in 2020-21 and 76% in 2021-22
 - Post 16 PEPs quality assured as good: 72% in 2019-20, 63% in 2020-21 and 68% in 2021-22

West Northants:

- Statutory school age PEPs compliance: 90% in 2019-2020, 97% in 2020-2021 and 98% in 2021-2022.
- Statutory school age PEPs quality assured as good: 56% in 2019-2020, 64% in 2020-2021 and 79% in 2021-2022
- Post 16 PEPs compliance and quality has been more variable over the last 3 years:
 - Post 16 PEPs compliance: 83% in 2019-20, 94% in 2020-21 and 82% in 2021-22
 - Post 16 PEPs quality assured as good: 72% in 2019-20, 82% in 2020-21 and 52% in 2021-22.
- In 2018-2019, 25.9% of OC2 Northamptonshire Children in Care achieved a 9-4 pass in English and Maths, compared to 17.8% nationally. For 2019-2020 this rose to 29.2%, compared to 24.4% nationally (figures for 2022 not yet available)
- The percentage of post 16 Children in Care in Education, Employment or Training (EET) 3-year trend of improvement: 74% in 2020, 81% in 2021 and 84% in 2022.

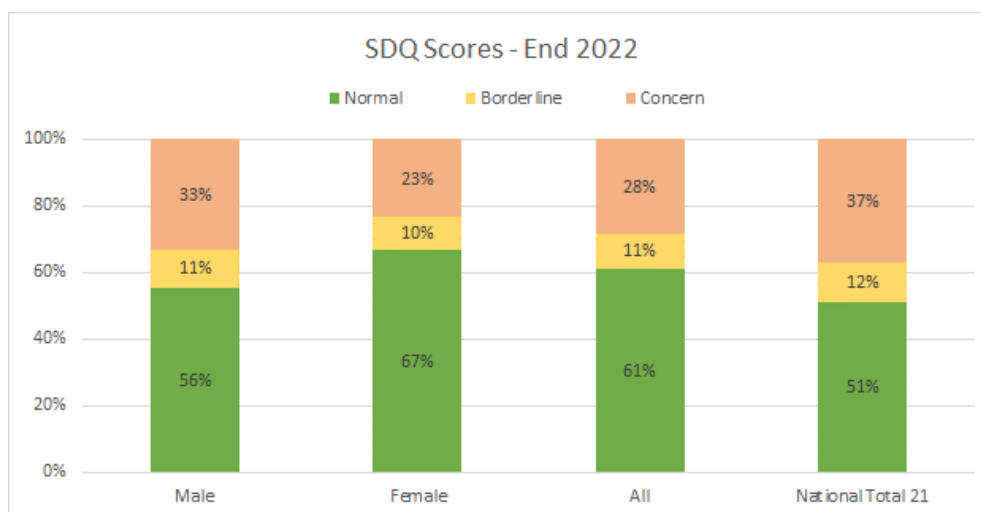
Feedback from VS holiday activities:

"The best, we love them and want more, especially stable mates and adventure ways. Leaders lots of fun. Loads new challenges and activities this year I was living my best life thank you." (child in care)

"Great opportunity for the kids to get out and do some structured activities. Our young person did struggle when first attending these sessions but has now grown in confidence and welcomes the opportunity to get out and mix with others. As carers we really are grateful to be able to have some things in the diary especially over the 6-week holiday to help keep the kids busy." (carer)

Health

- 91% of Children in Care have a completed SDQ (June 2022).

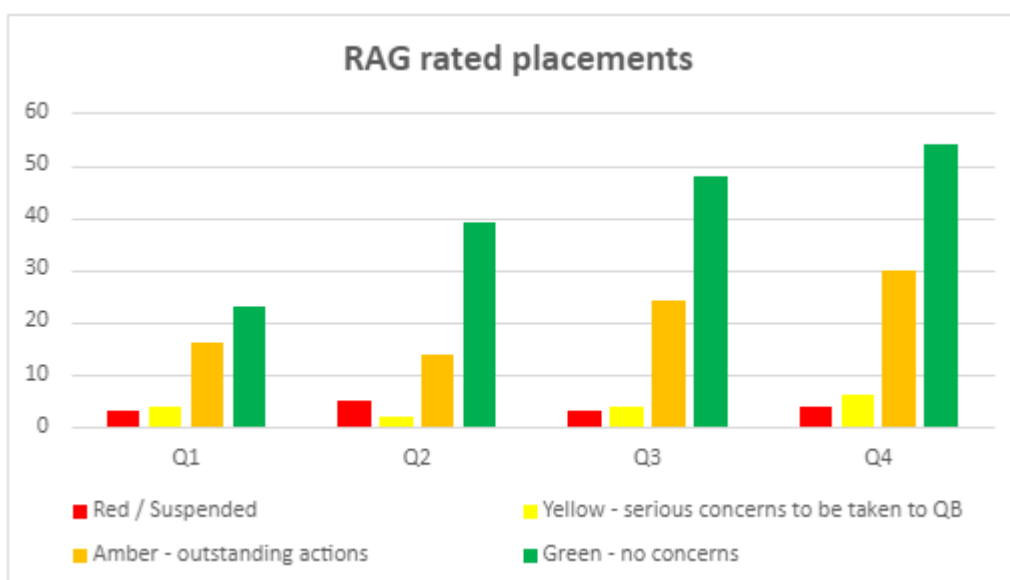


- 62.7% of children have an up-to-date dental assessment, above national and stat neighbour averages (YTD July 2022).
- 33% of Children in Care have had an Initial health assessment on time (YTD July 2022); and 68.8% have an up-to-date review health assessment, an improvement on previous 2 years but below comparators.
- NHFT's audit of IHAs has found the quality of the assessments is good.

Placements

- Proportion of Children in Care for 2.5+years in same placement for 2+years/ placed for adoption has increased from 61% in 2019 to 68.3% in 2022; our focus is on reducing the proportion of children who have had 3+ moves in the last 12 months.
- 58 children are living in 'staying put' arrangements (August 22)
- Net gain of 9 NCT fostering households over last 2 years (to August 22) despite challenges of the pandemic and national trends of carers leaving the profession.
- Of 65 children who had received therapeutic support directly/via carer at end June 2022, 6 (9%) had experienced a placement breakdown against a baseline of 30%<.
- An NCT foster carer who completed Therapeutic Parenting with clinical psychologist reported going from 70% chance that the placement would end, to 70% chance it will continue. Another said: *"Before the sessions I didn't think I would continue with fostering and now I will"*.
- To date, we have secured an additional 11 residential care beds for the sole use of NCT by the end of 2022, including in emergency/ urgent situations.
- People Too review of placements, commissioning, and brokerage (February 2022) found: *'In some areas, NCT is managing, and meeting need as effectively as comparators. Despite this, some intractable issues are present that require creative and innovative solutions.'*

'Leadership, insight, and analysis is allowing NCT to focus on the right things, with many plans in flight to address existing deficits.'



Quality and Outcomes team quality assurance of placements that are unregistered and/ or where concerns have been raised 21/22- Extract from a Quality & Outcomes visit to an unregistered placement:

'CM when I arrived you said you were happy for me to come in and complete my visit. You said you remembered me from my last visit. You told me that you had been at school today and now you were just doing your washing. You said you had had a good day at school and appeared happy. You said I could come see your room and I was amazed at how good it looked – and very bright. You said you liked your room. You showed me the pictures on the wall and told me the people in the photos were your old carers.

You told me you were saving up to buy a gaming PC and laughed at me when I didn't know what this meant. You told me you were going to use it to play fortnight. We talked about how you play on your x-box at the moment and you have 2 hours a day you can play. You said that sometimes you would like more and we talked, with N, about how well you have adhered to this time limit.

I heard you laughing and joking with your support worker and N and you were very pleased to show us all your trick for putting on your duvet cover.'

What does this mean for children and families?

- Our Children in Care are well supported by workers who care about and understand their needs and the majority achieve good outcomes.

What are we doing to further improve?

- We are **part of the Local Family Justice Board** and its subgroups which meets regularly and improves joint working between the NCT and the courts. Priorities include more robust work prior to the first hearing, strengthening processes, better pre-proceedings, more robust case preparation, shorter care duration, less hearings, and more effective hearings.
- We are also **part of a DFE regional project** which has developed a toolkit for all practitioners along the lines of the Essex toolkit but with a local focus. This has been rolled out in NCT and is part of our overall improvement work for the PLO process and for use within the pre-birth procedures.
- **Graded Care Profile 2** training for staff will support our response to chronic neglect at earlier stages. By the time children reach threshold for PLO, Graded Care Profiles could be utilised to review the impact of the support and offer the evidence for the action that needs to be taken.
- We are looking at how to **further strengthen quality of assessments** i.e., training of social workers in specialist models of assessment such as Parent Assess.

- **Improvement actions are in place** to ensure 'My Care Plans' are consistently completed with children that clearly reflect their current and future needs with clear contingency plans, are shared with children in good time before their review, and they are given the choice of how their review is held.
- **We will continue to encourage children's participation in reviews** and the use of the Mind of My Own App to record and represent their wishes and views at reviews.
- **IROs will ensure the Care Plan holistically explores and identifies each child and young person's needs**, particularly focusing on children and young people's cultural and diversity needs.
- IRO and Children in Care Service Managers will continue to **share good practice and identify areas of concern** so we can develop joint plans to address these.
- **Support and encourage IRO's to fully evidence** the direct and indirect contact they have with children and young people and their families.
- **Reduce the number of children having 3+ moves in 12 months** through increased scrutiny on placement planning and stability arrangements, including additional family support for children in NCT foster care and external placements.
- **Developing trauma informed practice** in our Children in Care teams.

Education

For the 2022/23 academic year The VS is focusing on:

- **Improving the compliance and quality of post 16 PEPs** through allocated resource of two Education Officers and an experienced Team Manager
- Addressing drift in the assessment of SEND for some children in care and the securing of special school places for children in care with an Education and Health Care Plan through **new escalation procedures**
- **Enhancing our intervention offer** for education settings to ensure they are best placed to improve the outcomes of children with a social worker.
- Developing **engagement and participation** with Children in Care.
- Supporting schools in responding to the **new exclusions guidance**: in particular, advice on what additional assessment and support needs to be put in place.
- Supporting other services in **discharging their statutory duties towards children in care** with SEND.

We will also:

- **Monitor the impact of and learning from the Prospects/ H2I** joint working to improve EET outcomes for children.
- Exploration of how care experienced young people with an EHCP may be able to **access Supported Internships available via Prospects**.

Health

- **Training and support for practitioners** to improve understanding of SDQ scores and use in care planning.
- From September 2022, dip sample children's records from different agencies to assess how comprehensively SDQ's are used (and triangulated) to **inform practice and care arrangements for young people**. Information is also utilised to better understand and support Children in Care's emotional and mental health needs.
- **Continue to work with health partners** to address and highlight the impact of delays to children's health assessments and reviews.

- **Shaw Trust are funding a new Mental Health and Well-Being Worker** (to be recruited) to provide additional support to young people at H2I homes, with the intention to improve placement stability and achievement for young people.
- **Barnardo's have been commissioned by the ICB to deliver a key worker service** for children / young people aged 0 to 25 with learning disabilities/ autism with complex needs– this includes children who are in care and those who aren't. Key workers will navigate to ensure the appropriate level of support is accessible when needed, manage crisis, and support community living. En-fold (local organisation led by people with autism) will be providing peer support and step-down support. This is expected to go live in Q4 21/22.

Placements

- Our Sufficiency Strategy is being refreshed and we continue progressing the following actions to address the shortage of suitable placements to meet children's needs:
 - Fully implement and monitor the impact of process changes in commissioning and brokerage.
 - Deliver NCT's fostering recruitment and marketing campaign to increase the net number of NCT carers that can support the differing needs of our children.
 - Further PH funding has been secured to provide therapy to <15 additional NCT foster children/ families to sustain placements; and Clinical Psychologist direct work with 10 families and 60 Social Care staff to upskill and embed trauma-informed practice. We are working with ICB to identify how this can be mainstreamed.
 - Work with external IFAs to increase access to emergency foster carers.
 - Continue to build and improve relationships with external providers.
 - Open our 2 new emergency homes by the end of 2022.
 - Work with councils to finalise capital investment in additional NCT Children's Homes.
 - Progress additional externally delivered Children's Home if successful in DfE capital bid.
 - Monitor impact of initiatives to stabilise placements.

Care Leavers

What do we know about the quality and impact of our practice?

- Russell House, our dedicated building for care leavers to drop in and attend groups provides a positive, warm, safe, and supportive space that is valued by young people and practitioners.
- Post pandemic, we have re-established our drop-in day where agencies such as DWP, Housing, Health, Education, Prospects, and CIRV are available to meet with our young people. We are also setting up a similar drop-in centre in the North.
- We were planning to celebrate our care leavers at a festival style event in September, for up to 100 of our young people; most of the performances / acts are by the young people. Unfortunately, this had to be postponed due to the Queen passing away and will be re-arranged.
- 19 of our care leavers took part in a camping trip in Summer 2022, helping to increase self-esteem, kindness, patience, teamwork, self-awareness, and confidence.
- Care Experienced Apprentices within the Leaving Care Team are supportive and creative. They also provide ideas of how to engage our young people so that we have a wider voice to help us shape the service delivery. Both are due to gain their qualifications in November, and one has already secured a permanent role in NCT (finance team).
- Positive relationships between the Separated Children's Team workers and PAs enable consistency of service for young people, particularly when they have been at point of crisis and when transitioning to leaving care services.

- Improved transitions for children into the leaving care service because of joint service events and joint supervisions.
- Since our November 2021 Monitoring Visit, young people have contributed to a survey about the Care Leavers offer and a reviewed offer has been created which is currently being prepared for publication. There will also be a version for young people.
- Financial entitlement changes have been agreed and the new policy has been rolled out within the service. This new financial policy provides a comprehensive offer to young people and guidance to staff and young people of sources of financial and other support.
- The stability of Leaving Care staff means many young people have positive enduring relationships with their personal advisors. Although at times unavoidable, we seek to limit the changes experienced by a young person. Changes in allocation arrangements has meant the 'duty' system is now able to provide a more responsive and person-centred service.
- We have continued to make further improvements in quality of pathway plans. All are reviewed by managers with clear oversight and direction given, which is then captured on the young person's record
- Young people at risk are now managed through the adult risk management arrangements with regular multi-agency team meetings to oversee and manage the risk, chaired by experienced and suitably qualified staff with important key other agencies (police, housing, adult services) routinely in attendance.
- The newly created accommodation and transitions panel allows for all agencies to refer and review young people and has been seen to have a positive impact in building brighter futures for young people.
- While there is pressure on the stock of social housing, care leavers have priority bidding status and practice has now changed to ensure housing applications are made at the earliest opportunity in line with the young person's needs. We have agreed refreshed care leavers housing protocols with WNC and NNC.
- Most young people now receive access to their records within the prescribed timescales and comprehensive chronologies are created for them. Where there is a delay, this is resolved as soon as possible.
- Through a PH funded project, 73% of Leaving Care case-working staff have fully completed Emotion Coaching training; there are 3 EC Champions and feedback shows staff are now working in this informed way: *"I found understanding how the brain develops and at what stages and how that affects behaviour extremely useful."*
- Mental Health Advanced Practitioner (MHAP) role has supported 50 young people intensively and another 50 through other approaches.
- 7/11 Tier 3 care leavers that our MHAP had supported in Q3 and Q4 of 21/22 had been helped so they **had not needed** to access NHS emergency/crisis pathways.

"you're my go to person, you have saved me from myself on so many occasions, without a doubt you're always there for me and you understand me more than anyone. you mean so so so much to me and i want you to know that. i hit the PA jackpot with you!! you're amazing at your job and never ever let any of your new cases or the ones you still have tell you otherwise. i wouldn't be half the woman i am today if it wasn't for you j, thank you so much for being you x"

Care leaver about their PA

Suitable accommodation

- Most of our care leavers are living in suitable accommodation.
- Regular meetings with housing colleagues from WNC and NNC have been effective in moving young people into accommodation where they may previously have been homeless.
- Currently (August 2022) 13 young people have been identified as no permanency address or street homeless. All are carefully monitored with services and plans in place to seek to move them to suitable accommodation if possible:
 - 10 are staying with friends or family.
 - 1 is street homeless and has been presented to the Accommodation & Transitions Panel.
 - 2 are in temporary accommodation.
- Supported accommodation, from Homes to Inspire Belinda Ferrison House, 'Training Flats' continues to support up to 21 care leavers at any one time to achieve good outcomes.
- We have secured more of this kind of supported accommodation package by commissioning YMCA, with a new property for up to 9 care leavers with additional needs due to open in Summer 2023.
- We are working with council colleagues as finding their own tenancy continues to take longer than expected for young people, and there is a back log for the housing teams following the pandemic.
- The newly created Accommodation and Transitions panel allows for all agencies to refer and review young people and has been seen to have a positive impact in building brighter futures for young people.
- Prospects also provide valuable input for young person's education or employment plans.

How do we know?

- QA activity (September 2021) found the majority of Pathway Plans reviewed have a clear exploration of the young person's needs and how they like to be supported, with the voice of the young person present in the majority even when young people are non-verbal.
- Ofsted monitoring visit (November 2021 found) *'the quality and timeliness of written pathway plans have improved since the 2019 inspection'.. 'regularly updated and written collaboratively with care leavers'.. though for 'some care leavers the plan does not address some important aspects of their lives'.*
- Most CRPDs undertaken with the service are seen to be good or better.
- 82.4% of young people have an up-to-date pathway plan (YTD July 2022) this includes 87.4.% of 18 – 21-year-olds.
- 81.4% of 18–21-year-old care leavers have been in contact with the service in the last 8 weeks (August 2022).
- 62.3% in EET (YTD July 2022) above England and stat neighbour averages.
- At the end of June 2022, 50 young adults had been intensively supported (Tiers 2-3) with their mental health and wellbeing by our MHAP and another 50 through light touch/via PA/complex case panel/open days. These young adults have had marked improvements in their range of wellbeing issues.
- 7/11 Tier 3 care leavers our MHAP had supported in Q3 and Q4 of 21/22 had been helped so they **had not needed** to access NHS emergency/crisis pathways.
- 94.7% of care leavers in suitable accommodation (YTD July 2022) which is above England and stat neighbour average.
- Ofsted monitoring visit (November 2021) found *'management oversight of care leavers who have become homeless has improved since 2019, resulting in many of their housing situations being resolved, although some inconsistencies remain'.*
- Feedback from adult's service attendees of the Accommodation and Transitions panel is that it is alerting them much earlier to young people with additional needs and also increasing awareness of the issues facing many care leavers. Alongside the need to develop priority pathways to ensure they can access the help that is needed.

- At the end of Q4, only 2 of the 19 care leavers supported at Belinda Ferrison House 'Training Flats' were NEET and there were zero notifiable incidents (no CSE, damage, assaults to staff, police involvement, complaints, episodes of bullying or hospital admissions).

"My time at BFH was largely positive and I received lots of support from all of the staff there especially my support worker J. From the small things such as help with shopping to the much bigger things such as support with my mental health and self-harming issues.

The fact that there is a member of staff 24/7 is also a big positive as it allows for support even in the early hours of the morning, this came as a big help to me when I had a bad incident of self-harm.

