

Lead Member Children and Families: Annual Report

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Division and Local Member: All

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Summary

1 The Strategic & Professional Framework For Children's Services

- 1.1 The current statutory guidance, summarising some 300+ statutory duties, has as the central principle the co-ordination of education and children's social care services under a single elected lead member to support the strategic and professional framework within which the safety and the educational, social and emotional needs of children and young people are considered together.
- 1.2 The strengthened professional structure for Children's Services comprising Children's Social Care, Education, Commissioning and Performance, and Quality Assurance and Safeguarding was established in January 2016. Following the departure of the Deputy Director Education in 2017, a review of the education service senior structure was carried out in discussion with representative Headteachers. As a result, the education service now comprises 3 areas – schools standards and the provision of places, inclusion service including special educational needs and disabilities and Support Services for Education (SSE) providing traded services to support schools. The new Assistant Director for Inclusion started in April 2018 and a Cabinet Member for Education was appointed in May 2018 to support the lead member. Her annual report will cover mainstream education, school improvement, school building, and SSE, they are not therefore covered in this report. These changes reflect the Council's commitment to schools and education in Somerset and the need to improve education outcomes for all children.
- 1.3 Each senior manager provides professional leadership for their service area and also represents children's services, deputising for the Director of Children's Services (DCS) (and all the statutory functions of the role) as required. The Cabinet Member provides support and challenge to the DCS and relevant members of his senior team as appropriate, through the various governance arrangements in place in the service.
- 1.4 The Ofsted report into the Council's safeguarding and corporate parenting functions was published in January 2018, with a judgement of Requires Improvement (RI) resulting in the ending of government intervention. As an RI

authority the Council is subject to an enhanced inspection regime to support the Council to get to 'good'.

It is of concern that only Cornwall, the Isles of Scilly and Bath and North East Somerset are judged Good in the South West. In comparison to other regions the South West performs poorly with no 'Outstanding' local authorities. As a result, government funded sector led improvement for the South West local authorities is being provided out of region by Essex County Council an 'Outstanding' local authority. Essex continues to support Somerset's improvement journey including chairing the Children's Social Care Quarterly Performance Review Meetings (QPRM).

Reflecting the strengthened capacity in the service and some areas self-assessed as 'good', the Council has been providing some externally funded support to other southwest LAs.

1.5 As a result of the Financial challenges facing the Council, and with advice from advisors funded by the LGA, Children's Services has moved to a statutory minimum service, this in summary means:

- Provide services which meet the Council's statutory obligations in relation to children's social care, SEND, education and youth offending services.
- Fund Early Help which directly avoids the need for statutory services (social care, SEND and youth offending)
- Provide services where there are external funding sources
- Ensuring all services improve to at least 'good' by 2020/21

The ongoing work involved in addressing the financial challenges has had an impact on the improvements necessary in Corporate Parenting and Special Educational Needs & Disabilities which have not been at the pace originally planned.

1.6 The strategic multi-agency framework for children's services in Somerset, is met by the **Somerset's Children and Young People's Plan 2016–2019** <http://www.somerset.gov.uk/policies-and-plans/plans/children-and-young-peoples-plan/> . A revised plan for 2019-2022 is being produced following a multi-agency process, overseen by Somerset Children's Trust and involved feedback from young people including Children Looked After and Care Leavers.

1.7 Each improvement programme has a supporting annual action plan. Accountability and challenge in relation to these plans is ably provided by partner agencies through the Children's Trust and the Education Partnership Board and by elected members through the Corporate Parenting Board and the Scrutiny for Policies, Children and Families Committee.

2 **Children's Social Care**

2.1 The focus for Children's Social Care since the Ofsted inspection in 2017 has been, and continues to be, the journey from Requires Improvement to Good and to ensure that our services, systems and processes are set up to support the delivery of this and the achievement of good outcomes for children.

Since September 2018 there has been a full complement of four Heads of Service in post within Children's Social Care. This creates the opportunity to develop more collaborative ways of working across the service areas and will

support the implementation of new ways of working from April 2019. Priorities include working with the operational management group to:

- Reduce the impact of transition points on children;
- Remove barriers to developing improved social work practice with the focus being on strength and relationship-based social work;
- Increase the number of children who successfully reconnect and return home to their parent or carers;
- Good quality, effective planning for children;
- Work within our own service and partner agencies to ensure children receive the right service at the right time and that responses are effective and proportionate to the identified strengths, needs and risks. Included in this is the redesign of the front door (First Response).
- Explore a more community-based response to safeguarding.

