

North Somerset Safeguarding Children Annual Report January 2022 to March 2023



NHS
Bristol, North Somerset
and South Gloucestershire
Integrated Care Board



Avon and Somerset Police
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Introduction

Welcome to our third Safeguarding Children Annual Report from the North Somerset Safeguarding Children Partnership.

As with many multi-agency safeguarding partnerships, 2022 to 2023 has been a challenging year for us. The transition arrangements in North Somerset have taken longer than planned due to recruitment challenges resulting in drift of key business priorities. This report covers the period from January 2022 up until the end of March 2023. The Board has been chaired throughout this period by our Independent Chair, Ivan Powell.

This annual report will be shared with:

- The Chief Executive, North Somerset Council
- The Chief Executive of BNSSG Integrated Care Board
- The Outcomes, Quality and Performance Committee and System Quality Groups of the Bristol, North Somerset, South Gloucestershire Integrated Care Board (BNSSG ICB)
- The Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner
- The Safer and Stronger Communities Strategic Partnership
- Children and Young People's Policy & Scrutiny Panel (NSC)
- Children and Young People's Partnership Board
- The North Somerset Safeguarding Adults Board
- The National Safeguarding Practice Review Panel
- What Works for Early Intervention and Children's Social Care Centre
- This report is to be approved by the Executive of the North Somerset Safeguarding Partnership in September 2023

Should you require the report in any other format to support accessibility please contact the Safeguarding Children Business Manager NSSCP maggie.lilburn@n-somerset.gov.uk.

Foreword from the NSSCP Safeguarding Children Partnership

Executive

We have had a range of recent challenges. This includes the ongoing challenge of recruiting to the key roles of business manager and business support officers who provide such vital leadership and safeguarding direction. We've shown resilience and commitment to improve in light of its recent Ofsted Inspection findings in March 2023. The fundamental aim of each peer challenge is to help councils and their partners reflect on and improve the impact of practices and services for children, young people, and families. We also reflect on national guidance from a range of sources including the Wood Review. During our development day in March 2023, we focused on making our work evidence-based and agreed the areas of focus for the coming year. We are also working to emphasise independent scrutiny and oversight now more than ever.

We acknowledge the extraordinary efforts made by our local community as well as all voluntary and statutory partners. We feel very proud to live and work within North Somerset in light of such hard work.

This report reflects some of those challenges we have worked to overcome and the great results we have achieved. As this is the third year of the Partnership, we know that there are several key initiatives we have needed to develop in 2022 and 2023. Statutory partners have recognised there have been insufficient resources in the absence of sufficient chairing capacity and a permanent business manager and administration support for the partnership to flourish.

- Rosi Shepherd, Chief Nursing Officer, BNSSG ICB
- Adam O’Loughlin, Chief Inspector, Avon & Somerset Police
- Sheila Smith, Director of Children’s Services, North Somerset Council
- Ivan Powell, Independent Chair

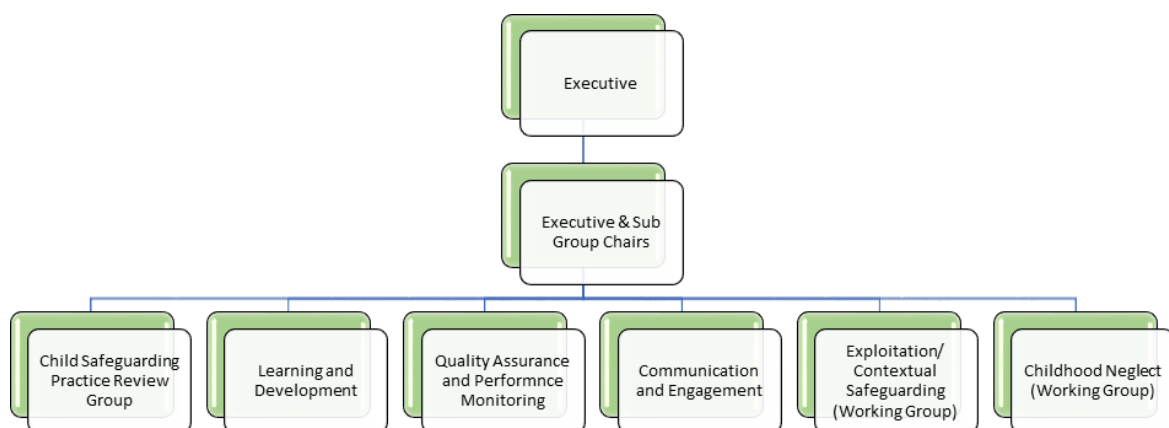
North Somerset Safeguarding Children Partnership Structure

Following the recruitment of an Interim Business Manager in 2022 and February 2023, we’ve worked together to embed our core principals and move closer to our Partnership’s goals. All Subgroups are in place with a clear focus, chairing arrangements, and robust membership. The Communications and Engagement Subgroup is currently being reviewed and consideration is now being given to join this subgroup with the Safeguarding Adults Board. This will add value to the current Partnership Arrangements.

All subgroups and working groups are fully operational, with clear work objectives against the new three-year Safeguarding Business Plan. Safeguarding Activity has accelerated considerably with a greater emphasis on audit and embedding learning from local reviews into professional practice and cascading this learning at multi-agency training events.

Below the Executive is the Executive and Sub Group Chairs. These chairs oversee the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Group, Learning and Development, Quality Assurance and Performance Monitoring, Communication and Engagement, Exploitation/Contextual Safeguarding (Working Group) and the Childhood Neglect (Working Group).

NB: The communications and Engagement group will now join with Safeguarding Adults subgroup to strengthen partnership working.