Being able to meet other young people living at BFH was also a good experience as it allowed me to mingle with others and get out to exercise and participate in some football which helped me. Workshops and activities such as cooking with the staff here was also lots of fun.

Overall, my time at BFH provided me with lots of help and support with learning how to become independent. The staff were all very friendly and welcoming and I was glad to meet everyone there."

Initial findings from Practice Week (August/ September 2022) included:

- Leaving Care workers know their young people well, are committed to improving their lives, have good communication skills, offer a good mix of support and challenge, have a focus on outcomes, and are incredibly adept at identifying and engaging the best support services.
- The service is working pro-actively to engage with our harder to reach young people – our Care Experienced Apprentices have supported with new ideas here.
- The Voice group is highly valued by female young people; it provides safe space to have helpful, supportive conversations with skilled practitioners from Health and Social Care.
- The service is making real headway building community networks and engaging partner agencies fully in ongoing support of our young people.
- Multi agency working is a real strength – because of this young people do not have to repeat their stories several times.

My PA is always on my side

I like my worker; she speaks to me about my experience, my family and my identity

Feedback from auditor observing a joint supervision with Children in Care and leaving care

'The young person's views, wishes and feelings were clear; their voice had been captured and was shared well by both service areas; K facilitated this discussion well so each service areas views were heard equally. K's clear focus on the young person, and leading in a strengths focussed way was what made this an awesome piece of work'.

What does this mean for children and families?

- Our care leavers are well supported by workers who care about and understand their needs; and the majority achieve good outcomes.

What are we doing to further improve?

- The drive for all young people to have clear, specific plans and personal advisors to be clear on the action they need to take to support our young people to succeed remains relentless. Recent changes to the team structures have given increased oversight on case work and support to staff which we expect to help achieve this.
- We would like to create a hub similar to Russell House in the North and are having discussions regarding potential properties to progress this.
- Work around transitions into adulthood being seen as part of the young person's "journey" and not a single step is important to the leaving care service. A lot of work to inform and support other service areas is underway; this is part of proactive work to formalise earlier preparation for adulthood.
- Continue to engage partner agencies to ensure networks are built in advance and to share responsibility for supporting young people as they become adults; particularly for those young people who were separated children as services that can meet their specific needs are underdeveloped and not readily available across the county.
- Working with council colleagues to identify potential properties for a 'training flats' style supported accommodation in the North.
- Further PH funding has been secured for MHAP direct work with <35 care experienced young adults and <40 frontline staff to upskill and embed trauma-informed practice and events for an additional 100 care experienced young adults; and we are working with ICB to identify how to mainstream this.
- Through the ICS we are planning a stakeholder event for businesses, services, and relevant organisations in Northamptonshire aiming to further improve the offer to our care leavers.
- We have plans to offer more group work for our young people (beyond our well-being, UASC, Football, Girls Sport, and Your Voice groups) so that young people have many and varied opportunities to engage with the service.
- Working jointly with other services, the *Preparing for Adulthood* programme is being progressed to ensure all care leavers are helped to be ready to live successfully independently.



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CORPORATE RISKS																		
CR 01	01/04/2021	Chief Executive	Long term sustainability	Stakeholder engagement - unitaries and other strategic partners Many of the KPIs are dependent on good partnership working with North Northamptonshire and West Northamptonshire and other agencies including Health (PEPS, educational outcomes, health outcomes, missing from care)	Poorly defined shared objectives Collaborative advantage for working together not clearly defined Policy changes within local authority and / or partner organisations Partnership initiative is incompatible / does not align with other local initiatives	Performance targets are not met. No strategic approach to issues of risks, costs, benefits.	2	5	10	1. Clear vision and conditions for success developed and shared with all partners and colleagues 2. Children's Trust business plan strategy with clear priorities 3. Development of strong relationships with both councils and partner organisations	1. Consultation with staff through 58 minute sessions and additional forums 2. Children's Trust strategy in development through the forums	2	5	10	Maintain strong relationships with workforce, owners and partners	2	5	10
CR 02	01/04/2021	Chief Executive	Quality of services / contractual	Service Delivery Contract: A persistent breach in the provision of the Services persisting for one or more Quarters during the term of the Agreement; Monthly KPI falls outside of Tolerance for three (3) consecutive Months; Quarterly KPI, falls of Tolerance for two (2) consecutive Quarters or more	Insufficient progress made against planned improvements and performance indicators	Step In Notice	2	4	8	1. Regular monitoring against contractual KPIs 2. Improved reporting through OCG and SCG 3. Improvements in Business Intelligence and demand forecasting	1. Baselines agreed, together with reporting templates 2. ILACS Inspection "Requires Improvement" 3. Key focus on local and national	2	4	8	1. Improved business intelligence systems. 2. Continued focus on permanent recruitment 3. Social Care Improvement Board 4. Increased workforce training	2	4	8
SOCIAL CARE RISKS																		
SCR 01	01/04/2021	Director of Children's Social Care	Quality of services / contractual	An emergency occurs that has: - a significant adverse impact on the welfare of, and there is a serious increased risk of harm to, children and/or young people in the county of Northamptonshire; or - has a material adverse effect on the Trust of the Services such that there is, or will be, a long-term increased risk of harm to children and young people in the Northamptonshire if the Trust continues to perform the Services	Business continuity failure in critical services Death or injury to a child or young person under the responsibility of the Trust, through inappropriate care or attention	Step in notice Child Safeguarding Practice Review	2	5	10	1. Regular quality assurance and audit activity along with management supervision and oversight to identify and address any risks in relation to practice	1. There are no cases currently where concerns of this type have been identified	2	5	10	N/A	2	5	10
SCR 02	01/04/2021	Director of Children's Social Care	Inspection / Regulatory	Improvements seen by Ofsted in the ILACS 2022 are not sustained or built on.	Failure to improve services for children	Failure to maintain and build on improvements results in difficulty with future recruitment and retention and have negative impact on outcomes for children, and reputational risk	2	5	10	1. Effective leadership and oversight to ensure services are operated at an effective level 2. Monthly Improvement Board to monitor progress 3. Peer review of SEF summer 2022	1. Ofsted ILACS recognised progress and NCT status is now "Requires Improvement" 2. Updated Improvement Plan currently in Draft Form including input from partners and will be	2	4	8	1. Updated improvement plan to be sent to Improvement Board	2	3	6
SCR 03	01/04/2021	Director of Children's Social Care	Service delivery	Ongoing impact of Covid-19 on service demand and related budget pressures	Insufficient apportionment of national monies to cover incurred Covid-19 related Trust costs. Additional financial pressure on the Council. Covid-19 affecting staff members / foster carers / residential homes	Service delivery constrained - reduced service provision; workforce reduction. Need to find additional funding for services. Some non-essential services may be affected.	3	5	15	1. Baseline report produced detailing Trust position as at 1st November. 2. Continuation of targeted funding for additional SW capacity, early help and fostering 3. Placement and performance monitoring in place	1. increase in pressure and complexity with particular impact on certain service areas 2. Weekly demand level report showing pressure on placements	4	4	16	Monitoring impact, potential impact on service demands post March. Additional request for additional funding through contract as part of Invest to save.	2	5	10
SCR 04	09/05/2022	Director of Children's social care	Service delivery	Increase in safeguarding referrals and complexity of need leading to an increase in numbers of children in care	impact of Covid 19 pandemic, combined with legacy of unmet needs and underdeveloped early help offer.	Impact on capacity to manage the workload and to deliver quality services potential impact on budgets and placement cost alongside complexity of young people needs to be met	3	3	9	1. early help steering group and action plan and ongoing work with the wider partnership to ensure right help at the right time and reduce escalation of needs 2. system approach to ensure appropriate levels of intervention for families 2. work on robust application of thresholds by a strong front door 3. continue to improve quality of services and ensure sustainable plans at closure	1. Increase in demand and complexity as the effects of the pandemic are more prevalent. 2. Increase in separated children and fewer children leaving care over the last year. Therefore, increase	3	4	12	ICS engagement to address system challenges Safeguarding partners working collectively on priorities, one being early help Neglect steering group to develop action plan and monitor impact	3	3	9

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SCR 05	09/05/2022	Director of Children's social care	Service delivery	Unregistered placements that are illegal	THE CARE PLANNING, PLACEMENT & CARE REVIEW (ENGLAND) (AMENDMENT) REGULATIONS 2021 came into force on 9 September 2021- demands that Looked after children under the age of 16 must be placed in foster care or a registered children's home	risk of prosecution/ judicial review/ insurance/ reputation/ Ofsted inspection unintended impact where we see regulated providers that refuse complex cases as they may negatively impact their Ofsted rating and increase in solo placements	4	5	20	Unregulated placement is made only when no other alternative is available. Decision at AD/ Director level. Checks prior and after the placement is made ensuring risks are mitigated and the needs of the young person are understood. All unregulated placements are monitored on a weekly basis by senior managers to ensure all children living in unregistered children's home placements are safe and children's needs are met, and that timely action is taking place to secure a registered placement that meets their needs or so that they can safely return home. Fortnightly reports to councils/ DCSs and ICF. Regular reporting to Ofsted is in place. We report to our Social Care Improvement Board and OCG on a monthly basis. Quality assurance in regards to this area of work in place.	Unregistered placements procedure devised to ensure consistency. Senior management oversight and regular review. Learning from Ofsted inspection has been implemented. Reporting to council and ofsted in place. Sufficiency	4	3	12	implementation of sufficiency action plan. implementation of capital investment and DfE bid. Implementation of valuing care project. Weekly meetings chaired by AD for QA and Commissioning involving services and commissioning team. Increase in quality assurance activity with focus on both compliance and outcomes	2	5	10
SCRO 6	01/04/2021	Director of Children's Social Care	Finance / service delivery	Challenges to the delivery of / withdrawal of the Troubled Families Programme	Government withdraw or significantly amends the terms of the Troubled Families Programme	Insufficient funding to sustain services funded by the Troubled Families Programme. Poor outcomes for young people. Increased costs, reputational risk.	2	4	8	1. Regular monitoring of troubled families (supporting families) attachment and PBR income	1. Attachment funding covers staffing and has been rolled forward by government for a further year to 21 / 22 2. Significant increase in successful claims for the final quarter of 20/21 financial	1	4	4	1. A/D Early Help leading a piece of work to identify where further claims are possible 2. Closer interface with Business intelligence with dedicated resource 3. funding confirmed for future years	2	2	4
SCRO 7	01/04/2021	Director of Children's Social Care	Service delivery	Non recent child sexual exploitation connected cases	Victims coming forward, police investigation and criminal charges, identification of further victims and alleged perpetrators as investigation continues and made public	Serious harm experienced by a child/ young person, reputational, financial (litigation, insurance, additional resource requirements), HR (disciplinary)	3	4	12	1. The Trust is managing the safeguarding aspects of the operation/ investigation in collaboration with safeguarding partners who together manage the communication strategy.	Police investigation completed and review of case files has also been	3	4	12	1. Once report written and publication timeline confirmed then to develop a comms plan. 2. Additional resources agreed by the council to effectively manage existing work and any new	2	4	8
SCRO 8	07/03/2023	Assistant Director CFSS & YOS	Service Delivery	YOS pending HMIP inspection.	Impact for the Children Trust if the YOS provision is considered not to be a strength.	Failure to achieve a successful outcome for inspections and decrease in positive outcomes for young people and families.	3	4	12	Regular inspection readiness Meetings Peer review undertaken Service Performance Data Clinics YJB action Plan performance monitoring QA Audit Controls - recent review of Custody support plans Data intelligence with Police and Partners to Target areas and themes. Scrutiny on Top ten re-offenders YOS Management Board, Assurance reporting, oversight and challenge.	Preparing to convene external scrutiny for inspection readiness preparing to undertake a full audit control of all policy and procedures to ensure updated and accessible to staff. Training Audit tracker Inspection folders in place Review Risk areas known	3	4	12	Continue to hold the inspection readiness meetings. Report all risks to YOS management Board NCT SLT Oversight	2	3	6
FINANCE AND OPERATIONAL RISKS																		
FOR 01	01/04/2021	Chief Executive/Director of Finance and Resources	Service delivery	Manage budget within agreed contract sum	The inability of the Trust to break even leads to a 'breach of contract' as determined within the Financial Mechanism	Step-in notice	1	5	5	1.Regular monitoring of cash flow by Director of Finance 2. Regular monitoring of budget through SLT and Trust Board	1. No current cash flow concerns 2. Transformation and efficiency reporting in place 3. Balanced Outturn position as at the 31/3/2022 subject to final	3	5	15	1. Review of Placement spend, though Joint Funding panels and procurement 2. Creation of local provision 3. Continued drive to recruit foster carers 4. Implementation of new ways of working as part of both IT and asset strategy within the trust 5. Implementation of valuing care project in 2023.	1	5	5
FOR 02	01/04/2021	Director of Finance and Resources	Finance	The risk of cuts in the budget contributions of partner agencies following central budget cuts	Partner agency reduce / withhold supporting budget	Service delivery constrained - reduced service provision; workforce reduction	2	5	10	1. Regular meetings with funding partners to ensure clear sight of any proposed budget cuts 2. Successful bid for additional funding from DfE for improvement activities £469k 3. Reviewing new grant allocations and submission of bids for 22/23 (i.e. new burdens grant)	1. Submission of contract sum for period 2023 -2025 and provisional contract sum agreed in accordance with SDC 2. Monthly detailed financial monitoring in place	3	5	15	1. Funding agreements in place for 22/23. 2. Process in place for change control in the 22/23 financial year to respond to Medium term pressures. 3. Finalising arrangements for the treatment of earmarked grants and reserves 4. Inflation pressures including pay inflation above the levels forecast in the contract sum, which will require a change control mechanism to be enacted	2	5	10

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FOR 03	01/04/2021	Director of Finance and Resources	Finance / service delivery	Increase in volume and the complexity of care required and increase in numbers of children in need of support adding to budget pressures.	Inaccurate prediction of service demand and Placement Sufficiency	Failure to achieve a successful outcome for inspections and decrease in positive outcomes for children, young people and families	3	5	15	1. Regular monitoring of cases 2. Review commissioning arrangements and benchmarking for external placements 3. Joint funding arrangements with education and CCG 4. Development of placement sufficiency strategy	1. Increased complexity of cases post Covid-19 2. Review of placement budgets and partner contributions 3. MARP panel developing, however challenges from partners as implementation of new arrangements for joint funding protocols 4. Increasing demand in	4	5	20	1. Individual pupil Monitoring systems in place re case numbers. 2. Improved placement sufficiency and planning , through capital investment 3. Trust workshop to develop placement sufficiency and the development of additional local provision 4. Review of Trust property and linking to the councils asset management strategy 5. submission of additional capital bids to develop local provision. 6. Placement modelling to inform contract sum negotiations as part of quarter 1 report , final position to be agreed on actuals. Retrospective change control to be implemented at year end .	2	5	10
FOR 04	01/09/2021	Director of Finance and Resources	Finance / service delivery	Increasing cost of commissioned services and placements as a result of uncontrollable external factors (i.e. Increased national insurance; changes in regulation; impact of Brexit and Covid on ability of providers to secure suitable workforce, failure of external placement market to meet needs)	Failure to secure services and placements to meet level of demand within budget	1. reduced service provision for children and families leading to future increase in demand 2. not able to fulfil contractual requirements 3. Cost pressure	3	4	12	1. Commissioners working with providers to address workforce related issues 2. Re-opening of frameworks to increase number of providers and reviewing commissioning options 3. Identifying alternative service delivery models to commissioned services	1. Care and support providers experiencing challenges in securing suitable workforce 2. Reviewing provider	4	4	16	1. Join additional placement frameworks 2. Improve joint commissioning with adults services 3. Bring commissioned services in house if this is viable and will achieve better value for money	2	4	8
FOR 05	01/04/2021	Director of Finance and Resources	Finance / service delivery	Inability to deliver savings plans within contract sum	There have been additional cost burdens on Children's Services as a result of Covid-19. We have also postponed some transformation projects which were set to deliver savings and efficiencies for the Council	Failure to deliver savings and transformation projects leading to pressures on the contract sum and targeting resources on improving from line service delivery.	3	5	15	1. Review of individual project delivery 2. Work with partners as a collaborative approach (i.e. CCG, housing). 3. Identify alternative savings and in year mitigations 4. Incorporate project management with SRO for each project. 5. Closer links with finance and corporate project management to establish co-dependencies	1. Continued review of budgets 2. Review benchmarking and demand forecasts 3. New monitoring and reporting system in place. 4. Workshop with WNC in December 22 to review key priorities and savings co-delivery	3	5	15	1. Impact factored into the development of the MTFs and contract sum 2. Review residual pressures impacting on 22/23 financial year 3. New monitoring and reporting system in place. 4. Workshop with WNC in December 22 to review key priorities and savings co-delivery	2	5	10
FOR 06	01/07/2021	Director of Finance and Resources	Information Governance	Data Breach. NCT processes and stores a high volume of sensitive information related to the safeguarding and protection of vulnerable children and their families. Data breaches risk the integrity and availability of this information.	Deliberate or accidental action (or inaction) by NCT as data controller or a data processor of NCT data. Access by an unauthorised third party. Sending personal data to an incorrect recipient. Computing devices containing personal data being lost or stolen. Alteration of personal data without permission. Loss of availability of personal data.	Reputational Harm. Financial penalty through ICO fines under GDPR. ICO audit and regulatory action due to reduced UK GDPR compliance. Harm or risk of harm to service users, their families, employees and 3rd parties due to data breach. Loss of systems functionality. Possible safeguarding impact to children from information loss, incorrect information recorded or inability to access data when decision making. Loss of NCT contract to deliver services.	4	5	20	1. IG Service established and DPO appointed. Data Protection and Cyber Security Essentials training is mandatory to all staff and is renewed annually. Data Protection policies and procedures are in place. Data breach reporting procedure is defined and communicated to workforce. Workforce report data breaches promptly and in line with policy. DPO report breaches meeting threshold to ICO within 72 hours deadline. . Data breach protection policies and procedures reviewed as IG BAU. The DPO and SIRO work closely with workforce and SLT to ensure a Trust wide awareness of data protection responsibilities, that training is taken up and breaches are reported to DPO. NCT data protection compliance certification for ICO place. 2. Systems Data Protection Impact: New processes, systems, working methods, project programmes, software implementation, etc., are assessed for their data protection impact. 3. Unlawful Access to NCT Systems: Third party agencies and organisations provided with access to NCT systems within a NCT SLA, Commissioned Contract, other contract type or Data Sharing Agreement (DSA) for defined usage.	08/2022. Implementation of IG Framework Action Plan on hold due to additional workload to address Leaving Care information access request backlog. 07/2022. New controls to authorise access to NCT systems and data for third-parties through an updated access request form has been completed. Trust wide communications through DPO and CEO to workforce	3	4	12	1. Permanent recruitment of IG team and level of resource to be agreed 2. Training completions to be continually monitored to ensure levels of compliance are maintained. Additional training to be put in place specific to roles and service areas across workforce; direct target of staff not completed mandatory training. 3. Implementation Development of Information Governance and Data Protection Framework action plan.	2	4	8
FOR 07	01/07/2021	Director of Finance and Resources	Information Governance	Cyber security incident or issue. NCT processes and stores a high volume of sensitive information related to the safeguarding and protection of vulnerable children and their families and its workforce through computer systems.	Cyber Attack - Security breaches or hacks of computer systems leading to data breach and loss of functionality from ransomware (malicious software) placed on systems. Successful phishing exercise, data leakage, hacking activities and insider (employee) threat. Cyber defences are not sufficiently robust because the IT environment is not maintained to the required standard of security and integrity.	Harm or risk of harm to service users, their families, employees and 3rd parties due to data breaches. Loss of systems functionality. Possible safeguarding impact to children due to inability to access information. Staff unable to make correct safeguarding decisions due to cyber security attacks.	4	3	12	1. Data Protection policies and procedures in place. 2. Data protection policies and procedures to be regularly reviewed . 3. Data Protection and Cyber Security Essentials training is mandatory to all staff and is taken up. 4. Procedure and process to report breaches meeting threshold to ICO. 5. Regular communications to workforce regarding adherence to policies and procedures. 6. Additional training and workshops offered to workforce on procedures and policy requirements.	1. Data Protection policies and procedures are in place, either NCT owned or incorporated from NCC, WNC or NNC legacy documentation. 2. Review of data protection policies and procedures incorporated into Information Governance and	2	3	6	1. Data Protection policies and procedures to be reviewed and formatted to NCT brand. 2. Information Governance and Data Protection Framework Action Plan to be completed 3. Training completions to be monitored to ensure levels of compliance are maintained. 4. Additional training to be provided.	2	2	4