2.2 **Edge of Care Services**

The prevention service within Children's Social Care, Team 8, has been redesigned from existing resources to provide an increased breadth of service provision in terms of both reach and availability. Team 8 now work across high level 3 and level 4 services, meaning that adolescent children (transition to secondary school age onwards) face fewer changes in worker where the professional relationship is core to making positive changes within families. As of January 2019, Team 8 provide a casework service and crisis (duty) service seven days a week, 7am–10pm. The early start ensures children with school attendance issues can be supported, especially our Children Looked After within Somerset where data shows poor school attendance to be a core issue.

To further support our children and families who are experiencing significant stress or dysfunction which could lead to family breakdown, prevention services are now delivering a 10pm–7am crisis support service 4 nights each week (over the Friday–Monday night weekend) working with the Police and other agencies.

Edge of Care services were well regarded by Ofsted in the 2017 inspection.

2.3 **Youth Offending Service**

The overall case load of YOS has continued to steadily climb over the last year, currently fluctuating at 85–90 children actively involved with YOS at any one time. The reoffending rate is very slightly above the national average, but of more significance we are seeing an increase in serious youth violence which, from local intelligence, is believed to be associated largely with the drugs trace and County Lines type activity. From a zero rate in 2017/2018, three young people have been remanded in custody in the current year, with 2 remaining at HMP Parc currently. This has a significant financial impact upon the YOS, as we receive no remand budget as this is based upon previous years' performance.

Key areas for YOS activity going forwards are:

- Reviewing how the service is structured staffing wise, to cope with increasing numbers and complexity where indications are the YJB grant will be significantly reduced

- Ensuring all staff can deliver healthy relationships and substance misuse work at Tier 2, as the current externally funded contracts held within Team 8 terminate
- Reviewing (very) early prevention work to ensure proportionality of response, allowing greater proportions of staff resources to concentrate on the highest risk young people, who are often also our most vulnerable
- Ensuring partner contributions, including premises and staffing, are reviewed to reflect current and projected need and demand
- Supporting staff and partners through the HMI probation inspection process, which is likely to happen later this year

2.4 **Children Looked After**

The Somerset rate of Children Looked After remains low compared to other authorities in the South West. However, in the last year there has been an increase in the number of children coming into our care, (546 in January 2019 compared to 523 in December 2017). Key priorities for the service include:

- Placement sufficiency and stability – work is underway with providers of care and social workers to address these issues.
- Achieving permanence – this year has seen a drive on ensuring permanence planning meetings are held for all our children to ensure we remain focussed on achieving permanence at the earliest opportunity, avoiding unnecessary drift and delay.
- Reconnection (formerly known as reunification) – ensuring that we continually drive towards ensuring those children and young people that can safely return home do so
- Quality of direct work with children
- Ensuring the voice of the child is central to service development and delivery

The Care Leavers Service has published the Local Offer and positive feedback has been received. Currently there are 236 Care Leavers being worked with and there is a continued focus on improving the consistency of pathway plans and decreasing the number of Care Leavers who are not in education, employment or training (NEET).

2.5 **Adoption**

Somerset County Council Adoption Performance 1st April 2017 – 31st March 2018

Following the reinspection of Children's Services in 2017 adoption was judged Good. Ofsted noted the provision of strong adoption services ensuring successful permanence for a wide range of children. The inspection found good practice from effective planning for adoption right through the process to good post adoption support services. Fostering for Adoption (FFA) was noted as an area of considerable strength.

Recruitment of adopters improved in 17/18 with 26 adopter households approved and 31 children were adopted with another 31 children placed for adoption. This is a reduced number of adoptions however in terms of percentage of adoption as a permanence outcome for children leaving care there has been an increase from 13% to 14%. The number of children leaving care due to a Special Guardianship Order being made has remained stable.

Performance in relation to two of the three scorecard indicators (Adoption Scorecard Year ending March 2017– the scorecard is always published a year behind) has been improved in relation to making timely decisions and placements for children in our care. Performance against the A2 indicator, 'Average time between a local authority receiving court authority to place a child and the local authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family (days)' continues to be strong and we are in the top 25% of local authorities.

Since the launch of the Adoption Support Fund the Permanence Team has made 255 successful applications to the adoption support fund. The total approved funding was £795,580.

Regional Adoption Agency - Adopt South West (Adopt SW)

Progress towards a regional adoption agency was slower than anticipated; Somerset County Council fully transferred Somerset's adoption services to Adopt South West on the 1st October 2018. Our RAA is a hosted Local Authority model and brings together the adoption services of Somerset, Torbay Council, Plymouth City Council and Devon County Council. Devon County Council are the host LA. Kath Drescher was appointed as Head of Service for AdoptSW, this appointment was greeted positively across the region.