Independent Scrutiny

Independent Scrutiny which is one of the key changes in the new partnership arrangements. Currently this function is undertaken by our Independent Chair. There have been a number of context-appropriate methods to achieve the scrutiny function which we have been adopted. Challenges and responses raised between partners are noted in the partnership minutes. We also use multi-agency audit tools (for Neglect cases and Child Sexual exploitation) as well as the development of action log trackers for recording safeguarding business activity. Section 11 requirements as outlined in the children Act, 2004, were completed by the University Hospital Bristol and Western (UHBW) as well as the 2 Fostering Agencies Compass and Capstone.

The Child Exploitation Working Group conducted a preparatory JTAI in January 2023 examining multi-agency arrangements for dealing with criminal and sexual exploitation. We have begun considerations for the partnership to undertake a LGA peer review is planned for the coming financial year.



What is Safeguarding Children?

Working Together 2018* defines the safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children as:

- protecting children from maltreatment.
- preventing impairment of children's health or development.
- ensuring the children are growing up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care.
- taking action to enable all children to have the best outcomes.

Child protection is a part of safeguarding activity that protects specific children who are suffering, or likely to suffer, significant harm.

North Somerset Safeguarding Partners, in accordance with Working Together 2018, have drafted their new Multiagency Safeguarding Arrangements for Children and Young People.

The North Somerset Safeguarding Children's Partnership is a multi-agency partnership, with responsibility for safeguarding children and young people throughout the North Somerset locality.

Leadership comes from three statutory partners:

- North Somerset City Council
- Avon & Somerset Police
- BNSSG ICB

The Safeguarding Children Business Manager and Independent Chair coordinate this work.

The NSSCP works closely with other relevant groups to ensure a coordinated, borough wide, approach to a range of issues which cross the boundaries of age, and are therefore, not the specific remit of any one group. These include:

- The Safer and Stronger Communities Strategic Partnership
- Children and Young People's Policy & Scrutiny Panel (NSC)
- Children and Young People's Partnership Board

Our Vision

We want children and young people who reside in North Somerset grow up in a safe environment, free from abuse and neglect. Children, young people, and their families will receive the right level of support & intervention, at the right time, by skilled professionals to ensure that children and young people have the best start to life.

Our Values

- Transparency and Respect – we will foster a culture of openness, respect and transparency. NSSCP partners are required to work openly together, to learn from collective and individual experience, and to seek and receive assurance on the overall effectiveness of work to safeguard and protect children in North Somerset.
- Integrity and Honesty – we will be honest and open with each other on areas of challenge, transformation and system change to inform decisions on future initiatives and collaborative working.
- Challenge and Innovation - we will respectfully and constructively challenge each other to drive continuous improvement and deliver the best outcomes for North Somerset's children.
- Collaboration and Partnership – The three Safeguarding Partners and all Relevant Agencies will work proactively, effectively, and collaboratively together. We will value differences to help drive improvements for children and young people.

Care and Listening to the voice and lived experience of the child - Everything we do will benefit children and young people in North Somerset. We will ensure that our work is child centred, and we continually seek to care and engage, and involve our children and young people and their families.

Key Strategic Business Priorities

The NSSCP Strategic Plan has been developed to focus on a set of agreed priorities that have been agreed at the NSSCP Development event on 10th March 2023 These are:

- Leadership- To provide strong governance to an effective strategic framework.
- Learning Ensure- that practitioners have the knowledge and skills to be effective in their safeguarding children's roles.
- Neglect- To identify and support the prevention of neglect by improving the safety and wellbeing of children and young people in North Somerset the effective early identification help and effective support.
- Contextual Child Exploitation- Ensure child exploitation is recognised and responded to effectively, including when young people transition into adulthood.

We've identified these priorities from themes arising from the Partnership's existing scrutiny, and quality assurance programs and key learning points arising from children's safeguarding practice reviews. The strategic objectives will remain the same for the three-year period of the plan but we will often review the activities that sit underneath them.

The structure of the strategic plan allows the Board to focus on key strategic areas of partnership activity but also remain flexible to respond to feedback. This will allow us to refine existing programs in response to the needs of children and young people..

To support the delivery of the Business Plan, we make more detailed individual plans aligned to the Board's strategic priorities with each Sub and Working Group. The NSSCP will take a leadership role in the delivery and quality assurance of partnership work in these areas. Progress against this plan will be reviewed and monitored by each individual subgroup / Task and Finish Group in the first instance. Where necessary and appropriate, the Execs Plus Group will highlight both areas of concern and areas of good practice and success to the full NSSCP Executive Board meetings for further action.

A Snapshot of what North Somerset Safeguarding Children Partnership has achieved

1. We have completed our 3-year Business Plan and agreed our 4 Strategic priorities. The voice of the child is a key thread throughout our business priorities.
2. We continue to embed neglect as a key area of learning throughout respective partnership training requirements and develop learning briefings.
3. We have promoted learning opportunities from national and locally driven developments, case reviews, and audits and assisted in the development of effective and appropriate multi-agency courses.
4. Our Family Strengths and Needs Toolkit and documentation is now complete. We have commenced multiagency audits in Neglect, making sure plans cover the area identified as a concern – this will continue on a 3 monthly basis.
5. We have Improved the sharing of data relating to all our vulnerable children including those vulnerable to exploitation across the Partnership and with other Local Authorities.

6. Following local case reviews or serious incidents relating to children. We continue to quality assure NSSCP multi-agency training and professional development activities and evaluate of the impact of this training.
7. Following the national review of the murders of Arthur and Star, this partnership also held a learning event for practitioners from across all organisations which was supported by the Interim Designated Nurse for Safeguarding Children across the system.
8. Our Child Sexual Exploitation Strategy 2023- 2026 has been finalised, and as a result our multi-agency responses to children at risk of criminal & sexual exploitation has been strengthened.

Spotlight On 2022/2023



This section of the Annual Report focusses on key areas of work undertaken during 2022/2023 However, these must be seen in the context of the very significant amount of day-to-day work undertaken by staff throughout the year. We cannot overestimate the amount of “routine” work that goes into keeping children and young people safe in North Somerset.