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FOR 08	01/11/20	Director of Finance/SLT	Staffing	High levels of permanent staff turnover	Less consistency of practice and increased levels of agency staff	Service delivery is hindered by staff recruitment and retention issues. An over reliance on interim social workers, that impacts the overcapacity and capability to deliver. Increased financial cost of interim staff. Inconsistency for families and potential for reduced outcome achievement High caseloads due to vacancies	5	4	20	1. Push permanent recruitment 2. Effective support for staff to mitigate high levels of attrition 3. Work in partnership with OPUS and community care as part of a strategic campaign 4. Develop reputation and offer for social workers	1. Review of arrangements to introduce permanent SW staff to the organisation and consideration of an alternative provider to further improve opportunities to recruit to permanent posts. 2. A 2% pay award for roles paid at SM1 or below arranged for payment in July and backdated to 1	5	4	20	1. Ongoing regular focus on permanent recruitment - performing well in a difficult market 2. Development of a strategic recruitment partnership - microsite for recruitment in place 3. Working with community care to promote the trust and utilise networks 4. Development of communication strategies including the use of social media platforms(Linked in and Twitter). Continued focus on alternative ideas for retention. Focus on hotspots across organisation continues.	2	4	8
FOR 09	01/04/2021	Director of Finance and Resources	Contracts and Supplier resilience	Risk of weak supplier resilience	If there is a risk of weak supplier resilience, then there is the possibility of provider bankruptcies putting service continuity at risk.	A reputational risk of failing to meet the needs and expectations of our customers, members and politicians as well as legal implications for statutory services. Potentially increased costs through recommissioning are failure to identify an alternative provider	3	4	12	1. Ensure service continuity plans are in place and annually reviewed for all strategic and priority contracts. 2. Increase frequency of monitoring of the provider, and use other indicators such as share value performance to help determine risk. 3. Monitoring CreditSafe alerts if the providers financial standing changes and rating drops to below 50%, Contract Managers to Increase frequency of monitoring of the provider, and use other indicators such as share value performance to help determine risk	1. Review of all contracts and providers 2. Exposure to financial risk (post covid) organisations have been funded at budget. 3. Impact on changing demands (Transport - continuation of	2	4	8	1. Continue to review supplier resilience as part of contracts review and commissioning strategy 2. Consideration of developing strategic partnership which would provide longer term stability of commissioning arrangements 3. Consideration of inflation related increase to commissioned services in with contract sum negotiations	2	4	8
FOR 10	01/04/2021	Director of Finance and Resources	IT Infrastructure	Implementation of new children's IT system 1/4/22 - RISK updated to Procurement and Implementation of new Children's IT system	Failure to implement the new IT system aligned to support practice improvement, improved reporting and integration with other systems > failure to engage with the service	1. System does not support practice and improved decision making and efficiencies . 2. Failure to integrate with other systems	3	4	12	1. Embed best practice into new system (e.g. Signs of Safety) 2 .Ensure new system supports Ofsted Improvement Plans 3.Implementation supports Ofsted Improvement Plans. 4. Appropriate groups embedded in Trust through project but continued post programme 5. Enhance technical support and ongoing development	1. Engagement of Project lead for Children's Services 2. Governance structure proposed. 3. Revenue from NNC and WNC sought - awaiting final decision on governance arrangements	4	4	16	1. Programme board decision on future of social care information management system has defined new actions for this risk 2. Agree Capital with Council(s) to start procurement 3. Start procurement with engagement from Trust teams as required - 5/1/23 First programme board started. NNC funding approved, WNC funding due to be approved end Jan 23.	2	4	8
FOR 11	01/04/2021	Director of Finance and Resources	Service delivery	The Trust is dependent upon the Council(s) delivery of aligned services and of a number of support services	Reduced service delivery level by the Council(s) impacts the trust own performance	1. Performance targets are not met 2. Support services are not supporting the delivery of the trusts objectives	4	4	16	1. Development of KPIs that will support service delivery levels required by the Trust 2. Continued development of support services board , with focus on areas of poor performance	The Support Services Board has been in operation for 2 years and is receiving high quality monthly performance information and narrative around KPIs. The board reviews risk and issues monthly and records actions / commentary	2	4	8	1. Review potential impact on KPI's and service improvement delivery 2. Review alternative delivery models in partnership with the councils 3. A separate risk and issue register has been developed and is in place for Support Services. This enables recording of items relating to performance and affecting service delivery that are not picked up by existing KPIs 4) IT KPIs have been reviewed and agreed. 5) Transport SLA being developed following disaggregation.	1	4	4
FOR 12	01/08/2021	Director of Finance and Resources	IT on-going support	IT support for the Trust including access to systems	Failure to implement new functions in existing IT systems (e.g. CareFirst) results in NCT not being able to fulfil improvement and contractual requirements	1. Not able to support improvement plans 2. Not able to fulfil contractual requirements	3	4	12	1. Escalation with IT and also Eclipse programme board to gain buy in and support for this risk 2. Recruitment of IT relationship manager for the Trust 3. Review critical incident and business continuity	1. Escalated to IT and gained positive results. 2. New business relationship manager employed by IT and has had positive impact	3	4	12	1. CareFirst and other systems roadmap created to align with NCT priorities 2. Invest to save investment in technology to incorporate new ways of working 3. Continued engagement with IT relationship manager 4. Creation of a Trust Digital Strategy	1	4	4

Risk No	Date Raised	Risk Owner	Risk Type	Risk Description	Event	Impact	Initial Risk Score			Mitigating Action	Current Position	Current Risk			Further Management Actions	Target Residual Risk		
							Probability	Impact	SCORE			Probability	Impact	SCORE		Probability	Impact	SCORE
FOR 13	20/12/2021	Director of Finance and Resources	Property Infrastructure	The current level of repair across the properties occupied by the Trust is poor. Clarity of the working principles between the North and West with respect to rectification is causing delay and there are concerns around the availability of funding to rectify issues raised.	1. Health and Safety concerns/event 2. Poor working conditions for staff 3. Staff safety concerns 4. Ability to provide services (children's centres and children's homes)	1. Ability to provide a safe working environment for staff and customers 2. Ability to provide frontline services	4	4	16	1. Escalation to the Assistant Directors of Property (North and West) on 3rd December 2. Escalation to the Support Services Board 20th December 3. North/West to provide clarity on working arrangements as the service disaggregates, including confirmation around tracking and prioritising expenditure 4. Children's home report by Trust capturing high risk areas 5. Monthly SLA meetings to be put in place with N/W Unitaries 6. Progress to be reported to the Support Services Board 7. Trust undertook soft FM audit across sites to feed into retender of N and W contracts 8. Planned programme of works to be developed to address NCC underinvestment in properties 9. ICF tested with defining clear routes for accessing capital for both N and W - documented process with associated templates.	Following escalation to property ADs in North and West, engagement has continued to improve. Monthly operational and quarterly strategic SLA meetings are in place for the North and the West. The North and West fully disaggregated responsibilities on 31st January. The North have been responsive to queries raised and are bedding in their	2	4	8	Establish a clear working process with the North and West Unitaries for the management and prioritisation of repairs and maintenance. Ensure the North and West are reporting on all agreed KPIs and that MI information requested by the Trust is provided regularly Agree a funded planned maintenance programme across all Trust occupied buildings once Unitary budget setting process has completed (developing well) receive documented access to Capital process via the ICF for in year applications Feed specific capital projects requests into contract setting process to ensure key projects are included within Unitary capital plans Joint N/W/Trust Asset utilisation working group chaired by ICF established since Feb 23.	1	4	4
FOR 14	25/04/2022	Director of Finance and Resource / AD CFSS and YOS	Financial Risk	YOS restructure plans rely on the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner funding support. Recently this has been withdrawn for the year 21/22 which has placed a financial shortfall on the team budget. It is imperative that OPFCC provide ongoing funding via the Unitary Authorities to support the Prevent and Diversion from offending priority.	Clear funding arrangements with the unitary authorities needs to be clarified with longer term agreements. OPFCC need a direct reporting line to one unitary authority on behalf of both councils to be able to ensure good communication and payment responsibilities agreed.	Less staffing to deliver the preventative and Diversion element of YOS priorities to reduce the number of first time offenders. YOS are already a Priority one in this area for YIB therefore this would raise ongoing concerns.	4	3	12	1. Senior Managers aware, 2. Identified Unitary Council Lead, 3. Set up regular meetings to discuss financial agreements for the future.	New Finances have been provided by MoJ to aid the early help and prevention work supported by the YOS. This will be a positive position for the YOS staffing issues and managing	1	1	2	Review current Service Plan. New recruitment drive of fixed term staff. YOS management Board oversight of priorities strengthened.	1	1	2
FOR 15	25/04/2022	Director of Finance and Resource / AD CFSS and YOS	Financial Risk	Supporting Families Changes to Outcome Framework to be implemented in October 2022, the Prescribed framework and guidance has made the reporting of successful PBR claims more challenging than previously. We will need much more partnership engagement to identify more families than last year. The changes to the framework also identifies health as a data provider which has not always been easy to achieve previously.	Data meetings with health are ongoing to ensure we can download what we need BiPi leading on Data warehouse work. Partnership engagement sessions to deliver the new framework so that everyone understands what is required going forward. Information sharing protocol understood and shared to all partners. Governance arrangements to be set out clearly to ensure priority plan delivery. Need to achieve 100% again this year for PBR	Reduced financial contribution from the DLUHC resulting in less staff employed to deliver the work. More scrutiny by DLUHC department and regional leads. More scrutiny in data performance and auditing of casework.	4	3	12	1. Senior managers aware of new Framework, 2. Steering Group aware, 3. New Governance arrangements developed. 4. Revise action plan and risk register.	1. Dates set for meetings with Health Data Leads and IS Governance 2. Police ISA for data sharing sign up. 3. New Early Help Strategic Partnership Board to oversee the SF Action Plan and EH	4	3	12	Health Lead and AD for CFSS to ensure Early Help Partnership Board hold this as a key priority. Also link with Family Hub delivery plans and ICB and place based delivery development groups for both west and North.	2	2	4
FOR 16	07/01/2022	Director of Finance and Resources	Operational risk	There is a risk that the split of DTI services between NNC and WNC Councils will impact the SLA provided from WNC DTI to NCT. This is because the capability and capacity of service from WNC DTI could be impacted by this split.	Continued dialogue with WNC Chief Information Officer to provide assurance of no impact	Currently unknown	4	3	12	1. This is being raised with the CIO for WNC 2. A formal request for reassurance that SLA and other elements of IT services provided will not be impacted by this change	1. Raised with WNC CIO (July 2022). Reassurance received 2. Council assessment March 2023 3. Continue to	4	3	12	Contractual escalation of risk if the impact threatens front line services.	2	3	6
FOR 17	10/01/2023	AD Quality Assurance & Commissioning	Operational and Financial risk	Residential Short Breaks	Councils do not agree to NCT / NCT partner organisation delivery; no other viable providers; have to continue with current provider at cost higher than budget	Risk to family breakdown and increase in children in care if service significantly changes/ withdrawn in unplanned manner; failure to meet statutory duties ;increase costs if have to continue with current provider; negative SEND inspection outcome	3	4	12	Specialist pension advice being sought; twin track planning NCT or NCT partner to deliver; project steering group in place; financial modelling	Due diligence report to be completed by end Jan 23	2	4	8	Reviewing models in other areas; consideration of what additional financial support could enable transfer to alternative provider ; options to remodel service prior to transfer	1	4	4

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		Last 6 Months Activity							Comparators		Target	Trend	
Measure		October	November	December	January	February	March	YTD	SN	England		20/21	21/22
Children and Family Support Services	Total families allocated to Children & Families Support Service teams	113	174	152	130	124	139	1639	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	1538
	Families allocated within 2 days of receipt	64%	73%	71%	65%	72%	60%	65%	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	71%
	Initial Family Contacts conducted	96	96	100	94	96	108	1110	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	971
	Total children open to CFSS at month end	1255	1294	1396	1370	1422	1496		n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	1399
	Of which open for 9+ months	105	106	142	136	143	174		n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	103
	Of which open for 12+ months	52	50	55	56	66	77		n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	31
	Average weeks open per child (at month end)	19.1	17.6	17.9	18.1	18.2	18.7		n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	20
	Average caseload per worker (at month end)	9.2	9.4	10.2	10.5	11.0	11.3		n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	11
	Total families closed	137	126	82	122	87	89	1353	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	1344
	% closed as completed successfully	48%	53%	50%	58%	56%	48%	52%	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	47%
	Families escalated to Social Care at any point while active with CFSS	27	22	10	14	16	21	244	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	135
	Children escalated to CP within 12 months of CFSS EHA	5	0	3	4	0	1	23	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	18
	As % of total CP starts	7%	0%	4%	4%	0%	2%	3%	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	2.4%
	Children escalated to CIN within 12 months of CFSS EHA	10	9	2	5	0	4	78	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	55
As % of CIN acceptances	4.9%	3.2%	1.3%	2.8%	0.0%	1.8%	3.4%	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	2.5%	
Measure		October	November	December	January	February	March	YTD	SN	England		20/21	21/22
Contacts and Referrals	Number of Initial contacts received by the MASH	3904	4152	3071	3617	3840	4201	46624	n/a	n/a	n/a	41323	43393
	% of contacts to referral	21%	21%	17%	18%	19%	18%	19%	n/a	n/a	n/a	25%	30%
	% of contacts to EH	11%	14%	20%	26%	23%	22%	15%	n/a	n/a	n/a	25%	14%
	% contacts NFA	68%	65%	64%	56%	58%	57%	66%	n/a	n/a	n/a	50%	56%
	Number of referrals received by the MASH (in month)	837	877	511	657	728	767	8926	n/a	n/a	n/a	11357	12959
	Rate of referrals received by the MASH per 10k (annualised)	580.3	608.0	354.3	460.5	510.3	537.7	517.1	503.0	538.0	n/a	677.0	748.7
	% of Referrals to Section 47	26.2%	24.5%	24.9%	28.6%	27.3%	25.0%	24.6%	n/a	n/a	n/a	0%	0%
	% of Referrals to Assessment Only	73.8%	75.5%	75.1%	71.4%	72.7%	75.0%	75.4%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
	Percentage of referrals with a previous referral within 12 months	22.7%	31.2%	29.0%	25.7%	28.3%	30.0%	29.5%	21.0%	20.0%	29.0%	31.0%	35.6%
	MASH referrals given an outcome within 48 hours (2 working days)	61.9%	61.1%	57.0%	57.0%	54.7%	51.2%	67.5%			85.0%		
Measure		October	November	December	January	February	March	YTD	SN	England	Target	20/21	21/22
Assessments	Number of assessments authorised	675	1195	798	745	718	825	9702	n/a	n/a	n/a	8728	9110
	Rate of assessments authorised per 10k (annualised)	468.0	828.5	553.2	522.2	503.3	578.3	562.0	496.0	533.0	578	500	526
	Percentage of Single Assessments authorised within 45 working days	95.7%	89.9%	88.8%	91.4%	93.0%	94.9%	93.9%	87.0%	84.0%	85%	98.2%	97.8%
	Percentage of DAAT cases visited within 5 days of referral	64.4%	47.9%	46.2%	40.7%	57.5%	51.3%	57.1%	n/a	n/a	tbc	74.0%	78.2%
	Open assessments past 45 days	5	29	35	41	14	52	52	n/a	n/a	n/a	2	7
	% of assessments ending with service involvement	41%	33%	32%	39%	32%	36%	34%	n/a	n/a	n/a	39.7%	36.6%
	% of assessments stepping down to early help or universal	27%	31%	30%	26%	31%	26%	29%	38.0%	29.0%	n/a	22.9%	24.6%
	% of assessments closing with no further action	31%	36%	38%	35%	37%	38%	36%			35.0%	34.0%	38.9%
Measure		October	November	December	January	February	March	YTD	SN	England	Target	20/21	21/22
S47's	Number of S47's authorised	318	364	304	193	301	295	3473	n/a	n/a	n/a	2436	2670
	Rate of S47's authorised per 10k (annualised)	220.5	252.4	210.8	135.3	211.0	206.8	201.2	155.0	180.0	161	136	154
	% of S47's with outcome ICPC required	37%	35%	37%	37%	29%	41%	37%	34%	34%	n/a	46%	42%
	% of S47's with outcome no further S47 action	55%	57%	57%	53%	59%	48%	54%	n/a	n/a	n/a	41%	50%
	% of S47's with outcome no further action	8%	7%	7%	9%	12%	10%	9%	n/a	n/a	n/a	11%	8%
CIN	Number of children in need (inc CP and CIC as per DfE definition)	4838	4646	4336	4333	4376	4491	4491	n/a	n/a	n/a	4223	4196
	Children in need rate (per 10,000)	279.5	268.4	250.5	253.1	255.6	262.3	262.3	299.0	334.0	335.8	282.0	242.4
	% of children in need with an up to date CIN plan	75.5%	74.8%	70.3%	75.4%	83.7%	76.5%	76.5%	n/a	n/a	90%	90.0%	86.6%
	% of children in need with an up to date CIN visit	75.3%	73.0%	71.8%	78.2%	82.0%	76.6%	76.6%	n/a	n/a	90%	80.1%	83.1%
	Number of privately fostered children	6	6	6	5	4	4	4	n/a	n/a	n/a	4	7
Measure		October	November	December	January	February	March	YTD	SN	England	Target	20/21	21/22
Child Protection	Percentage of Initial Child Protection Conferences held within 15 days of a strategy discussion being initiated	54.9%	45.9%	49.4%	9.3%	42.6%	24.3%	60.5%	84.0%	79%	81%	86.0%	82.2%
	% of ICPC's which result in a child protection plan	74.7%	63.3%	71.8%	76.6%	90.7%	62.9%	79.1%	86.0%	87%	n/a	86.0%	80.0%
	Number of children with a Child Protection Plan	672	669	666	698	678	625	625	n/a	n/a	n/a	725	591
	Children with a Child Protection Plan rate (per 10,000)	38.8	38.7	38.5	40.8	39.6	36.5	36.5	34.0	42.0	45.5	42.2	34.1
	% of children on CP plans with a visit within timescales	84.6%	88.7%	77.4%	87.5%	90.8%	89.9%	89.9%	n/a	n/a	90%	88.8%	92.2%
	Percentage of children that became the subject of a Child Protection Plan for the second or subsequent time	22.1%	40.5%	15.4%	33.3%	24.0%	21.3%	29.7%	24.0%	23.0%	20%	22.6%	27.7%
	Percentage of children with Child Protection reviews completed within timescale	96.7%	96.2%	96.8%	97.0%	98.0%	99.3%	99.3%	92.0%	89.0%	95%	94.0%	97.1%
Percentage of Child Protection Plans closed after two years or more	2.7%	0.0%	12.9%	3.2%	0.0%	6.0%	4.2%	2.0%	4.0%	3.6%	2.8%	3.7%	