Transferring our adoption services was a period of intense activity managed alongside maintaining the service for adopters and children. Some staff were unsettled by their employment transferring to Devon County Council and several experienced adoption workers left the service. Post 1st October there have been some significant technical difficulties, challenges with the reality of aligning practice and social work capacity particularly in our part of the region. AdoptSW are recruiting to vacancies.

2.6 **Safeguarding and Assessment**

Over the last 12 months the focus has been on supporting the move from a compliance focus to a focus on quality of practice. The service has been working to ensure that responses are proportionate and effective and that children and their families understand the reasons for our involvement and what they can expect from the service in terms of intervention.

This has included a service 'obsession' on thresholds supported by the implementation of the safe uncertainty model enabling more confident risk management and the panel systems across the county. This work has resulted in:

- A significant reduction in Child in Need numbers across the county reducing from 1750 in May 2018 to 1240 in January 2019;
- An improvement in the conversion rates within the child protection process and a reduction in the number of strategy meetings ensuring children do not receive statutory intervention unnecessarily.

- Stable numbers of children subject to Child Protection Plans
- Improvement in the timeliness of assessments completed from 54% in April 2018 to 84% in January 2019.
- A reduction in the number of children subject to Public Law Outline meetings and care proceedings.

Linked to the above the service has embedded a dip review cycle to close the learning loop in relation to focus areas.

Work with partners has been ongoing to support consistent understanding and application of thresholds. Resources at First Response are now being deployed more flexibly to prevent contacts coming into the system which previously have resulted in No Further Action at an early stage. The success of this work will inform the redesign of the front door services.

The service is currently focussed on improving the quality of planning to ensure that interventions focus on the impact on the child and are effective in achieving good outcomes for children.

2.7 **Partnerships, Quality, Audit and Quality**

The last year has seen significant change and development within the quality assurance service. Ofsted 2017 highlighted some strengths, but overall cited a lack of challenge to SW practice from IROs and CP chairs. With a new permanent management team in place, the service has responded well, developing improved escalation processes, a strengths-based approach to identifying issues requiring resolution and clearer processes for recording challenge and the impact this has on outcomes for children. Links with front line social workers and managers have been strengthened, and review meetings are increasingly child focused, whilst structures for gathering feedback from professionals and service users are now in place.

The Quality Assurance framework has been updated to include a wider range of audit and diagnostic tools, which are aimed at giving managers a clear understanding of what is working well and what areas require focus to increase the pace of improvement.

Management of the SSCB Business Unit, and Route One advocacy have now come under the remit of the QA service, which will enable a clearer focus on key Ofsted objectives (including advocacy for children in CP conferences and improved partnership working).

The key challenges for the next year will be to maintain the pace of change, and to increase the influence and impact that the ISRO service has on the quality of practice, particularly for CLA. The development and implementation of new local and regional safeguarding arrangements will also be a key priority, with work already underway to plan for implementation in September 2019. There is an enthusiasm and commitment evident within the team which it is anticipated will support further positive change throughout 2019 and beyond.

2.8 **Children with Disabilities**

The Children with Disability service has been redesigned from existing resources to provide a more proportionate response to disabled children and their families.

The Social Work Team provides a service to children and young people whose needs are assessed as being at high tier three and tier four. The Family Intervention Workers in our Early Support Team provide a service to children whose needs are assessed at tier 3 and the Resource Team provide the services required at the lower tiers.

This redesign was completed in collaboration with the Somerset Parent Carer Forum and ensures that children and families receive the support that is required to meet their needs in the most effective and appropriate way.

The Social Work Team now work with 160 children having average caseloads of 15 which means they are better able to provide the support required to their families in a more effective way.

The Early Support Service work with 165 children and the Resource Team directly with 82 children. However, we also provide activities with community partners through grant funding which families can access from our short break calendar which is sent 2800 children.

Our three children's homes which provide overnight short break services to those children who require that level of service are rated as follows:

The Lodge – Good

The Elms - Requires Improvement to be Good

Beech trees – Requires Improvement to be Good

3 **Inclusion**

- 3.1 The development of the Somerset Inclusion Service under the Assistant Director – Inclusion is progressing well following the removal of the internal commissioning arrangements for statutory education services. These arrangements now come under the Director of Childrens Services and will form part of the Children's Services Transformation programme.

The newly developed Inclusion service comprises four strategic managers to bring together a wide range of statutory functions. This includes the SEND casework function, providing education for Pupils who are permanently excluded, identifying those who are missing from education, have persistent absence or low attendance and monitoring those who are electively home educated and the educational attainment of Children Looked After through the Virtual School. The Principal Educational Psychologist has joined the Inclusion leadership team to further add capacity and strengthen alignment across all statutory education services.