Multi-agency Training and Development: what we did well

- We have delivered 75 multi-agency courses to 1260 participants. (April 22 – March 23)
- Multi-agency training has returned to a similar frequency as pre-pandemic, with 85% of the training courses now being delivered face to face Within the safeguarding partnership, the key focus areas around childhood neglect and child exploitation has driven considerations about the training offer
- The current Child Sexual Exploitation course is now delivered by our Police colleagues
- The neglect agenda had been enhanced with two new courses: a full day course considering the Cumulative impact of Neglect.
- The new online Strengths and Needs (Neglect) Toolkit training has been promoted
- We have delivered training on the Effective Support course which is to explore the use of the revised document for front line practitioners
- A great deal of work has gone into the development of the above courses as well as the ongoing delivery of the core offer of safeguarding courses

Future objectives:

- Review the overarching management system for advertising/booking of courses will need to be considered
- The current system of North Somerset CPD Online, will be closed later this year with no clear pathway for replacement. Review of high-quality event evaluation to ensure the training offer is meeting its targets

- Ensure all partners can access the partnership multi-agency training offer. Ensuring the courses are advertised to staff as widely as possible, this is an essential action for the coming 12 months
- To continue to ensure that the voice of the child remains a golden thread running through all our multi-agency training courses
- Develop a multiagency training program that spans over 12–15-month period so partnership colleagues can time-table training courses well in advance

Child Safeguarding Practice Review Group Subgroup - what we did well



- During the reporting period the case review group has met monthly
- It also collates and creates an action plan for the Partnership resulting from key findings of these reviews.
- In the year March 2022-March 2023 one Rapid Review was held, two Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews were completed (which had been initiated before March 2022), and an appreciative enquiry undertaken following an earlier Rapid Review
- The Subgroup has revised its Terms of Reference, referral form and Rapid Review process, and has produced a standardised Terms of Reference for undertaking Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews

Future objectives:

- Consider and examine the findings from National and Regional Safeguarding Practice Reviews and identify learning themes and actions for dissemination
- Review and strengthen our local Policies and guidance in line with local practice eg non mobile baby policies and guidance.
- Continue to assess and manage new referrals for significant events, undertake rapid reviews, and where appropriate commission Child Safeguarding practice Reviews
- We have reflected on local Rapid Review Cases and their respective action plans relating to Neglect and will ensure that these are incorporated into multiagency safeguarding training events

Learning and Development Subgroup - what we did well



- We have promoted learning opportunities from national and locally driven developments, case reviews, audits and assisted in the development of effective and appropriate multi-agency courses
- We continue to Quality assure NSSCP multi-agency training and professional development activities and evaluate the impact of training

- We have reflected on local Rapid Review Cases and their respective action plans relating to Neglect and will ensure that these are incorporated into multiagency safeguarding training events

Future objectives:

- Continue to support multi-agency arrangements on the delivery of the multi-agency training program, which includes implementing any health specific actions relating to the National, regional and local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews
- We will ensure that learning briefings are completed and cascaded across agencies so that learning from Rapid Review can be shared and implemented
- To support safeguarding partners to establish a learning assurance framework to ensure that all training is well evaluated and the changes in professional practice evidenced

Quality Assurance and Performance Management activities- what we did well



- This group from inception has developed maturely, keeping to an outcome focused agenda, ensuring that cross-working with the other sub-groups takes place
- We now have an effective group that reflects membership of colleagues from key parts of the system who are committed to the functions and aims of the sub-group
- A safeguarding children Dashboard has been developed that reflects practice performance against a RAG rating within the local authority and is reviewed at each meeting. This assists in identifying areas of multi-agency practice or risks that require further exploration
- The dashboard is now reviewed at every Q&A subgroup meeting to determine where future pieces of QA work require action or escalation to the partnership executive team
- Linked to the above, we have invited feedback from key leaders to share single agency audits undertaken for assurance purposes. The key partners in the subgroup take back the learning to their respective organisations for discussion and action

Future objectives:

- Establish a multi-agency auditing programme. This will ensure those multi agency responsibilities such as quality of referrals, CP decision making, are undertaken jointly and reflect multi agency accountability and perspective
- Further develop our Dashboard to reflect the work across the partnership e.g. incorporate health and police data

- Work closely with partners to identify key leads in each agency to co-produce the required detail ensuring we have meaningful information to inform the programme of work for the partnership
- Ensure recent Inspection reports from each agency are considered through a multi-agency lens and identify relevant QA activity that is required to drive up practice standards across the partnership
- To continue to evidence safeguarding strengths and good practice; identify gaps and areas for development; drive learning and service improvement

Child Exploitation Working Group -what we did well



- We have completed our 3-year Child Exploitation Strategy to include our risk assessment tool
- We have mapped children vulnerable to exploitation and geographical areas where exploitation may be taking place across North Somerset
- We have Improved the sharing of data relating to children vulnerable to exploitation across the Partnership and with other Local Authorities
- Preparatory activity in anticipation of a potential JTAI focusing on Child exploitation has been put in place
- Delivery of a Risk Outside the Home (ROTH) team within the Local Authority
- Improved understanding and awareness of Exploitation in its wider context including wider risks that lead to exploitation
- Development of a task and finish group to focus on data and partnership wider systems development

Future objectives:

- Risks Outside The Home (ROTH) Forum to be developed considering local council work streams
- To prepare for our forthcoming JTAI
- To continue to monitor the Number of Child Sexual Exploitation Crimes and strengthen the sharing of Data
- Ensure child exploitation is recognised and responded to effectively, including when young people transition into adulthood

Neglect Working Group – what we did well



- The working group has been meeting on a 6 weekly basis to drive forward the neglect multiagency audits and respective toolkits including the neglect strategy. We have worked closely with Somerset who have assisted us in our development
- Our The Family Strengths and Needs Toolkit and documentation is now complete

- We have commenced multiagency audits in Neglect making sure plans cover the area identified as a concern – this will continue on a 4 monthly basis

Future objectives:

- To encourage and support multi professional members in cases of neglect, to be confident and vocal enough to ensure the right levels of discussion, and decision making are completed and recorded
- To continue to monitor the referrals for physical/emotional/sexual abuse, given that neglect is the highest category (82%)
- To finalise our neglect strategy by January 2024 and agree a launch date for Feb/March 2024
- To support the delivery of the Business Plan’s more detailed work plans, aligned to the Board’s strategic priorities, will be developed for each Sub and Working Group

Dealing with risk & learning from Safeguarding Practice

This section explains how learning and improvements are embedded to make progress on achieving better outcomes for children and young people.