Measure		October	November	December	January	February	March	YTD	SN	England	Target	20/21	21/22	
Children in Care	Number of children in care	1221	1241	1229	1233	1232	1231		n/a	n/a	n/a	1143	1185	
	Children in Care rate (per 10,000)	70.5	71.7	71.0	72.0	72.0	71.9		64.0	70.0	n/a	66.3	68.5	
	Number of Children in Care who are UASC	94	100	103	104	105	104		n/a	n/a	n/a	0.0	66.0	
	Number of children entering care	42	51	32	44	33	32	448	n/a	n/a	n/a	387.0	458.0	
	Number of children discharged from care	37	31	44	42	34	35	398	n/a	n/a	n/a	401.0	424.0	
	% of children leaving care due to permanence (Special Guardianship Order, adoption, residence order)	16%	16%	25%	10%	21%	23%	19%		31%	n/a	30%	29%	22%
	Percentage of eligible Children in Care of statutory school age with PEPs completed by the end of last term (reported May/September/January)	97.0%	97.0%	98.0%	-	-	-	-		n/a	n/a	95%	-	-
	Percentage of Initial Health Assessments completed within 28 days of becoming looked after.	82.4%	78.3%	83.7%	44.4%	84.4%	42.9%	55.4%		N/A	N/A	90%	51.9%	46.6%
	Percentage of Children in Care with an up to date dental check	74.2%	73.9%	72.5%	72.2%	73.0%	71.2%	71.2%		69.0%	70.0%	90%	40.1%	55.2%
	Percentage of Children in Care with an up to date health assessment	65.1%	66.1%	73.8%	66.8%	67.1%	66.6%	66.6%		88.0%	89.0%	93%	62.0%	63.0%
	% of Children in Care with an up to date care plan	85.0%	82.1%	80.6%	79.8%	82.2%	83.6%	83.6%		N/A	N/A	95%	93.0%	86.0%
	% of Children in Care with a visit within the last 6 weeks	87.6%	91.0%	87.4%	85.8%	92.3%	89.9%	89.9%		n/a	n/a	95%	85.0%	91.2%
	% of Children in Care with their 1st review on time	90.9%	80.0%	90.9%	57.1%	74.3%	68.2%	82.6%		n/a	n/a	tb	70.8%	78.9%
	% of Children in Care with their 2nd review on time	84.7%	88.4%	87.0%	85.7%	87.7%	88.3%	88.3%		n/a	n/a	tb	89.7%	88.0%
% of Children in Care with their subsequent review on time	93.0%	92.1%	91.6%	91.6%	91.3%	92.7%	92.7%		n/a	n/a	tb	95.4%	93.2%	
Measure		October	November	December	January	February	March	YTD	SN	England	Target	20/21	21/22	
Placements	Percentage of Children in Care with three or more placements in the previous 12 months	11.9%	11.7%	11.6%	11.0%	11.0%	11.0%	11.0%	10%	10%	10%	8.8%	12.7%	
	Children who have been in care 2.5 years or more, and of those, who have been in the same placement for 2+ years/placed for adoption (%)	68.4%	67.5%	65.1%	64.1%	65.2%	65.2%	65.2%	71%	71%	66%	63.0%	72.5%	
	% of children in care placed out of county and 20+ miles from their home	17%	18%	18%	18%	19%	20%	20%	19%	16%	17%	19.0%	18.0%	
	% of Children in Care in residential placements	11.5%	11.7%	12.0%	11.4%	12.3%	12.7%	12.7%	20.0%	17.0%	n/a	11.9%	11.9%	
	% of residential placements which are in house	9.4%	8.4%	9.6%	10.0%	11.1%	9.2%	9.2%	n/a	n/a	tb	11.0%	10.8%	
	In house residential utilisation	73.0%	73.0%	73.0%	73.0%	73.0%	73.0%	73.0%	n/a	n/a	tb	72.7%	59.1%	
	In house foster utilisation	69.2%	67.7%	68.7%	70.3%	69.0%	67.0%	67.0%	n/a	n/a	tb	86.0%	65.8%	
Measure		October	November	December	January	February	March	YTD	SN	England	Target	20/21	21/22	
Adoption	Number of adoption orders granted			7			9	30	n/a	n/a	n/a	72	38	
	The average number of days between children entering care and being placed for adoption			401.0			426.9	498.3	340	376	273	436	588	
	The average number of days between the placement order being granted and being matched (Quarterly)			102.0			144.7	120.2	152	178	178	165	184	
	Percentage of Children in Care who were placed for adoption within 12 months of an agency decision that they should be adopted (Quarterly)			85.7%			77.8%	86.7%	72.5%	74%	72%	72.9%	70.3%	
Care Leavers	Percentage of eligible Children in Care and young people with up to date Pathway Plans	85.4%	82.2%	78.7%	80.2%	83.1%	84.8%	84.8%	N/A	N/A	95%	87.8%	88.9%	
	Percentage of eligible Children in Care and young people with up to date In Touch Visits/Contact	88.5%	86.4%	85.1%	84.8%	89.1%	89.6%	89.6%	N/A	N/A	90%	79.7%	81.3%	
	% of Children in Care & Care Leavers aged 16+ with a personal advisor	84.9%	84.4%	79.4%	78.4%	79.7%	78.8%	78.8%	n/a	n/a	tb	77.6%	78.5%	
	Percentage of young people now aged 17-21 and living in suitable accommodation who were looked after when aged 16	95.4%	94.6%	93.1%	93.4%	95.6%	94.7%	94.7%	89.0%	89%	90%	91.9%	91.7%	
	Percentage of young people now aged 17-21 and in employment, education or training who were looked after when aged 16	64.2%	63.5%	62.8%	64.2%	64.5%	63.4%	63.4%	56.0%	58%	55%	58.6%	62.5%	
Measure		October	November	December	January	February	March	YTD	SN	England	Target	20/21	21/22	
Caseloads & Staffing	Workers with caseloads above the target in Assessment Teams	10	5	3	3	0	4	4	n/a	n/a	35	0	0	
	Workers with caseloads above the target in Safeguarding Teams	34	38	33	29	39	36	36	n/a	n/a	22	39	27	
	Workers with caseloads above the target in LAC Teams	5	3	4	7	7	5	5	n/a	n/a	20	1	4	
	% of qualified social workers with caseloads above target	19.2%	17.9%	15.9%	15.5%	17.8%	17.3%	17.3%	n/a	n/a	12%	16%	13.1%	
	Overall % social care posts which are vacant	15.7%	17.4%	17.1%	16.8%	15.3%	16.4%	16.4%	16%	17%	20%	19%	17%	
	Overall % social care posts filled by agency staff	18.1%	17.8%	18.6%	17.7%	18.1%	17.8%	17.8%	tb	17%	18%	18%	18%	
	Periods of absence recorded for SW staff - starting in month	49	29	29	40	24	24	348	n/a	n/a	tb	n/a	314	
	Number of SW staff that reached any sickness absence trigger in month	6	5	4	6	4	tb	4	n/a	n/a	tb	n/a	6.0	
	Open SW sickness absence cases managed by HR team (includes informal)	25	21	17	21	16	tb	16	n/a	n/a	tb	n/a	10	
	Staff Turnover Rate (All NCT)	17.4%	17.2%	17.0%	17.3%	17.5%	18.1%	18.1%	tb	18.1%	tb	15.6%	14.4%	
Number of unallocated cases (>48 hours)	14	0	0	0	0	0	0	n/a	n/a	0	0	0		

1. Executive summary – Head of Audit opinion

1.1 The role of internal audit is to provide an opinion to the Trust, through the Finance, Resources and Audit Committee, on the adequacy and effectiveness of the internal control system to ensure the achievement of the organisation’s objectives in the areas reviewed. The annual report from internal audit provides an overall opinion on the adequacy and effectiveness of the organisation’s risk management, control, and governance processes, within the scope of work undertaken by Internal Audit. The basis for forming our opinion is:

- An assessment of the range of individual opinions arising from risk-based audit assignments contained within internal audit plans that have been reported throughout the year, including services provided to the Trust by West Northamptonshire and Cambridgeshire Councils
- The relative materiality of these areas and management’s response to agreed actions
- Management investigation and response to issues raised from fraud investigations

1.2 We can provide satisfactory assurance that there is a sound system of internal control, designed to meet the Trust’s objectives, and that controls are being applied consistently.

2. Summary of Internal Audit 2022-23

2.1 This report details the work undertaken by internal audit for Northamptonshire Children’s Trust (the Trust) and provides an overview of the effectiveness of the controls in place for the full year. Internal Audit has been provided to the Trust via a service level agreement with West Northamptonshire Council (WNC) Internal Audit Service.

2.2 2022-23 was a challenging year from an audit perspective, with a large proportion of activity relating to audits initiated as part of the 2021-22 plan outstanding at the end of 2021-22. These were reviewed and delivered by BDO, an external provision partner. The 2022-23 plan was also reviewed, and 5 audits removed to prioritise impactful audits, leaving 5 audits which were delivered by the WNC audit team.

2.3 Audits relating to the 2021-22 plan which were issued as final reports in 2022-23 have had the working papers reviewed to ensure that sufficient 2022-23 evidence was covered, and they could be included in the 2022-23 opinion. The 5 audits delivered as part of the 2022-23 plan were supported by 4 audits relating to WNC services provided to the Trust. The insourcing of the WNC audit team has led to delays in the delivery of audits, and the completion of the plan has been challenging, with some audits at draft report stage at the time of this report. These have been included in the assurance rating for 2022-23. Any changes identified following this report will be reviewed and, if required, re-audited as part of the 2023-24 plan.

2.4 The assessment ratings for the audit coverage is summarised in the table 1 below, with detail for individual audit assignments provided in table 2.

Table 1: 2022/23 audit activity

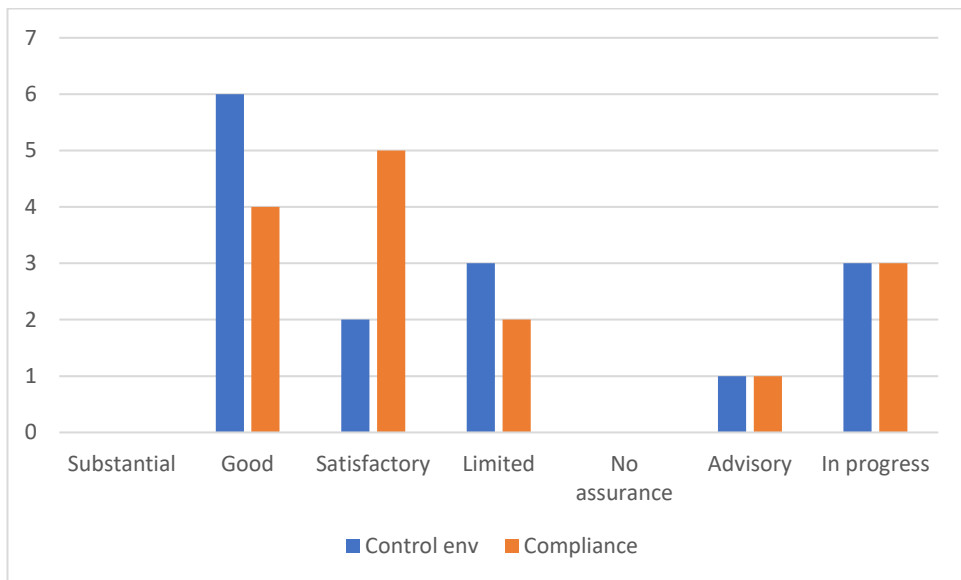


Table 2: Audit details

Assignment	Audit Status *	Assurance Rating			Recommendations			Key findings / Comments
		Control Environment	Compliance	Org Impact	E	I	S	
2021/22 – Plan; 2022/23 Assurance								
Services - Foster Care and Special Guardianship Payments	Final Report	Good	Good	Minor	0	0	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New/ceased Foster Care and Special Guardianship Orders (SGO) payments, overpayments and one-off discretionary expenses had sufficient supporting evidence. The system design could be improved by reviewing the policies and procedures. It can further be strengthened by including who prepared the reconciliation. Policies and procedures relating to Foster Care and SGOs have not been reviewed within a timely manner or version control is missing.

Assignment	Audit Status *	Assurance Rating			Recommendations			Key findings / Comments
		Control Environment	Compliance	Org Impact	E	I	S	
								<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The payment run reconciliation has no information in relation to who has completed and reviewed leading to risk of lack of adequate audit trail, segregation of duties and accountability.
Services - Placement Contract Management	Final Report	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Moderate	0	5	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence of a best match form and approval in line with the Scheme of Delegation. Evidence of invoice review against IPA's, sample checking of payments and evidence of final review and approval for payments. No placement review and approvals panel. No formal IPA or documentation for in-house fostering placements Processes for best match forms not completed due to the recent back log. Review of monthly placement management reports found there is no documented action plan detailing actions to be completed and expected completion dates
IT Systems Security - Carefirst System	Final Report	Limited	Satisfactory	Moderate	4	2	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The system is outdated and not user friendly, which creates duplication and inefficiencies. Roles and responsibilities in relation to the system support management have not been clarified and confirmed to ensure the most effective and efficient use of resources. Current arrangements for user access are duplicated Changes to user accounts are not proactively notified by the relevant managers. Business continuity planning and back up arrangements were not documented. There are limited improvements that can be made to make the system more user friendly and compatible with the modern technology. There are easy to complete online forms. Security declaration and CareFirst training are being completed and supporting evidence is in place. There are documented data entry procedures. The system is regularly backed up and backups are checked and confirmed.
2022/23 – Plan and Assurance								

Assignment	Audit Status *	Assurance Rating			Recommendations			Key findings / Comments
		Control Environment	Compliance	Org Impact	E	I	S	
Overarching Safeguarding Arrangements	Final report	Good	Good	Minor	0	2	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Job descriptions should be reviewed and updated as required Develop a robust system of monitoring and reporting to evidence training takes place in respect of Rapid Reviews and Children Safeguarding Practice Reviews Consider making safeguarding training mandatory for all NCT staff
Corporate Parenting – Leaving Care s24	Final report	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Minor				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Transition to Adulthood (Leaving Care) – Financial Policy and Guidance should be revised and approved at an appropriate level The Operational Group should be specifically tasked with investigation of the reasons for and setting up corrective action to bring Pathway Plan KPIs bank in line Management should ensure that required service improvements arising from Collaborative Reflective Practice Discussion review Practice Week have been or are being actioned
Corporate Governance Framework (incl Ofsted Improvement Plan Monitoring)	Fieldwork							50% complete
Social Work Workforce	Final report	N/A	N/A	N/A				Strategic level review <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Workforce Development Strategy demonstrates a focus on leadership, manager support of staff and initiatives for recruitment and retention Further review of how the workforce is using the strategy and how it is embedded required
Fostering Service (In-House - Independent Fostering Agency)	Fieldwork							Scope amended and agreed with management after consideration of Ofsted report. Focus on replacement content management system: development of specification and controls until new system in place 75% complete
West Northamptonshire Council provided services								
IT Disaster recovery	Complete	Limited	Limited	Moderate	0	7	0	Management action plan in place

Internal Audit: Annual report and statement of assurance
2022-23

Assignment	Audit Status *	Assurance Rating			Recommendations			Key findings / Comments
		Control Environment	Compliance	Org Impact	E	I	S	
IT Cyber security	Complete	Limited	Limited	Major	10	3	0	Management action plan in place
Payroll transaction testing	Complete	Good	Good	Minor	0	1	3	Management action plan in place
ERP Gold IT user access controls	Fieldwork							80% complete
Cambridgeshire Council provided services								
Accounts payable: combined shared service	Final report	Good	Good	Minor	0	0	10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good level of control over the key control processes within Accounts payable system • Good level of control over the key control processes within Accounts payable system
Debt recovery	Final report	Good	Moderate	Moderate	0	0	9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Documented policies and procedures • Some improvement areas have been identified • Recovery process was generally robust • No write offs processed in ERP Gold
Income processing: combined shared service	Final report	Good	Moderate	Minor	0	0	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • System controls are in place, with automatic allocation to customer and invoice accounts, or suspense accounts • Software is being replaced in 2023-24 and current controls are being maintained • Controls were largely complied with • Reconciliation discrepancies were identified
Removed audits								
Sustainability – corporate parent role	Removed							
OFSTED action plan monitoring	Removed							Combined with Corporate Governance Framework audit.
MTFP and budget management	Removed							Suggested for inclusion in 2023/24 plan

Assignment	Audit Status *	Assurance Rating			Recommendations			Key findings / Comments
		Control Environment	Compliance	Org Impact	E	I	S	
ICT – network infrastructure security	Removed							
ICT – privileged access control	Removed							

3. Audit action monitoring

3.1 Trust audit action monitoring is undertaken by the Trust and reported to the WNC Internal Audit team.

3.2 WNC service audit action monitoring is undertaken by the Internal Audit team with regular contact with service managers to ensure actions are implemented as agreed. All limited assurance audits are involved in monitoring meetings with relevant operational managers to ensure that service progress is consistent, and actions are achieved.

3.2.1 IT related audits – cyber security and disaster recovery

Regular monthly meetings are held with the Head of IT Operations. Of 20 audit recommendations there are three ‘Essential’ that remain outstanding but are in progress. A considered action plan has been developed to break down the activity so progress can be monitored against the recommendations more easily. The service area has had some unforeseen issues that has impacted on the delivery of the audit actions. Two staff members have left the Council and recruitment for replacements is underway, the operations team have been involved in several major projects and activities which were either not known or not fully defined when the original dates were set and the level of BAU has increased.

3.2.2 IT Carefirst

A meeting with the key personnel took place on 4 July 2023 to obtain an update and gain assurance to close off the audit following review of evidence supplied.