What have we learnt from Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews?

The NSSCP collates the findings from local safeguarding practice reviews (LCSPRs), repeat learning/findings are reviewed and further audit and scrutiny is undertaken to have a broader view of the findings. This was undertaken following the National Review into the murders of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and Star Hobson. Work continues to be embedded into professional practice and findings shared with multi-agency training programmes.

In the year March 2022-March 2023 one Rapid Review was held, two Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews were completed. Both these cases involved chronic neglect of a child. Learning continues to be shared across agencies and the action plan is currently being monitored by the Learning and Development Subgroup.



Integrated Care Board – input into North Somerset Safeguarding Children Partnership

The ICB Safeguarding team has continued to contribute to our Partnership to deliver their statutory duties for safeguarding during this reporting period. Colleagues from across the health system have provided leadership to three of the five sub-groups of this partnership: Learning and Development, Quality Assurance and Performance, Child Neglect and the Child Safeguarding Practice Review subgroup.

There has been an investment in the Learning and Development of statutory safeguarding health roles within the Partnership, following receipt of funding from the Regional NHS England Safeguarding team. Two cohorts of Safeguarding Supervision training have been commissioned and delivered with 32 delegates from across health providers and the ICB now trained to deliver safeguarding supervision effectively to frontline health practitioners.

Bespoke Level 4 Safeguarding Children training has also been delivered to a cohort of 16 colleagues from across the health system which was extremely well received and is likely to be recommissioned in Quarter 3 2023/24. As part of the ICB's statutory duties, learning briefs have been shared across the system as a result of these system audits and through the One Care bulletin with Primary Care.

These key messages have also been reiterated and discussed at Safeguarding LINK GP meetings to ensure changes to practice are embedded.

We've refined the ICB Safeguarding Team's offer to Primary Care in terms of training, supervision and support. This includes signposting to Multi Agency Level 3 Safeguarding Children training, monthly Q&A drop ins, and quarterly Safeguarding LINK GP meeting. This has been underpinned by the introduction of a new post within the ICB Safeguarding Team. That is the Named Nurse for Primary Care (All Age) supported by two Named GPs for All-Age Safeguarding. During 2022/23, four Level 3 Safeguarding courses were delivered to Primary Care staff virtually.

The ICB Safeguarding Team has also been invested in during 2022/23 following a comprehensive workforce review against the delivery of statutory duties and comparison ICBs. A revised team structure was drafted and consulted upon and new posts have been created to be recruited into.

A new Designated Nurse for Safeguarding Children was appointed to and this role will be supported by three place-based Deputy Designated Professionals who will have an all-age remit, adopting a 'think family' approach.

Throughout this reporting period, system discussions have been had across the footprint on how the system could work more effectively at place

(6 x locality partnership), local authority (3) and system. The outcome of these discussions was to commission a review of the arrangements with the support of a full adopted scoping paper. The Local Government Association were commissioned by the system with Executive

Sponsors from the ICB, Police and Local Authorities to undertake this piece of work which began in March 2023.

The outcomes will be reported in next year annual report.



Avon and Somerset Police

The “Child Protection Crimes (excluding Domestic Abuse Crimes)” in the attached table are recorded crimes where there are child protection concerns (Child Abuse, Child Sexual Exploitation, Child Safeguarding), with this measure excluding Domestic Abuse Crimes where there are child protection concerns. The measure also includes peer-on-peer crimes where both the victim and suspect are children. The measure includes non-recent child abuse allegations, regardless of whether the victim was a child or adult at the time of reporting.

The data below shows that the volume of recorded “Child Protection” crimes in North Somerset fell by 4.3%, or by 19 crimes, in the last 12 months compared with the previous 12 months, falling to 422 crimes. This fall should be viewed in the context of sustained increases across the last decade. The rate of reduction is below the 7.3% fall recorded across the force area. These falls are not the result of changes in recording practices and represent an actual decline in identified offences.

Child Protection and Child Sexual Exploitation (12 month rolling)	Current	Previous	Chg	% Chg
Number of Child Protection Crime (excluding Domestic Abuse Crimes)	422	441	-19	-4.3%
Number of Child Protection Serious Sexual Offences	148	180	-32	-17.8%
Number of Non-Familial Sexual Crimes - Child Victim	199	226	-27	-11.9%
Number of Child Protection Crimes for Cruelty and Neglect of Children	106	108	-2	-1.9%
Number of Child Sexual Exploitation Crimes	227	292	-65	-22.3%

Missing Children

154 children were reported missing in North Somerset in the last 12 months, rising by 17 children or by 12.4% compared with the previous 12 months. 69 of these children were reported missing repeatedly, 6 fewer children than were reported missing repeatedly in the previous 12 months. The number of missing children reports fell to 370 in the last 12 months compared with 389 in the previous 12 months, a fall of 4.9%, contrasting with the 23.5% rise recorded across the force area.

There were falls in both the number of children missing from care, falling to 26 children in the last 12 months from 32 children in the previous 12 months, and the number of children going missing from care repeatedly, falling to 16 children from 18 children.