WEST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNCIL

30 November 2023

Report Title	Updates to the Constitution
Report Author	Catherine Whitehead catherine.whitehead@westnorthants.gov.uk

Contributors/Checkers/Approvers

Monitoring Officer	Catherine Whitehead	21/11/2023
Chief Finance Officer (S.151)	Martin Henry	17/10/2023
Communications	Becky Hutson	

List of Appendices

Appendix A – Draft revised Member Complaints Procedure

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to enable the Council to consider proposed recommendations of the Democracy and Standards Committee in relation to updates to the Constitution and the revised member complaints procedure.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 The Council's Constitution sets out how the Council operates, how decisions are made and the procedures which are followed to ensure that these are efficient, transparent and accountable to local people. Some of these processes are required by the law, while others are a matter for the Council to choose. The Council must operate in accordance with its Constitution and the rules set out in it. The Constitution is divided into different parts which set out the basic rules governing the Council's business as well as some of the detailed rules.
- 2.2 At their meeting on 15 November 2023, the Democracy and Standards Committee considered a report about proposed changes to the Council's Constitution as set out in Section 5 below. The Committee also considered revised arrangements for dealing with complaints against members, in line with the resolution the committee made in June 2023.

3. Recommendations

3.1 It is recommended that Council:

- a) Approves the recommendations relating to updates to the Constitution as set out in Section 5;
- b) Approves the revised Member Complaints Procedure at Appendix 2; and
- c) Delegates to the Monitoring Officer the power to make these amendments and any consequential amendments that may be necessary.

4. Reason for Recommendations

4.1 Keeping the Constitution under regular review will help ensure that it is legally compliant, complete, reflects the character and culture of the authority and supports effective and efficient decision making.

4.2 The revised member complaints procedure enables the Council and Monitoring Officer to consider complaints against Members consistently, and in a way that supports sound decision making.

5. Report Background

Section 8: Councillors

Member Complaints Procedure

5.1 The Member Complaints Procedure has not been reviewed in detail since the Constitution was first adopted. The procedure had not been applied fully in practice until a complaint against a Member was investigated and progressed to a Hearing before the Hearings Sub-Committee of the Democracy and Standards Committee in May 2023. That highlighted a number of shortcomings with the procedure which suggest it should be reviewed and amended. A summary of the proposed changes to the Procedure is set out below. The complete document is attached as Appendix A.

5.2 Initial assessment criteria

Greater detail has been written in section 4 of the revised Procedure to assist the Monitoring Officer (in consultation with the Independent Person) with the criteria they must consider when reaching a decision for an initial assessment.

5.3 Initial contact with the parties – (paragraphs 4.8, 4.9 and 4.10)

The Complainant will receive an acknowledgement letter shortly after the complaint has been received, and the Subject Member will be notified a complaint has been submitted within 10 working days. Within this letter the Member will be advised how to contact an Independent Person (to seek their views if they wish to and who shall not be the same independent person as that consulted by the Monitoring Officer), the details of a named contact within the Council's Democratic Services department, and details of wellbeing support available whilst the complaint is being dealt with. Standard letters will be revised to incorporate the details above. The

outcome of the initial assessment will be completed and communicated to all parties as soon as reasonably practicable or within 30 working days.

5.4 Complainants who ask for their name to be withheld – (paragraph 3.5)

At present the Procedure states that if a complainant wants to keep their name and address confidential, the Council will not disclose it to the Member against whom they have made a complaint, without their prior consent. It is proposed that the Procedure is amended to state that requests from complainants for the Monitoring Officer to withhold their identity so that they remain anonymous to the Member complained about will only be granted in exceptional circumstances. This is so the Monitoring Officer can balance the right of the Member to properly understand the complaint against them and respond to it, with the rights of the complainant. If a complainant does want to request that their identity is withheld, they must specify the reason for this, and the Monitoring Officer will then contact the complainant in writing to advise whether their request has been granted.

5.5 Roles of individuals involved in the Member Complaint Procedure

The roles of the Monitoring Officer, Deputy Monitoring Officer, Independent Person and Investigating Officer have been documented within an Appendix to the revised Procedure. As stated in the Procedure, if it becomes apparent any of these positions have a conflict of interest in relation to the complaint, they will not play any further role in the assessment and alternative arrangements would be made.

5.6 Initial enquires at the initial assessment stage – (paragraph 4.11)

The Procedure has been amended to make it clear that while the Monitoring Officer can make some initial enquiries at the initial assessment stage, it is not for the Monitoring Officer to gather or analyse information at this stage. Some examples are now given in the Procedure of the type of initial enquiries the Monitoring Officer might make.

It will be clearly documented in the letter to the Subject Member that the initial assessment is not an investigatory stage, but their comments will be welcomed to assist with the initial assessment. It is stated in the Arrangements that it is the responsibility of the complainant to provide sufficient information to the Monitoring Officer to illustrate how they consider the Code of Conduct has been breached

5.7 Confidentiality – (paragraph 8.3)

Complaints will be handled in strict confidence, until they reach the pre-hearing stage.

The Procedure has been amended to include a section explaining that there is a presumption that a meeting of the Hearings Sub-Committee will be held in public. The Procedure explains that the pre-hearing process will consider whether any parts of the hearing need to be held in private or if any parts of the investigation report (or associated documents) should not be published (due to containing confidential or exempt information (as defined in the Local Government Act 1972)). It is noted that the final decision will rest with the Hearings Sub-Committee on the day of the Hearing.

5.8 Alternative Resolution – (paragraph 5)

To assist the Monitoring Officer in considering alternative resolution as an option, the revised Procedure now provides examples of alternative resolution, and reference the guidance produced by the Local Government Association on informal resolution contained within its Guidance on Member Model Code of Conduct Complaints Handling.

5.9 Criminal Matters – (paragraph 4.13)

If the Monitoring Officer identifies any possible criminal conduct or a breach of other regulations by any person, they may refer the matter to the Police or any other relevant regulatory agency for consideration.

The Procedure has been amended to state that in such cases, the Monitoring Officer (in consultation with the other body) will consider pausing the assessment of the complaint pending conclusion of any criminal/regulatory investigation, proceedings or process of the other body. They have been further amended to include a summary of the provisions in the Localism Act 2011 which create criminal offences in relation to Disclosable Pecuniary Interests. The Arrangements now also reference the possibility having an agreed Protocol between the Police and the Council that deals with the referral of such matters to the Police.

5.10 Time frames for conduct of an Investigation – (paragraph 6.2)

Initially, the Monitoring Officer will consult with an Independent Person regarding the need for a formal investigation. If it is decided an investigation is required, an Investigating Officer will be appointed and the Monitoring Officer will agree an Investigation Plan with the Investigating Officer. The Procedure has been amended to state that the agreed Investigation Plan will include a timeframe in which the investigation and draft investigation report must be completed, and the timeframe will differ from case to case depending on matters such as the complexity and number of allegations, the number of Members involved or how quickly key evidence is provided by an outside body. It states that the complainant and the subject Member will be advised of the deadline for conclusion of the investigation. The revisions state that if the Investigating Officer finds that the deadline cannot be met as their investigation progresses, they must seek the written consent of the Monitoring Officer to amend the Investigation Plan to extend the deadline.

5.11 Decision of the Hearings Sub-Committee – (paragraph 10)

An addition to the Procedure has been made to state that at the conclusion of the Hearing (or as soon as reasonably practicable thereafter and subject to any adjournment), the Monitoring Officer shall prepare a formal decision notice in consultation with the members of the Hearings Sub-Committee. The decision notice will be agreed and signed by all Sub-Committee Members and a copy will be provided to the complainant, the Subject Member, the Investigating Officer, the Independent Person and the Town/Parish Council where the Subject Member is a Town/Parish Councillor. The decision notice will be made available for public inspection the next working day following the end of the Hearing (or as soon as reasonably practicable after the Monitoring Officer has prepared it). The decision will be reported to the next convenient meeting of the Democracy and Standards Committee and of the Council.

5.12 Detailed Procedure Documents – (paragraph 19)

These Arrangements deal with how complaints are handled, but various procedures will sit beneath these Arrangements to address the pre-hearing process, Hearing process, and review Panel process. They will also be accompanied by flowcharts for ease of understanding. Page 540

not proposed the detailed procedures and flowcharts form part of the Procedure requiring Council approval, but these will sit outside the Procedure and will be approved by the MO in consultation with the Chair of the Democracy and Standards Committee.

The Procedure was originally drafted addressed to the Complainant. The draft Procedures have been changed so that they are not addressed to any one particular party, because the information contained within them is equally relevant to Subject Members.

Gifts and Hospitality

- 5.13 At the request of a member of the Committee, consideration was given to the monetary threshold for the declaration of gifts and hospitality. It was suggested that the threshold of £10 is very low in comparison with other authorities, imposing an unnecessary burden on members and officers. The Committee resolved to recommend the value be increased to £25. The same threshold will apply to officers and, subject to the agreement of Council, Trade Unions will be notified of the change.

Section 9: Officers

- 5.14 As members will be aware, the Executive Director of Corporate Services has recently been seconded to our Children's trust to provide additional senior leadership capacity to help with the delivery of transformation plans. The structure chart and consequential changes need to be made to the Constitution to reflect this (temporary) arrangement:
- The Assistant Chief Executive now has responsibility for DTI, Customer and Corporate Services.
 - The Executive Director Finance now has responsibility for HR and Legal and Democratic Services.
- 5.15 It is also suggested that the glossary set out at the end of the constitution includes the definition of Chief Officer set out within the Officer Employment Procedure Rules. This will ensure consistency across the Constitution. The definition will be:

Chief Officer:

Statutory Chief Officer has the same meaning as set out in section 2(6) of the 1989 Act and for this council will be:

- (a) Chief Executive (Head of Paid Service)
- (b) Executive Director Finance (Chief Finance Officer)
- (c) Director of Legal and Democratic (Monitoring Officer)
- (d) Executive Director People and Deputy Chief Executive (Director of Adult Services)
- (e) Director of Children's Services
- (f) Director of Public Health;

Non-Statutory Chief Officer means a person who reports or who is directly accountable to the Head of Paid Service, to the Council, or any committee or sub-committee of the Council as set

out in section 2(7) of the 1989 Act (other than persons whose duties are solely secretarial or clerical or are otherwise in the nature of support services) and for this council will be any other Executive Director, Director or Assistant Chief Executive appointed by the Council who are not Statutory Chief Officers;

Deputy Chief Officers are people who report directly or are directly accountable to one or more of the Statutory or Non-Statutory Chief Officers (other than persons whose duties are solely secretarial or clerical or are otherwise in the nature of support services) as set out in section 2(8) of the 1989 Act, and for this council will be its Assistant Directors.

Financial Procedure Rules

- 5.16 The Council's Financial Procedure Rules contain a section dealing with organisations partly or wholly owned by the Council. These rules contain a number of provisions relating to the establishment and ongoing operation of bodies covered by various company structures such as limited liability partnerships, private companies limited by guarantee, community interest companies etc.
- 5.17 A review of these requirements has highlighted the need for changes to be made. For example, the rules require such organisations to comply with a number of requirements that are no longer considered to be achievable or realistic. These requirements include the appointment of a Finance Director reporting to the Council's Chief Finance Officer and compliance with the Council's Financial Procedure Rules. Some of these provisions are not appropriate for autonomous organisations such as NPH and would be better dealt with within the articles of association for each organisation.
- 5.18 Revised procedure rules for this section are set out below:

47. Establishing entities jointly or wholly owned by the Council

- 47.1 For the purposes of this regulation, the term 'company' is used to describe any of the following:
 - 47.1.1 Limited or unlimited company (including a community interest company).
 - 47.1.2 Limited partnership.
 - 47.1.3 Limited liability partnership.
 - 47.1.4 Community benefit society (under the Co-operative and Community Benefit Societies Act 2014).
 - 47.1.5 A similar entity with legal personality incorporated outside of the United Kingdom.
- 47.2 Where the Council is considering setting up a company in which it will have an ownership share (either as a shareholder or a member, according to the type of entity concerned) the following provisions will apply.
- 47.3 A business case must be prepared and approved by the Chief Financial Officer prior to final approval being given to making the company operational. The business plan must consider:

- 47.3.1 Short and medium term financial.
- 47.3.2 Taxation.
- 47.3.3 Risk management.
- 47.3.4 Value for money.

47.4 The relevant Chief Officer, Monitoring Officer and the Chief Financial Officer must certify that they are satisfied that the constitution and allied arrangements of the company are adequate to safeguard the interests of the Council before it becomes operational.

47.5 Insofar as the law permits, the Chief Finance Officer and Monitoring Officer shall have unfettered access to all information of the company as required to fulfil their statutory obligations.

6. Issues and Choices

6.1 The issues and choices insofar as they relate to the operation of the Constitution are set out in section 5 above.

7. Implications (including financial implications)

7.1 Resources and Financial

7.1.1 There are no financial implications arising directly because of the Constitution review process.

7.2 Legal

7.2.1 Every local authority is under a legal duty to prepare and keep up to date its Constitution (see Appendix B). In particular, section 9P of the Local Government Act 2000 requires the Constitution to contain:

- a) a copy of the authority's standing orders;
- b) a copy of the authority's code of conduct;
- c) such information as the Secretary of State may direct; and
- d) such other information (if any) as the authority considers appropriate.

Regular review of the Constitution helps to ensure these legal requirements are met. The amendment set out above will assist in ensuring the Council is able to operate in a lawful manner.

7.2.2 The Council is also required to have in place arrangements under which allegations that the Code of Conduct has been breached can be investigated and under which decisions on allegations can be made. The arrangements adopted by the Council also apply to allegations that Town/Parish Councillors have breached the relevant Town/Parish Council Code of Conduct. The Member Complaints Procedure (the Arrangements) is required to take into account common law and other statute, including the right to access to information and the provisions relating to a fair hearing in the Human Rights Act 1998.

7.3 **Risk**

7.3.1 There are no significant risks arising from this report. Reviewing the Constitution helps to reduce any risks that could arise as a result of the Constitution not properly supporting decision making and delivery of Council services.

7.4 **Consultation**

7.4.1 Consultation has been undertaken with the Democracy and Standards Committee and officers in relevant services prior to recommendations being submitted to Council.

7.5 **Consideration by Overview and Scrutiny**

7.5.1 Not applicable to this report.

7.6 **Climate Impact**

7.6.1 There is no climate impact to consider in relation to the recommendation.

7.7 **Community Impact**

7.7.1 None specific.

8. **Background Papers**

8.1 None

8.3 Member Complaints Procedure

1. Context

- 1.1 These “Arrangements” set out how a complaint may be made that a Member of this Council has failed to comply with the Council’s Members’ Code of Conduct, or in the case of a Parish or Town Councillor, that Parish or Town Council’s Code of Conduct, and sets out how the Council will deal with it.
- 1.2 These Arrangements include the appointment of at least two Independent Persons, whose views must be sought by the Council before it takes a decision on an allegation which it has decided warrants investigation, and whose views can be sought by the Council at any other stage, or by a Member against whom an allegation has been made. In the case of a Member seeking the views of an Independent Person, this would be from an Independent Person who has had no prior involvement in the complaint and has not been consulted by the Council.
- 1.3 Appendix 1 summarises the roles of various individuals involved in the Member Complaints Procedure.

2. The Code of Conduct

- 2.1 The Council has adopted a Code of Conduct for Members, which is set out elsewhere within the constitution.

3. Making a complaint

- 3.1 A person who wishes to make a complaint may write to:

The Monitoring Officer
West Northamptonshire Council
One Angel Square
Angel Street
Northampton
NN1 1ED

or e-mail the Monitoring Officer at: monitoringofficer@westnorthants.gov.uk.

- 3.2 The Monitoring Officer is a senior officer of the Council who has statutory responsibility for maintaining the Register of Members’ Interests and who is responsible for administering the process in respect of complaints of alleged Member misconduct.
- 3.3 In order to ensure that we have all the information which we need to be able to process the complaint, we ask complainants to use the complaint form, which is available on request or can be downloaded from the Council’s website, next to the Code of Conduct.
- 3.4 The complainant is required to provide us with their name and a contact address or email address, so that we can acknowledge receipt of the complaint and keep them informed of its progress.

- 3.5 Requests from complainants for the Monitoring Officer to withhold their identity so that they remain anonymous to the Member complained about will only be granted in exceptional circumstances. The Monitoring Officer must balance the right of the Member to properly understand the complaint against them and respond to it, with the rights of the complainant. This normally means that the Member will need to be told who is making the complaint. If a complainant does want to request that their identity is withheld, they must indicate this and the reason that they are making the request in the space provided on the complaint form. The Monitoring Officer will contact the complainant in writing to advise whether their request has been granted.
- 3.6 The Council does not normally investigate anonymous complaints, unless there is a clear public interest in doing so and the Monitoring Officer considers that a fair investigation could be carried out if the complaint was to be dealt with by way of investigation
- 3.7 The Monitoring Officer will acknowledge receipt of a complaint as soon as possible after receiving it.

4. Initial Assessment of Complaints Received

- 4.1 The Monitoring Officer will review all complaints received by the Council and may consult with at least one of the Independent Persons (see section 13 below) at this stage.
- 4.2 The Monitoring Officer must determine whether the complaint is in scope and whether it:
- (a) warrants investigation,
 - (b) may be suitable for alternative resolution without investigation, or
 - (c) does not warrant any further action.

Complaints will be taken seriously and dealt with appropriately. However, investigating a complaint involves spending public money as well as the cost of officer and Member time. The Council, therefore, takes a proportionate approach to the issue of whether or not a complaint merits investigation bearing in mind the sanctions which can be imposed if a Member is found to be in breach of the Code, and the costs to the Council and, therefore, to the public of undertaking an investigation.

- 4.5 In making the determination referred to in paragraph 4.2, the Monitoring Officer and Independent Person (when consulted) will have regard to a range of factors including the following:
- (a) Is the complaint against one or more named current] Members of the authority or of a parish or town council within the West Northamptonshire area?
 - (b) Was the Member in office at the time of the alleged conduct?
 - (c) Does the complaint relate to matters where the Member was acting in their official capacity?

- (d) Would the complaint, if proven, be a breach of the Code under which the Member was operating at the time of the alleged misconduct?
- (e) Does the complaint relate to conduct that occurred within the last six months or, if not, is there good reason for the delay in the submission of the complaint?
- (f) How serious is the alleged complaint?
- (g) Is the complaint politically motivated, vexatious or tit for tat?
- (h) Is there sufficient information upon which to base a decision?
- (i) Is the matter considered suitable for alternative resolution and are either the Member concerned or the complainant not prepared to accept alternative resolution as a solution?
- (j) Was the complaint made by one Member against another, in circumstances where a greater allowance for robust political debate should be given?
- (k) Would it be proportionate and in the public interest to carry out an investigation?;
- (l) Is the conduct something which it is possible to investigate?
- (m) Is there evidence which supports the complaint?
- (n) Would the complaint, even if proven, be unlikely to be serious enough to warrant any sanction?
- (o) Has the behaviour that is the subject of the complaint already been adequately dealt with eg. through an apology at the relevant meeting?
- (p) Does the complaint actually relate to dissatisfaction with a local authority decision rather than the conduct of a specific Member?

4.6 A single event may give rise to similar complaints from a number of complainants. Where possible these complaints will be considered by the Monitoring Officer at the same time. Each complaint will, however, be determined separately. If an investigation is deemed to be appropriate, the Monitoring Officer may decide that in the interests of efficiency, only one complaint should go forward for investigation, with the other complainants being treated as potential witnesses in that investigation.

4.7 If a complaint has been made but does not fall within the scope or intent of these arrangements, the Monitoring Officer may still decide to take informal action in order to resolve the matter.

4.8 The initial assessment of the complaint will be held as soon as possible after receipt of the complaint and the complainant and the Member that has been complained about will be informed, in writing, of the outcome by the Monitoring Officer as soon as reasonably practicable or within 30 working days of receipt by the Monitoring Officer of the complaint. If it is not possible for this timeframe to be met, the

complainant and the Member will be advised of this in writing by the Monitoring Officer together with the reason for the delay and the revised, expected decision date. The complainant and the Member will be kept informed of progress throughout the process.

4.9 Unless exceptional circumstances exist that indicate otherwise, within 10 working days of receipt of the complaint, the Monitoring Officer will inform the Member concerned of the receipt and nature of the complaint and invite their comments. If it is not possible for this timeframe to be met, the complainant will be updated in writing by the Monitoring Officer.

4.10 Member Wellbeing

(a) Subject Members will be kept informed of progress throughout the Member Complaints Process.

(b) At the point the Member is advised of the receipt of the complaint they will also be informed of the following:

- i. that they may choose to seek the views of one of the Council's Independent Persons in respect of the allegation that has been made against them, and how to obtain contact details;
- ii. the details of a named Member contact within the Council's Democratic Services Department, who supports the whole Member Complaints process; and
- iii. details of the wellbeing support available to a Member who is the subject of a Code of Conduct complaint.

4.11 Initial Enquiries

Where the Monitoring Officer requires additional information in order to come to a decision, they may refer back to the complainant for such information and may request information from the Member against whom the complaint is directed (in addition to inviting the Member to make comments in response to the complaint as set out in paragraph 4.9).

It should be noted that it is **not** the purpose of this stage to gather and analyse evidence. The initial enquiry stage is **not** an investigation. Therefore, neither the complainant nor the subject Member will be interviewed. It is the responsibility of the complainant to provide sufficient information to the Monitoring Officer to illustrate how they consider the Code of Conduct has been breached.

The following are examples of the type of initial enquiries the Monitoring Officer may make:

- Seeking minutes of a meeting where an alleged incident occurred.
- Checking whether the subject Member was present at a meeting where they are alleged to have made a comment that breached the relevant Code of

Conduct.

- Seeking details from a complainant of what was alleged to have been said, when a complainant has alleged that a Member has been bullying and disrespectful towards them during an exchange of views, but not provided any further information.
- Requesting screen shots from social media where a complainant has alleged that a Member has breached the relevant Code when posting on social media.
- When a complainant has alleged that a Councillor has failed to declare a certain category of Disclosable Pecuniary Interest but with no further information, asking the complainant to provide details of the interest they believe has not been declared.
- In parish and town council cases, the Monitoring Officer may also notify the Clerk and ask for relevant factual information to assist with the assessment of the complaint.
- Seeking clarification from the complainant where it is not possible to understand the content of the complaint document that has been submitted.

4.12 If, during the assessment of the initial complaint, it becomes clear that either the Monitoring Officer or the Independent Person have a conflict of interest in relation to the complaint, they will not play any further role in the assessment of the complaint. In order that the complaint can be assessed, steps will be taken to appoint a Monitoring Officer (or suitably qualified person) or an Independent Person from another authority to assess the complaint and take any further steps required under this procedure.

4.13 Criminal conduct/breach of other regulation

If a complaint identifies any criminal conduct or a breach of other regulations by any person, the Monitoring Officer may refer the matter to Police or any other relevant regulatory agency for consideration, in accordance with any agreed protocol (where a protocol exists). In such cases, the Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the other body will [consider pausing] [pause] the assessment of the complaint pending conclusion of any criminal/regulatory investigation, proceedings or process of the other body.

Section 34 of the Localism Act 2011 creates a number of criminal offences in relation to the disclosure of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests ('DPIs') as defined by the Relevant Authorities (Disclosable Pecuniary Interests) Regulations 2012. In summary only these offences relate to:

- not disclosing DPIs on taking office;
- not disclosing DPIs in a matter being considered at a meeting, to the meeting where the Member is aware they have a DPI in the matter, (where the DPI is not already registered);
- failing to notify the Monitoring Officer of a DPI in a matter considered at a

meeting, where the Member is aware they have a DPI in the matter (and where the DPI was not already registered or subject to a pending notification);

- failing to notify the Monitoring Officer of a DPI in a matter where the Member is acting alone, where the Member is aware they have a DPI in the matter (and where the DPI is not already registered or subject to a pending notification);
- unless they have a dispensation, participating in a vote or discussion in circumstances where the Member is aware they have a DPI in a matter being considered at a meeting;
- taking any steps, or any further steps, in relation to a matter (except for the purpose of enabling the matter to be dealt with otherwise than by the Member) where the Member is acting alone or is to act alone on the matter, and is aware they have a DPI in the matter; and
- providing false or misleading information either knowingly or recklessly in relation to the disclosure / notification of DPIs.

5 Alternative Resolution

- 5.1 In appropriate cases, the Monitoring Officer may seek to resolve the complaint informally, without the need for a formal investigation. The Monitoring Officer must consult with an Independent Person about this course of action. In considering the appropriateness of alternative resolution, the Monitoring Officer may have regard to the guidance produced by the Local Government Association on informal resolution contained within its Guidance on Member Model Code of Conduct Complaints Handling.
- 5.2 Informal resolution could either be directed at the Member who is the subject of the complaint, both the complainant and the Member, or at the authority more generally.
- 5.3 The Monitoring Officer will inform both the complainant and the Member who is the subject of the complaint if they consider that the complaint can be dealt with through informal resolution. It is possible that the Member complained about may themselves make an offer of informal resolution.
- 5.4 Where a reasonable proposal of informal resolution has been made, but either the complainant or the Member are not willing to accept that offer, the Monitoring Officer (and Independent Person) will take account of this in deciding whether the complaint warrants a formal investigation. The Monitoring Officer could nevertheless decide that the alternative resolution is reasonable and the best use of resources in the circumstances, (for example if an apology is offered).
- 5.5 Informal resolution could take many forms. The following are examples of alternative resolution:
- the Member accepting that their conduct was unacceptable and offering an apology;
 - the Member agreeing to undertake training;

- training for all Members as a whole where the allegation highlights a wider issue;
 - mediation facilitated by an independent mediator; or
 - other remedial action by the Council.
- 5.6 Where alternative resolution is to take place and the Monitoring Officer is satisfied that they need have no further involvement or where alternative resolution has taken place and the Monitoring Officer is satisfied with the outcome, all parties will be notified and the complaint will be closed.
- 5.7 Where alternative resolution has taken place and the Monitoring Officer is not satisfied with the outcome, they will consult the Independent Person as to whether the matter should nevertheless be closed or whether further action should be taken. All parties will be notified of the Monitoring Officer's decision.
- 5.8 It should be noted that when alternative resolution is used at initial assessment stage, there is no finding of fact to reach a conclusion about what happened because there is no formal investigation, meaning no decision is made about whether the Member failed to comply with the relevant Code.

6 If the Complaint is referred for Investigation how is the investigation conducted?

- 6.1 If the Monitoring Officer decides that a complaint merits formal investigation, they will appoint an Investigating Officer, who may be another senior officer of the Council, an officer of another Council or an external investigator. The Monitoring Officer will agree an Investigation Plan with the Investigating Officer.
- 6.2 The agreed Investigation Plan will include a timeframe in which the investigation and draft investigation report must be completed. This timeframe will differ from case to case depending on matters such as the complexity and number of allegations, the number of Members involved or how quickly key evidence is provided by an outside body. The complainant and the subject Member will be advised of the deadline for conclusion of the investigation. If the Investigating Officer finds that the deadline cannot be met as their investigation progresses, they must seek the written consent of the Monitoring Officer to amend the Investigation Plan to extend the deadline. The complainant and the subject Member will be advised of the reason for the delay and of the revised deadline for conclusion of the investigation and draft report.
- 6.3 The Investigating Officer will decide whether they need to meet or speak to the complainant to understand the nature of their complaint. If so, then the complainant can explain their understanding of events and suggest what documents the Investigating Officer needs to see and who the Investigating Officer needs to interview. The Monitoring Officer will consult with an Independent Person about the need for a formal investigation.
- 6.4 The Investigating Officer would normally write to the Member against whom a complaint has been made and provide them with a copy of the complaint. The Member would be asked to provide their explanation of events. The Investigating

Officer will identify what documents they need to see and who they need to interview. In exceptional cases, where it is appropriate to keep the complainant's identity confidential, or disclosure of details of the complaint to the Member might prejudice the investigation, the Monitoring Officer can delete the complainant's name and address from the papers given to the Member, or delay notifying the Member until the investigation has progressed sufficiently.

6.5 At the end of their investigation, the Investigating Officer will produce a draft report and will send copies of that draft report, in confidence, to the complainant and to the Member concerned, to give both parties an opportunity to identify any matter in that draft report which they disagree with or which they consider requires further consideration.

6.6 Having received and taken account of any comments which the complainant or the subject Member may make on the draft report, the Investigating Officer will send it to the Monitoring Officer.

7 What happens if the Investigating Officer concludes that there is no evidence of a failure to comply with the Code of Conduct?

7.1 The Monitoring Officer will, in consultation with the Independent Person, review the Investigating Officer's report and, if they are satisfied that the Investigating Officer's report is sufficient, the Monitoring Officer will write to the complainant and to the Member concerned, notifying them that no further action is required.

8 What happens if the Investigating Officer concludes that there is evidence of a failure to comply with the Code of Conduct?

8.1 The Monitoring Officer will, in consultation with an Independent Person, review the Investigating Officer's report and will then either send the matter for local hearing before the Hearings Sub-Committee made up of councillors from the Council's Democracy and Standards Committee or seek an alternative resolution.

8.2 Local Resolution

The Monitoring Officer and Independent Person may consider that the matter can be resolved without the need for a hearing. Such resolution may include the Member accepting that their conduct was unacceptable and offering an apology, and/or other remedial action by the Council. If the Member complies with the suggested resolution, the Monitoring Officer will report the matter to the Democracy and Standards Committee for information, but will take no further action.

8.3 Local Hearing

If the Monitoring Officer and Independent Person consider that local resolution is not appropriate or it isn't possible to achieve, the Monitoring Officer will report the Investigating Officer's report to the Hearings Sub-Committee, which will conduct a local hearing to decide whether the Member has failed to comply with the Code of Conduct and, if so, whether to take any action in respect of the Member.

In summary, the Monitoring Officer will conduct a "pre-hearing process", requiring the Member to give their response to the Investigating Officer's report. This is in order to

identify what is likely to be agreed and what is likely to be contentious at the hearing. The Chair of the Hearings Sub-Committee may issue directions as to the manner in which the Hearing will be conducted.

There is a presumption that a meeting of the Hearings Sub-Committee will be held in public meaning the complainant may attend the meeting as can other members of the public. This is unless “confidential” or “exempt information” (as defined in the Local Government Act 1972) is likely to be disclosed to the public, in which case the press and public would be excluded from the Hearing. (In relation to exempt information, it is exempt if and so long as in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information).

The pre-hearing process will consider whether there are any parts of the Hearing that are likely to be held in private or whether any parts of the Investigation Report or other documents should not be published prior to the Hearing. It should be noted that the final decision will rest with the Hearings Sub-Committee on the day of the Hearing. [If the Monitoring Officer, Investigating Officer or subject Member consider that there are reasons why the press and public should be excluded from the Hearing, the Hearings Sub-Committee will invite representations at the outset of the meeting before making a determination].

It is a legal requirement for the authority to seek and take into account the views of the Independent Person before it makes a decision on an allegation that it has decided to investigate. Therefore, the Independent Person will be invited to the Hearing. (The Independent Person will not be a member of the Hearings Sub-Committee). If the Independent Person cannot attend in person, arrangements will be made for them to attend by video link.

At the Hearing, the Investigating Officer will present their report, call such witnesses as they consider necessary and make representations to substantiate their conclusion that the Member has failed to comply with the Code of Conduct. For this purpose, the Investigating Officer may ask the complainant to attend and give evidence to the Hearings Sub-Committee.

The Member will then have an opportunity to give their evidence, to call witnesses and to make representations to the Hearings Sub-Committee as to why they consider that they did not fail to comply with the Code of Conduct.

The Chair will ask the Independent Person if they wish to ask any questions.

Before the Hearings Sub-Committee retires to make its decision, the Chair will ask the Independent Person to give their views to the Sub-Committee. (If the Independent Person is attending by video link and the technology fails, it will be acceptable for the Independent Person to provide their views by telephone to the Monitoring Officer who will relay those views to the Hearings Sub-Committee).

The Hearings Sub-Committee, with the benefit of any views expressed by the Independent Person, may conclude that the Member did not fail to comply with the Code of Conduct and so dismiss the complaint. Alternatively, if the Hearings Sub-committee finds that the Member did fail to comply with the Code of Conduct, the

Chair will inform the Member of this finding and the Hearings Sub-Committee will then consider what action, if any, the Hearings Sub-Committee should take as a result of the Member's failure to comply with the Code of Conduct. In doing this, the Hearings Sub-Committee will give the Member an opportunity to make representations to the Panel and will consult an Independent Person.

If the Member wishes to make representations to the Panel and/or consult with an Independent Person the Hearing will adjourn, normally for one week, and reconvene to hear any representation or statement from the Member before either confirming or amending their decision. If the Member does not wish to make representations to the Panel, or consult with an Independent Person, the decision of the Panel will stand as announced.

9 What action can the Hearings Sub-Committee take where a Member has failed to comply with the Code of Conduct?

9.1 The Council has delegated to the Hearings Sub-Committee such of its powers to take action in respect of individual members (including town and parish council members) as may be necessary to promote and maintain high standards of conduct.

9.2 If, following an investigation and hearing, it is established that a member has failed to comply with their council's Member Code of Conduct, one or more of the following sanctions may be applied:

- (a) Publish findings in respect of the Member's conduct;
- (b) Report findings to the relevant council for information;
- (c) Recommend to the relevant council that the Member be issued with a formal censure or be reprimanded;
- (d) Recommend to the Member's Group Leader (or in the case of un-grouped members, recommend to the relevant Council or committees) that they be removed from any or all committees or sub-committees of the council;
- (e) Where Executive arrangements exist, recommend to the Executive Leader that the Member be removed from Cabinet, or removed from particular portfolio responsibilities;
- (f) Instruct the Monitoring Officer to arrange or recommend training for the Member;
- (g) Instruct the Monitoring Officer to mediate between the complainant and the Member;
- (h) Remove or recommend the removal of the Member from any outside appointments to which they have been appointed or nominated by their council where the complaint relates to that appointment and for a specified period of time;
- (i) Withdraw or recommend withdrawal of facilities provided to the Member by their council, such as a computer, website and/or email and internet access,

which may have been abused or improperly used;

- (j) Exclude or recommend the exclusion of the Member from their council's offices or other premises, with the exception of meeting rooms as necessary for attending full Council, committee and sub-committee meetings.
- (k) Recommend that the Member concerned makes a formal written or oral apology to the full Council.

9.3 There are no powers that allow the Council to suspend or disqualify a Member or to withdraw Members' basic allowances. However, removing a Member from the Cabinet or other Committee may lead to a loss of a Special Responsibility Allowance that position was entitled to for the period of the suspension.

10 What happens at the end of the hearing?

10.1 At the end of the Hearing, the Chair will state the decision of the Hearings Sub-Committee as to whether the Member failed to comply with the Code of Conduct and as to any actions which the Hearings Sub-Committee resolves to take.

10.2 At the conclusion of the Hearing or as soon as reasonably practicable thereafter and subject to any adjournment as set out in 8.3 above, the Monitoring Officer shall prepare a formal Decision Notice in consultation with the members of the Hearings Sub-Committee. The Decision Notice will be agreed and signed by all Sub-Committee Members and a copy will be provided to:

- a) the complainant;
- b) the subject Member;
- c) the Investigating Officer;
- d) the Independent Person; and
- e) the Town/Parish Council where the subject Member is a Town/Parish Councillor.

10.3 The Decision Notice will contain a statement that the decision of the Hearings Sub-Committee is subject to any request for review made in accordance with this Member Complaints Procedure.

10.4 The Decision Notice will be made available for public inspection as soon as reasonably practicable after the Monitoring Officer has prepared it.

10.5 The decision will be reported to the next convenient meetings of the Democracy and Standards Committee and of the Council.

11 Appeals and Reviews

11.1 There is no right of appeal for the complainant or for the Member against a decision of the Monitoring Officer.

11.2 However, a review of the decision of the Hearings Sub-Committee may be sought by the complainant or the Member concerned in the following circumstances:

- (a) where the complainant or the Member concerned consider that the Local Hearing was not conducted in accordance with the process set out in these

Arrangements or the principles of natural justice (see below); or

- (b) where significant new evidence is available which has not been considered by the Hearings Sub-Committee.
- 11.3 Any such request for a review should be made to the Monitoring Officer in writing (by letter or e-mail) within 20 working days from the date the decision notice was issued to the parties and:
 - (a) if made pursuant to paragraph 11.2a above, must set out specifically how it is considered the Local Hearing was not conducted in accordance with the process set out in these Arrangements or the principles of natural justice; or
 - (b) if made pursuant to paragraph 11.2b above, must include copies of the new evidence or explain what the evidence is.
- 11.4 The Monitoring Officer may reject the request for a review if after consultation with an Independent Person they conclude that substantive reasons have not been provided to support the request or the further evidence provided is insufficient to support a request for a review. Simply expressing disagreement with the Hearings Sub-Committee's decision or repeating the original complaint will result in the request for review being rejected. If the request for review is rejected, the complainant and the Member will be advised in writing of the reasons for rejection.
- 11.5 If a request for a review is received (provided it is not rejected), the Monitoring Officer will notify the complainant and Member concerned and convene a meeting of the Review Panel.
- 11.6 The Review Panel will review the Hearings Sub-Committee's decision. The Review Panel will have the documentation considered by the Hearings Sub-Committee and the decision notice of the Hearings Sub-Committee before it. It will not conduct a re-hearing. It will only consider the request for the review, (including any new evidence presented with the request for review) together with the complainant or subject Member's response to the request for the review and response to any new evidence. The Review Panel will also have the discretion to re-hear any of the original evidence if it considers this necessary
- 11.7 The Review Panel will either:
 - (a) confirm the original decision of the Hearings Sub-Committee; or
 - (b) disagree with the original decision of the Hearings Sub-Committee and substitute its own decision (which may only be a decision that was open to the Hearings Sub-Committee).
- 11.8 At the end of the review, the Chair of the Review Panel will explain the Review Panel's reasons for its decision. Within 5 working days of the decision of the Review Panel, the Monitoring Officer shall prepare a formal decision notice in consultation with the Chair of the Review Panel and send a copy to the complainant and to the Member. The decision notice will be made available for public inspection and will be reported to the next convenient meeting of the Democracy and Standards Committee and the Council.

11.9 Unless in the opinion of the Monitoring Officer in consultation with an Independent Person exceptional circumstances exist, the Review Panel must make a decision within two calendar months of the receipt of the request for a review.