Missing Children (12 month rolling)	Current	Previous	Chg	% Chg
Number of Missing Children	154	137	+17	+12.4%
Number of Missing Children Reports	370	389	-19	-4.9%
Number of Repeat Missing Children	69	75	-6	-8.0%
Number of Children Missing from Care	26	32	-6	-18.8%
Number of Repeat Children Missing from Care	16	18	-2	-11.1%

Safety and Anti-Bullying

The overall number of child victims of all crime types in North Somerset rose by 67 victims to 1115 victims in the last 12 months, or by 6.4% compared with the previous 12 months. This increase is above the 3.5% increase recorded across the force area as a whole. The number of child suspects of all crime types in North Somerset in the last 12 months rose by 14.4% to 824 child suspects, an increase of 104 child suspects. This rise is significantly above the 2.7% increase recorded across the force area.

The number of Domestic Abuse Crimes with a victim aged 16 or 17 recorded in North Somerset fell by 37 crimes in the last 12 months compared with the previous 12 months. This represents a fall of just over one third (33.9%) to 72 crimes. This fall is well above the 7.7% fall recorded across the force area as whole.

The number of child victims of recorded Race Hate Crimes rose to 26 victims in the last 12 months from 21 victims in the previous 12 months. Given the relatively small numbers involved, care should be taken when comparing the percentage increase in North Somerset with the percentage change recorded force wide. All forms of Hate Crime are subject to a high degree of under-reporting, and it can reasonably be concluded that the actual levels are greater than the levels reported.

Safety and Anti-Bullying (12 month rolling)	Current	Previous	Chg	% Chg
Number of Child Suspects of Crimes	824	720	+104	+14.4%

Number of Domestic Abuse Incidents (Excluding Crimes)	1475	1521	-46	-3.0%
Number of Domestic Abuse Crimes	2669	2985	-316	-10.6%
Number of Domestic Abuse Crimes - Victim Age 16 - 17	72	109	-37	-33.9%
Number of Child Victims of Crimes	1115	1048	+67	+6.4%
Number of Child Victims of Race Hate Crimes	26	21	+5	+23.8%

Initial Child Protection Conferences - The police attendance rate at ICPCs in North Somerset in 2022/23 was 100% with all 78 ICPCs having been attended.



Children Services

Family Support & Safeguarding

Our service delivers the statutory social work assessments and support to all children who are referred to Children's Services, except those who are allocated to Children with Disability team.

Team Structure and remit

There are 6 Teams based across North Somerset, 1 in Portishead, 2 in Worle and three in Weston South.

Each team has a Team Manager, senior social workers, social workers and family support workers within its structure. The service is locality based and works closely with colleagues from Health, Education and Police, we also have close working relationships with commissioned services such as WeAreWithYou and NextLink.

Family Support & Safeguarding (FS&S) support children who receive support as Children in Need, Children supported by a Child Protection Plan and Children in our Care where the decision regarding their permanence is being made and overseen by the Family Court. Care Proceedings will determine if children can return home, remain in their family with alternative carers to their parents, be provided with foster care for their childhood or adoption outside of their family. If a child has a care plan for adoption, we work closely with our colleagues in Adoption West as our Regional Adoption Agency, who assist us to find families for our children. Social workers in FS&S remain allocated to the child until adoption orders are secured, therefore, our work with some children and their families can span several years. We work closely with colleagues in Corporate Parenting Service and children who are in our care will be allocated a social worker from this service only when the decision has been made that fostering is required for the duration of their childhood.

Ofsted ILACS Inspection 2023 – Practice that is working well.

- Our approach to securing permanence for children who can benefit from adoption and our progress and success for children who secure permanence early through Early Permanence. Our Adoption work and effective work with our Regional Adoption Agency was noted as a strength.
- Effective arrangements to track and monitor children's plans for permanence, specifically children supported through the Pre-Proceedings stage of the Public Law Outline, the impact of this assisting effective progression of those plans. Positive acknowledgement to the quality of the letters sent to parents before PLO commences.
- Private fostering, it was noted our assessments are robust and completed by social workers who understand children's needs which inform their support plans.
- Our assessments to support children ages 16 and 17 who are homeless or at risk of being homeless were noted as strong with good multi agency working to support them remaining at home or access appropriate housing, entry to care and or support.
- Our Assessments that lead to decisions to bring children into care are well matched to children's levels of need and risk. Assessments shared with the courts are generally strong and proceedings are increasingly timely.

We will drive improvement and monitor progress by ensuring that:

Our Quality Assurance & Performance Service meet monthly with all Team Managers chaired by the Head of Service to identify the impact of

improvement activity and explore areas for safeguarding development.

Our Initiatives

- Dip reviews of children's records against our focused plans for improvements.
- Monthly meetings to share our understanding of 'good' across all our work.
- Weekly Quality and Performance meetings to maintain team performance and review our goals.
- Seek out, record and hear our children's voices so we learn from these to improve our safeguarding and social work practice.
- Quarterly development sessions for the service so our teams can share what has worked well.

Future challenges and developments

It is clear we have much to do, however, Ofsted have confirmed that our strategic plan is robust. we have a good understanding of our improvement priorities.

We have reviewed and revised the annual FS&S plan against the Ofsted findings. A draft for 2023/24 is out for consultation. This will be finalised and launched in September before our Annual Conference, where key messages and further clarity will be offered on practice standards and revised processes.

Staffing capacity has been a major barrier to our improvement goals. Vacancy management is critical and focused activity to enable and support recruitment and retention will maximize all recruitment options and ensure our practitioners have the capacity to deliver consistently good effective support.

In line with many other Local Authorities, retention of social workers within statutory social work presents challenges. The current vacancy rate for FS&S is approx. 40%. By September there will be a planned induction of 6 permanent social workers, 2 additional locum social workers and recruitment of 3 permanent family support workers. Further recruitment activity is continuing.

Our 6 priority areas include:

- Effectiveness of management oversight and supervision
- Identification and response to significant and chronic risk
- Reviewing the frequency and quality of our visits
- Exploring our timeliness and quality of assessments
- Reviewing our effectiveness of safeguarding children's plans
- Evidencing progress and change for Children

Front Door

The Front Door is exactly what it says, a Front Door to ensuring the right outcomes for support / assessment are considered when children's needs moved beyond Universal (Tier 1) and Early Help (Tier 2). The Front Door is a multi-agency team and even though they do not undertake assessments or hold children they maintain curiosity and measure any potential for over optimism through judgement, professional supervision, management oversight and audits.

Over the last 3 years the Front Door has changed and developed, although Ofsted observed this was not fast enough in our Focused Visit in September 2022. The pace of change between September 2022 and March 2023 (Inspection) was significant which included the introduction of a Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH).

The Ofsted inspection in Marc 2023 found that:

'Improved information-sharing arrangements are supporting the right decision making for children. Most multi-agency checks are completed and returned in a timescale that is appropriate to the urgency of children's needs and the level of risk, typically within a maximum of 24 hours.

For non-professionals contacts we have Care Connect, who work alongside the Front Door to make sure contacts are past on swiftly without delay.

For professionals we have either Childrensfrontdoor@n-somerset.gov.uk or Dutyintake@n-somerset.gov.uk.

There is also a professionals' consultation line (01275 888690) for professionals who need guidance on next actions regarding a worry or concern they have and need Social Work support in deciding if a request for support document needs to be completed. The

consultation line was recognised in the March 2023 inspection: 'A refreshed consultation line has been successfully implemented to give professionals access to confidential support and guidance when there are concerns for children. This service has been well received by professionals and frequent manager oversight of the information is ensuring it is used effectively.'

Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub

The MASH has been in place since January 2023, and now it is embedded in our practice. We are reviewing the process to ensure that the partners are in the right place and implement what needs to happen next to make any improvements needed. We have seen a rise in contacts to Children Social care since MASH was in place which evidences the increased information sharing and quality taking place. Currently we have physical attendance from Education, Health, (Sirona Care and Health), Next Link (Domestic Abuse), Police join remotely but there is a plan for a physical present for at least one day per week from 1st July, however this may be limited.

A review of the MASH arrangements has commenced and fortnightly multi-professional meetings are being put in place to assist in this. Our gold standard is for all our multi professionals' colleagues to be seated together, in the Front Door to enable high quality discussion, ensuring curiosity and measure our balance for any over optimism. This is directly due to having the right people with the right information in the right place at the right time. Our update is that representation from the Youth Offending Service and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services who are keen to also join us our MASH team.

Worries and weakness, professionals such as Police and Health work across a number of authorities around our area. From their perspective a standard process across those areas would be beneficial, but this is not how we see North Somerset MASH working and does not fit in with our vision jointly worked with North Tyneside who supported us in developing a MASH, We want that face to face, local communication and commitment and believe this is fundamental to our further development.

Family Wellbeing Hub

A recent change to the Family Wellbeing Hub is the Missing Return Home interviews are now allocated directly from of the Risk Other Than at Home (ROTH) Team, to an identified Family Wellbeing Support Worker, rather than going through the Family Wellbeing Hub.

Quality Assurance

Quality Assurance of decision making within the Front Door in September 2022 was identified as an area in need of improvement in respect of Social Work Practice. Changes have been implemented to the Quality Assurance Process within the Front Door, as follows:

- The Team Manager and Senior Social Worker complete nine-to-twelve audits in any one calendar month. This is divided into fortnightly sessions
- MASH Multi-Agency Audits are undertaken every fortnight, to a total of twelve per calendar month. This has been less well attended to date. The Police have not attended to date due to capacity

- The Head of Front Door undertakes three Dip audits monthly. Currently the dip audits are covering re-referral
- The Team Manger feeds back outcomes and learning from audits to the Front Door Team in staff meetings on a fortnightly basis and monthly in a specific audit feedback learning session
- We have worked with the Effective Support document role, supporting training for an agreed understanding of where concerns may sit on the continuum of need which has replaced the Threshold Document

Family Wellbeing service

We work closely with our Front Door social work and multi-agency colleagues to ensure that children and families are offered guidance, support and signposting to the services that can give them the right support at the right time. We provide:

Intensive early help for families: 1:1 support with a Family Support Worker.

This is a non – statutory service and aims to help families who have already received Early Help support within their community, whose needs have become more complex, and the child or young person is at significant risk of not achieving expected outcomes. It is a service that offers a holistic and coordinated approach with more intensive intervention and support.

Return to Home Interviews:

We work closely with the ROTH team and complete the Return to home interviews with children who have had a missing episode.

Children Centres and Family Hubs: We Provide and run 11 children centres and provide outreach services to 3 other community buildings.

Children Centres provide a range of holistic universal and targeted services for families with children primarily under five including:

- child and family health services, ranging from midwifery, health visitor services to breastfeeding support.
- parent and toddler groups
- information on childcare and early learning and local support groups and help to promote the Early Years Pupil Premium
- classes for parents, drop-in sessions, healthy eating advice
- help for you to find work or training opportunities.

Committed to develop 3 of our children centres to become Family Hubs, one in each of our localities. They provide families with somewhere they can go if they need information, advice or guidance about parenting, concerns about family breakdown, and other worries. A Family Hub is a central access point for services and support and will provide a universal front door to families, offering a one-stop shop of family support services across their social care, education, mental health, and physical health needs.

UK Re-Settlement programme:

We have three schemes in North Somerset which support families who have come to the UK to seek refuge.

- Vulnerable persons resettlement scheme (VPRS)/ UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS) 2106 – a 5-year scheme and 5 years leave to remain. NS involved since 2016 and relates to the conflict in the Mina region. The pledge is to assist 20,000 individuals with NS resettling 14 families. We have 11 families settled through the VPRS and 1 through UKRS
- Afghan Relocation and Assistance Policy – 3-year scheme and 3 years leave to remain starting in July 2021. Scheme is to welcome Afghan Locally employed staff who have worked for the UK and risked their lives alongside British forces in Afghanistan to relocate to the UK with their families.
- Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme – 3 years scheme and 3 years to remain for those who have assisted the UK efforts in Afghanistan and stood up for values, women's rights freedom of speech and vulnerable groups. The government will resettle more than 5,000 people in the first year and up to 20,000 over the coming years. We have resettled 12 families in North Somerset.