11.10 There is no right of appeal of the decision of the Review Panel which is final.

11.11 If a complainant considers that the Council has failed to deal with their complaint properly, or if a subject Member considers the Council has failed to properly deal with a complaint made against them they may make a complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman or take their own legal advice as to options that might be open to them.

12 What is the Hearings Sub-Committee?

12.1 The Hearings Sub-Committee is a sub-committee of the Council's Democracy and Standards Committee. It will comprise three members of the Democracy and Standards Committee.

12.2 Independent Persons are invited to attend all meetings of the Hearings Sub-Committee and their views are sought and taken into consideration before the Hearings Sub-Committee takes any decision on whether the Member's conduct constitutes a failure to comply with the Code of Conduct and as to any action to be taken following a finding of failure to comply with the Code of Conduct.

13 What is the Review Panel?

13.1 The Review Panel is a sub-committee of the Council's Democracy and Standards Committee. It will comprise three members of the Democracy and Standards Committee who did not sit on the Hearings Sub-Committee, have not previously been involved in the matter concerned and who do not otherwise have any conflict of interest.

13.2 Independent Persons are invited to attend all meetings of the Review Panel and their views are sought and taken into consideration before the Review Panel takes any decision on whether the Member's conduct constitutes a failure to comply with the Code of Conduct and as to any action to be taken following a finding of failure to comply with the Code of Conduct.

14 Who are the Independent Persons?

14.1 The Council has four Independent Persons.

14.2 A person cannot be "independent" if they:

- (a) are, or have been within the past five years, a Member, co-opted Member or officer of the Council or of a parish council within the Council's area; or
- (b) are a relative or close friend of a person involved in making or determining the complaint. For this purpose, "relative" means:
 - (i) the other person's spouse or civil partner;
 - (ii) living with the other person as husband and wife or as if they were civil partners;

- (iii) a grandparent of the other person;
- (iv) a lineal descendant of a grandparent of the other person;
- (v) a parent, sibling or child of a person within paragraphs (i) or (ii);
- (vi) the spouse or civil partner of a person within paragraph (iii), (iv) or (v); or
- (vii) living with a person within paragraph (iii), (iv) or (v) as husband and wife or as if they were civil partners.

15 Being accompanied at a Local Hearing or Review Panel meeting

- 15.1 Both the complainant and the Member complained about may choose to bring another person with them to the Local Hearing and any Review Panel meeting (if one takes place) to support (but not represent) them. It shall be a matter for the Chair of the Hearings Sub-Committee and the Chair of the Review Panel to issue directions as to the manner in which a supporting person may participate in the Local Hearing/Review Panel meeting, to ensure there is a balance between a party's need to be supported and the need for the Hearings Sub-Committee and/Review Panel to conduct its business fairly and efficiently.

16 Principles of Natural Justice

- 16.1 For the avoidance of doubt, it is expressly stated that the procedures in these Arrangements must be conducted in accordance with the principles of natural justice. In summary, this means that each party has the right to a fair hearing, the right to make their case to an impartial person/group of people, and that the decision makers in this process act without bias or apparent bias, act impartially and do not create any procedural irregularities.

17 Service

- 17.1 Where it is necessary for any documentation to be sent to a Member against whom an allegation of breach of the Code has been made, those documents may be sent by recorded delivery post to that member's usual address and/or by e-mail to the e-mail address notified to the Council. Any documents sent by such a method are deemed to be served for the purpose of these arrangements.

18 Revision of these arrangements

- 18.1 The Council may by resolution agree to amend these arrangements and has delegated to the Chair of the Hearings Sub-Committee (and the Chair of the Review Panel in cases where there is a review), the right to depart from these arrangements where they consider that it is expedient to do so in order to secure the effective and fair consideration of any matter.

19 Procedure Documents

- 19.1 The Monitoring Officer in consultation with the Chair of the Democracy & Standards Committee may from time to time agree:

- detailed procedure documents that relate to the conduct of the pre-hearing process, a Hearing or a Review; and
- flow charts to illustrate and summarise aspects of the process and decision-making.

Appendix 1

Summary of roles of individuals involved in the complaints process

(a) The Monitoring Officer

The West Northamptonshire Council Monitoring Officer has overall responsibility for administering the process in respect of complaints of alleged Member misconduct in relation to both West Northamptonshire Council Members and Councillors from Town and Parish Councils within West Northamptonshire.

The Monitoring Officer is empowered through the Member Complaints Procedure to make an initial assessment decision on each complaint received to determine how it should be dealt with (ie. through investigation, alternative resolution, or no further action).

(b) The Deputy Monitoring Officer

The Monitoring Officer can delegate responsibility for the exercise of the function of conducting the initial assessment of complaints to another Officer within the authority. In practice, this is usually the Deputy Monitoring Officer (who is also the Deputy Director of Law and Governance), who is then able to make initial assessment decisions for and on behalf of the Monitoring Officer.

The Deputy Monitoring Officer could deputise for the Monitoring Officer in relation to any of the functions of the Monitoring Officer specified within the Member Complaints Procedure.

(c) The Independent Person

In broad terms, the Independent Person is someone who is not (or has not recently been) an Officer, Member or co-opted Member of West Northamptonshire Council or a Parish/Town Council within the West Northamptonshire area. Certain classes of relatives and close friends of Members and Officers are also prevented by law from being an Independent Person. (The criteria for qualifying as an Independent Person are set out at paragraph 14 of the Member Complaint Procedure).

The law requires that the views of an Independent Person must be sought by the Council before it takes a decision on an allegation which it has decided warrants investigation. (This means that when a complaint has been investigated and proceeds to a hearing, the Independent Person is invited to the Hearings Sub-Committee and to the Review Panel if a review takes place).

The law also states that the views of an Independent Person can be sought by the Council at any other stage, or by a Member against whom an allegation has been made. In the case of a Member seeking the views of an Independent Person, this would be from an Independent Person who has had no prior involvement in the complaint and has not been consulted by the Council.

The Member Complaints Process states that at the initial assessment stage, the Monitoring Officer (or Deputy Monitoring Officer) can consult with one of the Council's Independent Persons. When the Monitoring Officer consults with the Independent Person, they will consider their views, but the decision remains the decision of the Monitoring Officer. If both the Monitoring Officer and subject Member were seeking the views of an Independent Person at initial assessment stage, they would each use a different Independent Person to avoid potential conflicts of interest.

The Independent Person also has a role in being consulted by the Monitoring Officer:

- in cases where alternative resolution is being considered, or where it has been undertaken and the Monitoring Officer is considering whether the outcome was satisfactory
- at the stage where the Monitoring Officer is reviewing the Investigating Officer's draft report following an investigation
- when the Monitoring Officer is considering the request for a review following a Hearing.
- in relation to any decision to extend the timeframe in which the Review Panel must make a decision.

(d) The Investigating Officer

If the Monitoring Officer decides that a complaint merits formal investigation, they will appoint an Investigating Officer, who may be another senior officer of the Council, an officer of another Council or an external investigator (ie. somebody appointed by the Council from a specialist external organisation). The Investigating Officer will conduct an investigation into the complaint, prepare a report and, if the matter proceeds to a Hearing, attend the Hearings Sub-Committee to present their report, call witnesses and make representations.

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WEST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNCIL COUNCIL

30 November 2023

Cabinet Member for Finance: Councillor Malcolm Longley

Report Title	Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2024-2025
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Report Author	Martin Henry, Executive Director, Finance
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List of Approvers

Monitoring Officer	Cath Whitehead	26/10/2023
Chief Finance Officer (S.151)	Martin Henry	26/10/2023
Communications Lead/Head of Communications	Becky Hutson	26/10/2023

List of Appendices

None

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. This report provides members with an update on the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme (LCTRS) for West Northamptonshire Council (WNC) for the financial year 2023-2024 and asks members to approve a no change scheme for the financial year 2024-2025 in line with the recommendation from Cabinet.

2. Executive Summary

- 1.2. The LCTRS must be approved and in place by 31 January each year. The scheme applies to working age claimants only, as the government prescribes the scheme for those of pension age which provides up to 100% support based on the circumstances of the individual.

1.3. On 3 November 2022 Council approved a scheme for 2023-2024 based on 20% minimum payment and with some minor changes to the local regulations relating to benefit uprating.

2.1 At their meeting on 14 November 2023 Cabinet members received a report on the LCTRS proposals for 2024-2025 and were asked to recommend to Council and LCTRS for financial year 2024-2025.

3. Recommendations

3.1 It is recommended that the Council :

- a) Notes the contents of this report
- b) Approves a Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme for the financial year 2024-2025 as set out in the report including amending the LCTRS Regulations for pensioners in line with the uprating announced by DLUHC and uprating the working age Regulations in line with those announced by Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).
- c) Give delegated authority to the Executive Director, Finance to make any changes to the LCTRS regulations up to and including 31 January 2024 in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Finance.

4. Reason for Recommendations

To enable a Council Tax Reduction Scheme to be agreed for West Northants Council for the financial year 2024-25 to be in place by 31 January 2024

5. Report Background

5.1 From April 2013 each Local Authority has been required to determine a LCTRS, which replaced the national Council Tax Benefit scheme. The scheme applies to working age claimants only as the government provides a prescribed scheme (CTRS Prescribed Requirements Regulations 2012) for those of pension age, which provides up to 100% support based on the circumstances of the individual.

5.2 Each billing authority has discretion as to their local scheme, including the maximum support available to working age claimants (and the minimum percentage of the Council Tax bill they are required to pay) and the eligibility criteria for the scheme.

5.3 In November 2022 members agreed a LCTRS based on a minimum Council Tax contribution for working age claimants of 20% and some minor changes to the local regulations relating to benefit uprating. This scheme has been in place since April 2023.

6. Issues and Choices

Update on the LCTRS for 2023-2024 and impact on Council tax collection

6.1 As of June 2022, the total number of people in receipt of LCTRS was 19,294, 11,531 of which are of working age. As of September 2023, the total number of people in receipt of LCTRS is 18,584 with 10,8991 being of working age. The estimated cost of the scheme for 2023-2024 is £1.9m.

6.2 Council Tax collection rate for West Northants for 2022-2023 is 96.97% which is an improvement on 2021-2022 collection rate of 96.48%. It also compares well to the national average collection rate of 96.02% and a national average for unitary councils of 96.20%. We continue to monitor the collection rates each month and as of September 2023 the profiled collection rates are 56.92% against a target of 57.74%.

7. Implications (including financial implications)

7.1 Resources and Financial

7.1.1 It is anticipated that the proposal to keep the LCTRS scheme the same for 2024-25 can be contained within existing budgets.

7.2 Legal

7.2.1 The adoption of a Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme for West Northants is a legal requirement and is set out in Council Tax Reduction Scheme (Prescribed Requirements)(England) (Regulations 2012 (as amended by the Council Tax Reduction Schemes (Prescribed Requirements)(England) (Amendment) Regulations 2021).

7.2.2 If the proposal for a no-change scheme is agreed there is no requirement to consult on the LCTRS for 2024-20245

7.3 Risk

7.3.1 There are no significant risks arising from the proposed recommendations in this report.

7.4 Consultation and Communications

7.4.1 No consultation is required if the scheme remains unchanged for 2024-2025. Subject to the outcomes at Council, communications activities will be undertaken to raise wider awareness of the scheme among the public.

7.5 Consideration by Overview and Scrutiny

7.5.1 Not considered by Overview and Scrutiny.

7.6 Climate Impact

7.6.1 No impacts identified.

7.7 Community Impact

7.7.1 No specific impacts have been identified. An Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out for 2024-2025.

8 Background Papers

8.1 None



WEST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNCIL COUNCIL

14th November 2023

Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Town Centre Regeneration and Growth: Cllr Daniel Lister

Report Title	Acquisition of Former Bus Depot
Report Author	Kevin Langley Head of Major Projects and Regeneration Deven Efde Regeneration Manager

List of Approvers

Monitoring Officer	Catherine Whitehead	10/11/2023
Chief Finance Officer (S.151)	Martin Henry	10/11/2023
Other Director	Stuart Timmiss	
Communications Lead/Head of Communications		

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 This report seeks to notify Cabinet of the decision taken by the Leader of the Council to approve the acquisition of the Former Bus Depot in Northampton for a regeneration scheme.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 The Local Government Act 2000 Section 9E provides that the Leader of the Council can take any executive decision alone or with his Cabinet. In West Northants the vast majority of Executive decisions, not otherwise delegated, are taken collectively by the Leader and Cabinet together but in cases of urgency the Leader of the Council can take decisions where it is necessary. **Page 567**

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 That Cabinet note the decisions taken by the Deputy Leader of the Council set out at Appendix A and Appendix B.

4. Reason for Recommendations

- 4.1 Where decisions that would otherwise be taken by the Leader and Cabinet have been taken by the Leader alone, in the interests of transparency, the decision is reported to the next available meeting of the Council.
- 4.2 The decision taken provided the authority for the Council to:
- a) establish a capital budget of £3.3m for the purchase of the Former Bus Depot land and buildings at St James, Northampton
 - b) approve the acquisition of the Former Bus Depot for the delivery of a regeneration scheme.
- 4.3 Full reasons for the decision taken are set out in the decision records appended to this report.

5. Report Background

- 5.1 The tram, later bus, depot on St James' Road, Northampton was developed by the Northampton Corporation, passed to Northampton Borough Council in 1974, and with the sale of the Northampton Bus Company passed into the ownership of Stagecoach. In 2014, it was acquired with the assistance Northampton Borough Council (which briefly held the ownership) by Church's Shoes for the purpose of extending Church's manufacturing capacity. The site has been vacant for over ten years and is contributing to a negative perception and environment for the town. Church's did not develop the site as intended and decided to market it for sale
- 5.2 The primary benefit of acquiring the site is to have full control over what development and uses can take place on the site in future.
- 5.3 The site sits on the boundary of Sixfields and Dallington & Spencer wards. There are areas of high deprivation surrounding the site within the Spencer and St James neighbourhoods. The former is the second most deprived and the latter the seventh most deprived within the whole of West Northamptonshire. Both are within the top 5% most deprived neighbourhoods nationally.
- 5.4 There is the potential to deliver a benchmark, exemplar scheme that sets a new standard in the local area within affordable and mixed housing tenures. The Council would seek to use the site to raise the standard in terms of design and sustainability. This will need to be tested as the scheme for the site is developed as there may be a trade-off between the quality that can be delivered, and the costs incurred.

6. Issues and Choices

6.1 The decision taken was necessary to ensure the continued proper running of the Council and its business.

7. Implications (including financial implications)

7.1 Resources and Financial

7.2 The maximum financial exposure for the delivery of a housing led scheme is currently assumed to be £1.8m (based on a 'worst case' resale value of £1.5m with £0.3m of costs). If the council choose to sell the land for commercial uses then this loss would be mitigated. This should be treated as the cost of being able to own, control and regenerate the site as the Council wishes. Without incurring this cost the Council would have no control over the site and is informed that it would likely to be used for logistics and open storage which goes against what the council is seeking to achieve for this area of Northampton.

7.3 There is a strong expectation of significant grant funding to assist in the redevelopment of this site going forward.

7.4 Legal

7.5 Section 120 of the Local Government Act 1972 authorises the Council to purchase land by agreement:

“For the purposes of:

- a) any of their functions under this or any other enactment, or
- b) the benefits, improvement or development of their area”

7.6 The general power of competence in the Localism Act 2011 provides the Council with the power to do anything that individuals generally may do subject to the restrictions and/or limitations which are specified in the Act.

7.7 In addition, section 111 of the Local Act 1972 provides the Council with the power to do anything (whether or not involving expenditure, borrowing, or lending of money or the acquisition disposal of any property or rights) which is calculated to facilitate, or is conducive or incidental to the discharge of any of the Council's functions.

7.8 Risk

7.9 Risks associated with the acquisition and the delivery of a regeneration scheme are set out in Appendix C.

7.10 Consultation and Communications

7.10.1 This is a commercial acquisition and is not appropriate for consultation.

7.11 Consideration by Overview and Scrutiny

7.11.1 There has been no consultation with Scrutiny in relation to this acquisition due to urgency except for consultation with the Scrutiny Chair in relation to urgency.

7.12 Climate Impact

7.12.1 The current site is a brownfield site, through the delivery of a regeneration scheme the site will be remediated and will no longer be a blight on the local environment. Redevelopment of the site will be guided by the council's new Construction & Maintenance Climate Strategy

7.13 Community Impact

7.13.1 The project has the opportunity to provide housing including affordable housing to support a well-known pressure locally.