Advanced parenting offer

The advanced parenting offer in North Somerset delivers evidenced based programmes for parents of children from birth to 19 and 25yrs SEND

We have 14 parenting programmes which covers behaviour, domestic abuse, parent conflict, parenting an adolescent, child on parent violence. Some of the facilitators are specialist CYPIAT trained parenting practitioners. Robust quality assurance and supervision is carried out to ensure fidelity to the programmes.

We also have a parenting village coffee morning once a month which provides drop in professional and peer support for the families in our community needing extra support.

Let's Cook group is delivered at Oldmixon Family Centre, which is situated in the South locality. This group is for the whole community, aimed at children 0-5 and their parents and carers.

Aim related outcomes for this group are as follows:

Attendees have been able to meet other parents with young babies and share parenting experiences and cooking experiences:

- have increased their level of engagement with other local Children Centre services during their attendance.
- an increase in their knowledge of understanding of what ingredients can be used to make low-cost meals.
- that they are using activities and techniques learned in the sessions within their own homes

- have increased levels of communication and increased the number of fresh meals they cook at home.

What we achieved

- 100% of parents/carers said they are more aware of the services children's centres offer because of attending Let's Cook
- 100% had attended or planned to attend other groups within the children's centres, most popular being 'Let's play'.
- 100% said that because of attending Let's Cook, their knowledge on healthy recipes/ cooking and supporting positive interactions
- 80% are more aware of what ingredients can be used to make low-cost meals.
- 90% report an increase in the number of fresh meals they cook at home
- All parents and carers felt the venue and time of the group was suitable.

Comments from parents and carers, related to aim related outcomes:

- We've absolutely loved it. Thank you.
- I would be happy to pay more for this and pay up front. It's been Fab. Would love there to be more kids doing the course as it's brilliant. Wish it was a longer course. Thanks so much for accommodating my / our food tolerances. I this has been amazing.
- No, I think everything was done great. We absolutely loved our time here and my toddler is more confident helping me in the kitchen.



Children in Care

To reflect statutory guidance, Children in Care should receive an initial health assessment to evaluate the child's physical health and any requirement for access to specialist behavioral, mental, and emotional health assessment within 20 working days of becoming a child in care. The performance against this metric has been challenging for some time owing to timeliness of notifications from the local authority, capacity and availability of community pediatricians within Sirona Care and Health to undertake the assessment and a proportion of appointments where children were not brought.

A systemwide Children in Care workshop took place on 9th November 2022 to discuss how as an Integrated Care System- all system partners have a statutory responsibility for this cohort of Children. It was the first meeting of its kind. There was representation from the ICB- Safeguarding and Contracting, Sirona Care and Health- Strategic, Business Operations and Delivery of service, and all three Local Authorities were represented. There was a consensus from all system partners represented that an exploration of different options to undertake IHAs and RHAs was now necessary owing to challenges and impact on this vulnerable cohort. For example, the use of GPs to support the undertaking of IHAs instead of Community Pediatrician's.

In addition to the above, a pilot is underway to quality assure additional packages of care commissioned by the ICB for Children who are in care and placed out of area. The purpose of this exercise is to ensure that as Corporate Parents, the ICB is providing the best possible care and protection for the child in the same way as a good parent/birth parent would, and to quality assure the services being provided. In the same way, the ICB is exploring what could be included in a Care Leavers Health Offer, for example pre-paid prescription exemptions for those eligible.



Listening to children and young people is crucial, at times the most vulnerable young people don't always feel that they are heard or their opinions taken seriously.

Children's Participation Group - what is it about? Let's find out more....

- The Participation group captures the voice of our young people and children in North Somerset. We have evolved our engagement over recent months, and this is now led by what the children and young people want.
- We hold a monthly Care Leavers Forum, for our young people. We meet in the Town Hall to listen to their thoughts, discuss upcoming events and sometimes review documents to ensure they use language that cares and can be understood by our young people. We also provide a hot meal, which ensure our young people have eaten well that day. This is a lovely setting, where we have grown great working relationships with our young people.
- A Children in Care Council is also held monthly. This takes the form of a quarterly in person event at local venues, allowing us to provide food and games. The

months in between are shared between events held at schools or in conjunction with our Family Wellbeing Team.

Our Children's Voices



Now let's hear the voice of one young person: my personal story.

I became a child in care with North Somerset Council before transitioning to the Leaving Care team. I was living in supported accommodation and talked regularly with my Leaving Care Personal Advisor (LCPA) for support and access to opportunities for develop skills for living. I was introduced to the Participation team by the LCPA, I was very passionate about wanting to be involved with the various opportunities available at the local authority and to "change things from the inside out".

I remembered my experiences as a child in care, the transition to adulthood and as a care experienced adult and spoke honestly, reflecting on what went well, what could have been better and what needed to change. I am now a permanent member of the Care Leavers (CL) Forum, attending monthly and am an active contributor to the many discussions. For example, I have helped to:

- Design literature
- Commented on our mental health and education strategy.
- Regional and local care offer for care leavers

Most of all I have been able to forge new relationships and make new friends with many other young people who attend the Forum. It's nice to be with people who have the same experiences as you, you know you're not alone." I even get the chance to be on the interview panel for new staff in Children Services!

Overtime, my confidence has grown. And I am engaging in professional discussions with candidates and considering the voice of children and young people in everything we do.

- "My confidence grew so much being on the panel, I knew what I wanted to hear as a person doing the interview, so it helped me to answer the questions when it was me doing it."
- I never even used to ask the questions, now I can ask all of them." I now have a job but continue to be an active participator within the group and continue to share my experiences with other young people.
- I know what it was like and what would have helped me."

I am now living independently which is great news and looking forward to making plans for the future. I will be developing my skills and further training to become an advocate/mentor for children in care.

Quotes from children and young people when asked the following questions:

How do you feel participation has changed and is your voice is being heard?

- We have a voice.

- You can see staff trying their hardest to change
- We feel listened to
- We're being heard.
- Feels like we're being more appreciated now than we used to

How do you feel about people at home?

- We get on well.
- They love me.
- We have fun together.
- I feel safe with them.
- They're always there for me.
- They understand me.



What is going well in your life?

- My friends.
- My family.
- My hobbies/activities.
- Where I live.
- My care plans.



What is the best way to help me?

- Don't embarrass me.
- Be respectful to me.
- Get to know me.
- Ask me what I need!
- Treat me as an individual.
- Help me understand what is expected.
- Listen to my views.

Public health – Our Substance Misuse Service

Case Study- Child B's experience: here is my personal journey.

Child B is aged 17 years old

He was initially referred to the substance advice service when he was 16 for a Youth Alcohol and Drugs Diversion (YADD) issued by Avon and Somerset Police. He had been found with a small amount of an illegal drug during a stop and search.

Child B was vulnerable, had a diagnosis of dyslexia and clearly needed further assessment around his learning needs. He also was a heavy cannabis user, smoking daily. His life was complex, he had a difficult relationship with his mother, witnessed domestic violence and was removed into Foster Care for one year. On his return home his mother withdrew him from Education at the age of 11, preferring home education as an option. During this time,

he continued to smoke cannabis. A full assessment was undertaken, and he completed his drugs and engagements work, but subsequently did not respond to follow up calls.

A year later Child B has engaged with the Substance Advice Service following an unsettled period when he was staying with inappropriate people and exposing himself to future risks. He had started to deal in drugs. He had also started using MDMA in addition to cannabis.

Positive outcomes

Recently Child B's mum agreed to attend a joint meeting with the service and agreed to a further social care referral around his housing needs and contextual safeguarding risks. Child B has now been assessed by children's social care and has a Child in Need plan. He has met with a housing officer who has previously housed his older siblings.

Education, Health, and Social Needs

Education, Health and Speech and Language difficulties are now being addressed.

Child B's relationship with his worker at SAS has strengthened significantly. He remains engaged with his SAS program, now attending appointments regularly and face to face. He has completed a psychosocial intervention related to his drug use and responds well to motivational interviewing. He has also worked on harm reduction techniques. He is making some very positive steps forward. His cannabis use has reduced, and he has stopped using MDMA.

He has now received support to apply for benefits and no longer needs to sell drugs for financial gain. He is on the waiting list for accommodation. Following intervention, Child B's mother is offering some more support now too.

Ongoing support will continue despite the challenges. He has made great progress from our SAS interventions and his engagement is impressive.

Our Mental health Service

We have wellbeing practitioners in secondary schools running therapeutic interventions online and in person, which improve resilience and mental health and contribute to their safety and wellbeing for example [Mind Aid, Shameless, Resilience Lab](#).

Our future developments for next year

- Our mental health training will be expanding this next year
- Promoting five-to-thrive training for early years professionals
- Including dedicated training about self-harm,
- Establishing workshops for parents and school staff to support young people's mental health.

Our Alcohol Team

A new alcohol liaison worker is now embedded in Weston General Hospital, providing early intervention and referral to treatment services. Adults and our young people are also included into this service and can access treatment, advice and support.

What does our Data tell us?

From April 2022 to March 2023 the following data was collected:

- North Somerset's children and young people (0-17) population was 42,848
- 9,293 contacts were received, of which 654 were domestic violence contacts and 549 progressed to referral
- There were 1,024 referrals to Children's Support and Safeguarding of which 122 were re-referrals (new referral started within 12 months of a previous referral starting)
- There were 268 Children in Need (plans open at year end)
- 108 children with Child Protection Plans (open at year end) of whom the majority were on a plan due to neglect
- There was 36% of children on a child protection plan for a 2nd or subsequent time (of CPPs open at year end)
- There were 226 children in care (open at year end) of which 87 children started to be in care (during the year)
- There were 35 children recorded as at risk of sexual exploitation or as having been sexually exploited during the year
- There were 27 children recorded as at risk of criminal exploitation or as having been criminally exploited during the year
- There were 164 children that went missing during the year across 495 missing episodes

Local area Designated Officer (LADO) - Annual Report

This sets out the key findings from North Somerset's Local Area Designated Officer for Allegations (LADO), and activity using both data analysis and commentary between April 2019 to March 2020. [Read the LADO Annual report April 2022-2023 here.](#)

Child Death Overview Panel (CDOP) – Annual Report

North Somerset Safeguarding Children's Partnership remains a member of the West of England CDOP as it did as an LSCB. [Read the CDOP annual report 2022-2023 to learn more.](#)

Section 11 Audit 2022-2023

Section 11 was issued under the Children Act (2004) and has been reinforced in Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018. Section 11 places duties on a range of organisations and individuals to ensure their functions, and any services that they contract out to others, are discharged having regard to the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.

The five children's Partnerships across the Avon & Somerset Region worked together to audit organisations working with children and families.

The audits took place via a series of peer review workshops and the findings and learning were merged into one report across the children's partnerships in Bristol, Somerset, North Somerset, Bath & North-East Somerset and South Gloucestershire. North Somerset undertook reviews with Sirona Care & YMCA.

Partnership Priorities

- Embed the learning from National and local Child Safeguarding Reviews across all agencies
- Strengthen the Partnership governance and accountability and resourcing arrangements
- Accelerate our work on updating our website
- Refresh and embed best practice on neglect across the Partnership
- Work in collaboration with our Safeguarding Adults Partner on joint key priorities such as communication and engagement and transitional safeguarding.