8. Background Papers

8.1 [Decision - Acquisition of Former Bus Depot, St James Road, Northampton - West Northamptonshire Council \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#)

8.2 [Decision - Acquisition of Former Bus Depot, Northampton - West Northamptonshire Council \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#)

WEST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNCIL
RECORD OF DECISION – Executive Decision

Date Of Decision:	27 October 2023
Title:	Acquisition of Former Bus Depot, Northampton
Is this a “Key Decision”?	Yes
Purpose:	<p>To acquire the former Bus Depot in Northampton for a regeneration scheme.</p> <p>The reason that this is not going to a meeting Cabinet is because the decision needs to be exercised urgently and therefore the urgency procedure as set out in the Constitution is being applied. The urgency is that the current owner of the site wishes to sell the site with immediate effect and there wouldn't be adequate time to take this decision through the normal decision making process and the Council's opportunity to purchase the land will be lost to other bidders. A report will be taken to Full Council on the 30th November 2023 to report the decision taken in accordance with the urgency procedures.</p>
Cabinet Member:	Cllr Dan Lister, Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Town Centre Regeneration & Growth
Decision Maker:	Cllr Adam Brown, Deputy Leader of the Council
Consultation and Scrutiny:	Cllr Andre Gonzalez de Savage - Chair of the Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee approved the decision be taken under urgency procedures via e-mail dated 27/10/2023.
Officer Recommendations:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To recommend to the Non-Executive to establish a capital budget of £3.3m for the purchase of the former bus depot and buildings at St James, Northampton to include Stamp Duty Land Tax (SDLT). • To approve the acquisition of the Former Bus Depot in Northampton for the delivery of a regeneration scheme.
Decision Taken:	To proceed with the acquisition of the Former Bus Depot in Northampton for the delivery of a regeneration scheme.
Reasons For Decision:	<p>The recommendations are being made to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) enable the regeneration of a large brownfield site within West Northamptonshire b) support the regeneration and economic wellbeing of West Northamptonshire c) for the delivery of a housing scheme to address the needs of the local community <p>Without intervention, it is likely that the site would be sold to a developer who wishes to use the site for industrial and warehousing end use. This is likely to have an adverse effect on the surrounding area and contribute to the decline of the town centre.</p>

<p>Alternative Options Considered (Including Reasons For Rejection):</p>	<p>Alternative decision to not proceed with the acquisition would mean that the site would be likely sold to a developer who could land bank the site or could bring forward low-grade uses. Given the challenges of the site, it is also possible that the site could continue to sit vacant adding to the negative perception of the town centre and beyond.</p> <p>Full alternatives are set out tin the Appendix to this decision</p>
<p>Declarations of interest:</p>	

Authorised By Relevant Cabinet Member/Chief Officer/Deputy Chief Officer:

Name: Cllr Adam Brown, Deputy Leader of the Council

Date: 27/10/2023

WEST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNCIL
RECORD OF DECISION – Non Executive

Date Of Decision:	27/10/2023
Title:	Acquisition of Former Bus Depot, Northampton
Is this a “Key Decision”?	Yes
Purpose:	<p>To seek approval for the budget to be created for the acquisition of the Former Bus Depot site in Northampton.</p> <p>The reason that this is not going to a meeting Council is because the decision needs to be exercised urgently and therefore the urgency procedure as set out in the Constitution is being applied. The urgency is that the current owner of the site wishes to sell the site with immediate effect and there wouldn't be adequate time to take this decision through the normal decision making process and the Council's opportunity to purchase the land will be lost to other bidders. A report will be taken to Full Council on the 30th November 2023 to report the decision taken in accordance with the urgency procedures.</p>
Cabinet Member:	Cllr Dan Lister, Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Town Centre Regeneration & Growth
Decision Maker:	Cllr Adam Brown, Deputy Leader of the Council
Consultation and Scrutiny:	Cllr Andre Gonzalez de Savage - Chair of the Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee approved the decision be taken under urgency procedures via e-mail dated 27/10/2023.
Officer Recommendations:	To approve the creation of a capital budget of £3.3 million for the acquisition of the former bus depot site, St James further due diligence and design development.
Decision Taken:	To approve the creation of a capital budget of £3.3 million for the acquisition of the former bus depot site, St James further due diligence and design development.
Reasons For Decision:	<p>The recommendations are being made to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) enable the purchase of the former Bus Depot site in Northampton b) enable the regeneration of a large brownfield site within West Northamptonshire c) support the regeneration and economic wellbeing of West Northamptonshire d) for the delivery of a housing scheme to address the needs of the local community <p>Without intervention, it is likely that the site would be sold to a developer who wishes to use the site for industrial and warehousing end use. This is likely to have an adverse effect on the surrounding area and contribute to the decline of the town centre.</p>
Alternative Options Considered (Including Reasons For Rejection):	Alternative decision to not proceed with the acquisition would mean that the site would be likely sold to a developer who could land bank the site or could bring forward low-grade uses. Given the challenges of the site, it is also possible that

	the site could continue to sit vacant adding to the negative perception of the town centre and beyond. Full alternatives are set out tin the Appendix to this decision
Declarations of interest:	

Authorised By Relevant Cabinet Member/Chief Officer/Deputy Chief Officer:

Name: Adam Brown, Deputy Leader of the Council

Date: 27/10/2023

Record of Decision

Purchase of Land at St James' Road, Northampton

Appendix A

Background

- 1.1 The tram, later bus, depot on St James' Road, Northampton was developed by the Northampton Corporation, passed to Northampton Borough Council in 1974, and with the sale of the Northampton Bus Company passed into the ownership of First Northampton, part of the FirstGroup. In 2014, it was acquired with the assistance Northampton Borough Council (which briefly held the ownership) by Church's Shoes for the purpose of extending Church's manufacturing capacity. The site has been vacant for over ten years and is contributing to the negative perception and environment for the town.
- 1.2 The site has an area of 1.83 ha (4.5 acres) and is significantly (0.71Ha, 1.8 acres) covered in buildings. Apart from the transport office at the front of the site and the original tram depot façade, these have limited character or value.
- 1.3 Church's did not develop the site as intended and decided to market it for sale.
- 1.4 Proposals for a range of uses have come forward on the site including for residential and commercial uses. The most likely commercial uses that have been proposed are for open storage and distribution uses. While in planning terms commercial uses are supported this is a vast departure from the use as an extension of the Church's factory, for which the land was originally sold.
- 1.5 Open storage and distribution uses present a risk to the local area detracting from the appearance creating issues around safety for the residential neighbourhoods and not meeting the wider needs of the council through supporting high quality employment spaces or residential needs.
- 1.6 Through the Council's engagement with developers and our internal teams on the site, housing has been looked at as one of the potential uses identified as the preferred use on this site given that it has potential to meet housing needs on a strategic brownfield site, helping to ensure people had suitable places to live and minimising the need for the use of greenfield land for housebuilding. However, there appeared to be a material risk the land would end up being use for low-grade industrial or storage uses. Whilst these may be permissible in planning terms, they would not support the regeneration and place shaping of the area. In subsequent conversations with planning colleagues, they have informed us that the site may be identified as a residential site in the emerging West Northamptonshire Local Plan.

- 1.7 The Council submitted an offer of £3.000 million (m) for the site, which was subject to a decision by cabinet and full council. This has been accepted by Church's. If the purchase concludes, the Council would also be likely to need to pay Stamp Duty Land Tax (SDLT) of £0.140m and would incur in the order of £0.010m in legal and other professional fees.
- 1.8 A further £0.150m will be required to undertake further due diligence, design development and professional fees related to the procurement of a development partner for the site. Therefore, a budget of £3.300m would be required. There is no existing budget suitable for this purpose.
- 1.9 The Council has received updated ground contamination reports (Hydrock Report Review and Recommendations May 2023) which was independently assessed to identify the costs to undertake the required interventions (Quantem Northampton Bus Depot Site Remediation & Clearance June 2023). The Council also received flood risk information from the landowner but as these dates back to 2015, the Council has commissioned an updated report and is waiting for the Environment Agency to respond.
- 1.10 There has been local interest in seeking to have the former bus depot building listed through Historic England (HE). HE has stringent criteria for buildings to become listed and there is a chance that any of the buildings on the Former Bus Depot will become site listed. However, the risk remains that an application is made by local groups for the site to be listed which would have a negative impact on the development opportunity of the site, costs and timescales. A second form of listing is through the Council's 'local listing'. The council reviewed this site as part of its draft local list and only the former ticket office on the corner of the site is considered significant enough to feature in the Council's draft local list.

Appraisal of Land Value

- 1.11 The Council appointed external consultants to undertake due diligence on the site and looked at the potential development capacity to assess the value. It is considered that this site is best suited for residential uses that would support the regeneration and place shaping of this area of Northampton. A number of potential scheme variations have been looked at including different mixes of housing typologies including levels of commercial floorspace within the site to optimise the outcomes.
- 1.12 The site has been vacant for over ten years and is contributing negatively to the overall appearance and environment of the town. The vision and aspiration for the site is to deliver a high-quality and flagship residential scheme providing economic, social and environmental benefits for the surrounding communities as well as contributing to the overall appearance of Northampton and West Northants as a whole. The intention is that quality would be achieved through strong design as well as including consideration of the overall sustainability of the development.
- 1.13 There is a risk that the site could go to a developer who wants the end use to be for distribution and warehousing. This is not what the Council considers to be an appropriate for this site given its location and the opportunity it has to positively



contribute to the town. It is acknowledged that planning enforcement is a tool available to the Council but there are concerns about its effectiveness in controlling development or use on site.

- 1.14 The appraisal work shows that the site could have a value between £1.5m and £2.0m depending on the specific mix of uses included within the scheme. These values take into account the estimated cost to remediate the site. If the Council was unable to deliver development on the site, the loss would thus be in the order of £1.8m (at the higher end). However, this loss should not be realised (see below) and should be considered only as 'worst case' risk outcome, if the Council was unable to develop the land.
- 1.15 Whilst of course savings would be sought, this scheme is not recommended as an invest to save project for the Council. Rather the purchase is recommended to ensure the positive regeneration impacts that this site would bring to the local communities.
- 1.16 The proposal would be for the Council to develop, or secure the development of, the land. The revenue impact of £3.3m capital expenditure taken on an annuity basis over 60 years (as is reasonable for a land purchase) would be £198k pa¹. Provided revenue savings or income generation at least equalled the financing costs no loss would be suffered.
- 1.17 Homes England has the benefit of a covenant on part of the site that gives it benefit of the uplift in value if the site was used for residential uses, there is a clawback provision to the benefit of Homes England who receive 100% of the value uplift for uses that are residential. There have been discussions with Homes England regarding the removal of this covenant or minimising the financial impact. Whilst Homes England has not confirmed agreement, it has been receptive and is open to discussions. If the removal of the covenant is not possible, the masterplan for the site could look at limiting residential use in order to ensure that the Council is not adversely impacted by the restriction.
- 1.18 The Council appointed Savills to undertake the appraisal work on the site. They found that the optimal mix to generate the highest land value for residential uses would be only retaining a small level of commercial within the former Transport Office building located on the South East corner whilst using the remainder of the site for residential uses, which would allow up to 79 houses.
- 1.19 Savills have also assumed that the clawback allowance can be removed via negotiation with Homes England. If this was achieved, it would give a value of the site of approximately £2m.

	Housing led – 79 houses
100% Open Market	£1,960,000
100% Affordable	£1,950,000

¹ Using 5.80% interest rate, the PWLB rate for fixed rate loans of 50 years for greater duration as of 29th September 2023.

- 1.20 This would mean that the Council would need to pay £1m more than the indicative land value for use as residential to regenerate the site. Savills note that if the land is able to be remediated using grant funding, then their opinion is that the site would then have a market value for residential development in the order of £3,000,000.
- 1.21 Savills also considered the employment/existing use value of the site. There may be scope for storage use in the existing building and the storage market is currently in high demand. This may push values further, to in the order of £2,000,000 - £2,500,000 as an investment with secure income.

Potential Benefits of the Scheme

- 1.22 The primary benefit of acquiring the site is to have full control over what development and uses can take place on the site in future.
- 1.23 The site sits on the boundary of Sixfields and Dallington & Spencer wards. There are areas of high deprivation surrounding the site with the Spencer and St James neighbourhoods. The former is the second most deprived and the latter the seventh most deprived within the whole of West Northamptonshire. Both are within the top 5% most deprived neighbourhoods nationally.
- 1.24 There is the potential to deliver a benchmark, exemplar scheme that sets a new standard in the local area within affordable and mixed housing tenures. The Council would seek to use the site to raise the standard in terms of design and sustainability. This will need to be tested as the scheme for the site is developed as there may be a trade-off between the quality that can be delivered, and the costs incurred.
- 1.25 Some of the largest pressures faced locally are those of affordable and suitable housing types for our residents. The current Council housing register waiting list is 4452 with a further circa 600 households currently in temporary accommodation.
- 1.26 The site has the potential to help ease these pressures and the majority of the housing within the scheme could be tenure types where the Council is facing most pressure. These would be affordable rent, social rent, shared ownership, or other affordable tenures.
- 1.27 The delivery of affordable housing on this site may contribute towards meeting housing need across West Northamptonshire and reducing the costs the Council incurs providing temporary accommodation.
- 1.28 Alongside this a small number of Council-owned temporary accommodation units could be provided on-site if appropriate. Both approaches would help reduce the use of expensive nightly-charged accommodation which the council currently uses to meet some of the need for temporary accommodation. Indicative current costs are outlined below:



Size	Net cost to Council (nightly)	Net cost (monthly)	Net cost per unit (annual)
2 bedrooms	£33	£994	£11,929

- 1.29 To use the extreme case, if all 78 houses provided on the site allowed people to be moved out of temporary accommodation (not all to this site; cascade moves could achieve the same effect), the saving in temporary accommodation costs would be around £930k pa. Of course, the costs in achieving these savings would need to be taken into account. Current typical costs per unit delivered are £150k, allowing a rough estimate of costs of provision of £11.7m. This would represent an annual revenue impact (on the same bases as above) of £702k, and thus an annual savings of £227k. Taking the revenue effect of the land purchase costs into account would give an overall annual saving of £30k pa.
- 1.30 It is stressed that these figures are inevitably crude and uncertain at this stage, but nonetheless they give a sense of the likely scale of outcomes.
- 1.31 Some level of specialist housing provision may also be factored into the housing delivery on this site to offer more cost-effective and customer-focused housing solutions for adult social care and NCT (Northamptonshire Children s Trust) customers e.g., cluster homes for people with learning disabilities, or accommodation for care leavers.
- 1.32 This site may make a contribution towards the wider Council financial pressures and transformation of service delivery, in particular housing and adult social care and children’s placements. Currently West Northamptonshire is reflecting the situation nationally with increasing levels of homelessness and rough sleeping.
- 1.33 Through the delivery of 79 new homes on this site, taking the blended rate for Council Tax Band A & B properties would generate £120,678 per year for the Council. It is possible that some homes might be rated at a higher band and also through the design development process, density might be able to be increased on the site. Of course, the residents of these houses would also use services and thus generate costs for the Council.

Potential Gap Funding Opportunities

Home England

- 1.34 Homes England is keen to invest in West Northamptonshire and strategic discussions are currently taking place between the Council and Homes England over a number of sites which include the potential for this area to apply for funding through the Brownfield Infrastructure Fund (BIF). BIF is grant funding specifically aimed at unlocking brownfield sites such as the former bus depot.

Brownfield Land Release Fund

- 1.35 As well as the support from Homes England the Council also has a track record of securing significant sums from the Brownfield Land Release Fund to support the remediation of complex sites such as this, with the Council receiving £750,000 this year for the 35-45 Abington Street development and £400,000 last year for the delivery of a smaller residential scheme on New South Bridge Road. The next round of Brownfield Land Release Funding from OPE will be in January-March 2024.

Enterprise Zone

- 1.36 This site is also within the Waterside Enterprise Zone (EZ). There is potential that the EZ could contribute to the revenue costs associated with taking the site through design development and procurement as well as the possibility of providing capital funding to assist with land remediation and site assembly. Whilst the current arrangement for the EZ would be unlikely to enable this, governance arrangements around Enterprise Zones are currently changing with the policy from the Government to transfer economic development leadership from LEPs (Local Enterprise Partnerships) to councils. This may mean this becomes an opportunity for the Council to secure funding towards suitable development of the site.

Risks and Issues

- 1.37 Land purchases and regeneration schemes will always carry an inherent level of risk due to the unforeseen changes in circumstances; it is not possible to carry out land purchases and development without some level of risk. Key risks and issues are summarised below.
- 1.38 Flooding – the site falls within flood zones two and three (development difficult or impossible to justify) but is located within a defended area meaning this is possibly mitigated to flood zone one (development generally acceptable). There may be the need for further flood defences to minimise residual risk from surface water flooding.
- 1.39 Overage – there is a clawback provision to the benefit of Homes England who receive 100% of the value uplift for uses that are residential. The clawback is triggered by implementation of planning permission (for change of use or development of the property) or by disposal with planning permission.
- 1.40 Ground issues and contamination – the hydrocarbon contamination from historic use appears to have been mostly remediated, however there may be some residual issues. Prior to the construction of the tram/bus depot, the site was used as an ironworks; this may have left a range of materials and ground conditions. While some ground investigation for the site has been undertaken with the information provided to the council, there is still risk for elements that may have been missed or underestimated that may be more expensive than assumed, reducing net values or increasing the level of grant funding required.
- 1.41 Asbestos – asbestos containing materials have been identified across the site, this would need to be removed by a specialist contractor prior to demolition or



development. These costs are not yet fully understood and may be more than assumed, reducing net values or making the site unviable.

- 1.42 Demolition costs – in the absence of former tenders or other detailed assessment, the assumed demolition costs are uncertain, and may be higher. This would reduce the net value of the site or make the site unviable.
- 1.43 Planning (general) – the site falls within a safeguarded employment area within the local plan. The policy supports the change of use to alternative non-employment generating uses only if evidence can be provided to demonstrate that the existing use and other employment generating uses are not viable. Evidence to be supplied includes “details of active marketing undertaken over a continuous period of 12 months which shows that the site has been actively and extensively marketed for employment use and that no suitable interest has been expressed.” In subsequent conversations with planning colleagues, they have informed us that the site may be identified as a residential site in the emerging West Northamptonshire Local Plan. Paragraph 123 of the National Planning Policy Framework also supports a flexible approach to use of allocated site, in particular (a) to “use retail and employment land for homes in areas of high housing demand, provided this would not undermine key economic sectors or sites or the vitality and viability of town centres...”
- 1.44 Planning (conservation) – There is a risk that the site, or parts of it, could end up being locally listed or nationally listed. Whilst this would not be a significant issue for the Transport Office, as it is planned to retain this, any listing would cause significant issues on the rest of the site. Even if the site is not listed, the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) still requires consideration of the significance of non-listed heritage assets, which this is. This may mean some parts, or all of the existing structure need to be retained. This is likely to harm values (whether revenue or capital). There is a local campaign running to preserve the buildings and have them listed.
- 1.45 Other costs – there is currently a business rates liability on the site of c£60k a year. This would be reviewed to see whether the liability could be removed or reduced, and once preparation works start on site, this could also reduce the payment to the VOA (Valuation Office Agency). There are also costs associated with holding the site, such as security, these would be funded through the Enterprise Zone budget.

Finance

- 1.46 As set out above there are a number of financial and non-financial risks associated with the site some of which could lead to further financial liabilities.
- 1.47 However, as detailed earlier in the report, the maximum financial exposure currently assumed is £1.8m (based on a ‘worst case’ resale value of £1.5m with £0.3m of costs). This should be treated as the cost of being able to own, control and regenerate the site as the Council wishes. Without incurring this cost the Council would have no control over the site and is informed that it would likely to be used for logistics and storage which goes against what we are trying to achieve for this area of Northampton.



- 1.48 As set out above there is also a risk in respect of the Homes England (HE) clawback. The Council has had positive discussions where (HE) has indicated a willingness to forego all or part of its overage as well as to look at increased grant levels to work with the Council to deliver an exemplar scheme within Northampton. The position is not yet agreed, and it is of course possible that part or all of the restrictive covenants will be repayable. As a result, the position will need to be carefully monitored.
- 1.49 Having stated the above, there are several factors that should be considered that will reduce this overall regeneration premium and a number of them have been set out in the report. These include:
- Application for grant funding that has not been factored into the scheme.
 - Release of the clawback liability from Homes England which would increase the value of the land for residential use (as against the 'worst case' £1.5m).
 - Additional Council Tax receipts (received annually) to offset costs depending on site development.
 - Additional business rates receipts (received annually) depending on site development.
 - Combination of additional business rates and Council Tax receipts depending on site development.
 - Potential reduction in temporary accommodation costs across the Council.
- 1.50 It should also be considered that once this site has been regenerated there would be a boost to the local economy with more money spent with local businesses.
- 1.51 Homes England: The Council has engaged with Homes England and had positive discussions where it has indicated a willingness to forego all or part of its overage as well as to look at increased grant levels to work with the Council to deliver an exemplar scheme within Northampton. The position is not yet agreed, and it is of course possible that part or all of the restrictive covenants will be repayable.

Legal

- 1.52 Section 120 of the Local Government Act 1972 authorises the Council to purchase land by agreement:
- "For the purposes of:
 - a) any of their functions under this or any other enactment, or
 - b) the benefits, improvement or development of their area"
- 1.53 The general power of competence in the Localism Act 2011 provides the Council with the power to do anything that individuals generally may do subject to the restrictions and/or limitations which are specified in the Act.



- 1.54 In addition, section 111 of the Local Act 1972 provides the Council with the power to do anything (whether or not involving expenditure, borrowing, or lending of money or the acquisition disposal of any property or rights) which is calculated to facilitate, or is conducive or incidental to the discharge of any of the Council's functions.
- 1.55 To eliminate the risk of challenge it is important to ensure that in reaching a decision in respect of the above proposal as outlined in full above, it is key that the Council should be able to demonstrate that as part of its decision-making process it considered to all relevant matters.

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