3.2 **SEND casework**

The appointment of the Interim SEND manager and a permanent appointment to the SEND Strategic Manager has increased capacity in leadership of SEND casework in the Local Authority. Progress on preparing for the Local area SEND inspection has progressed through the development of the SEND Local area improvement network.

There has been a 78% increase in the number of requests for statutory assessment during the past four years since the implementation of the Children and Families Act in 2014. In 2017/18 the increase was 34%; this is significantly above National increases which are reported at 16.9%. The increase in requests also adds pressures to the Educational Psychology Team to provide statutory advice and to support this it was necessary to amend individual allocations made to schools.

Performance is measured by the 20 Week completion rate. This was finalised at 34% for 2017/18 and is significantly below National average of 64.9%.

A planned programme of transferring high needs funding into Education, health and Care plans has commenced and will continue to impact upon performance in 2018/19. This programme will be finalised by April 2020. To mitigate increased demands and impact upon performance targets, a restructure has commenced with the creation of new posts, including four more posts at a senior level and 10 additional temporary officers to undertake assessments and reviews of EHCP's.

Improvement is already seen as a result of increased capacity and final monthly performance data has risen for the 2nd month running with December performance finalised at 64%, just below National average.

3.3 **Permanent exclusions**

Providing full time education for children who are permanently excluded is a statutory responsibility from day 6 of their exclusion. In 2017/18 there were 120 permanent exclusions. This is a 68% increase since 2015/16 and high levels of permanent exclusions have continued at the start of the Academic year 2018/19. An initial projection taken in the first quarter predicted numbers of permanent exclusions would exceed levels as at 2017/18, however this has now slowed.

A combined project between the LA and CCG is due to commence in March to reduce permanent exclusions and support schools to identify and manage challenging behaviour. This project is intended to be short term and will focus on developing partnership working. Work force training will be included internally through the Children's Services Transformation programme and through training packages to schools, overseen by SSE and Partnerships with Teaching Schools. Whilst the initial project is short term ongoing activity will cover the duration of the Children and Young People's plan.

3.4 **Safeguarding in Education**

The development of a new integrated Safeguarding in Education Team from a redesign of existing services will add capacity and will focus upon supporting schools to undertake statutory functions relating to safeguarding, including attendance, and monitor compliance and quality assurance within the regulatory framework of Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE - 2017) and Working Together to Safeguard Children (2014).

The Safeguarding in Education Team will have portfolio specialisms such as Child Exploitation and County Lines, Children Missing Education (CME) and Children Missing from Home (CMH), Neglect, Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) domestic and sexual abuse, Prevent as well as monitoring school attendance. The plan is for the new service to be in place by the beginning of February 2019.

3.5 **Education for Children Looked After**

The Virtual School continues to monitor the educational attainment, attendance and outcomes for Children Looked After.

Throughout 2017/18 PEPs were received in the low to mid 90%, with 87% of Children Looked After attending good or better schools. Attainment at Key stage 2 in Reading, Writing and Maths at or above expected level was 24% in 2018, an increase from 19% in 2017 and at Key stage 4, 3 out of 38 young people achieved a standard pass, an increase of 2% from 6% in 2017.

Attendance is a key priority as National research clearly shows the link between school attendance and attainment. 10% of Children Looked After have attendance below 90% and as such could be deemed to be persistently absence. Attendance also continues to be impacted by placement moves.

The Virtual School has refreshed its priorities this year to reflect a greater emphasis on attendance by attending good or better schools, and attainment through good quality PEPs.

3.6 **Supporting Inclusion in Schools**

Supporting schools to be Inclusive has been the primary focus for the Learning Support Service who have been realigned under the SEND advisor. In September the Somerset Inclusion Audit was launched. This supports schools to self-evaluate and plan for Inclusion. It further contributes to the strategic developments across the Local Area. 161 schools completed the audit in the Autumn term, a return rate of over 68%, and data is currently being collated. Information from the audit will support joint commissioning of services to ultimately improve outcomes for pupils with SEND and will continue to support capacity building within our schools through training for teachers, SENCOs and other school staff.

4 **Education – Early Years**

4.1 **School Readiness**

The multi-agency School Readiness Working Group's focus is on supporting best practice in settings to ensure high rates of a 'good level of development' across the County and improving outcomes for children 0–5, through up-to-date advice and guidance, and working closely with the Early Years Communities model to promote CPD. 71.8% of children achieved a good level of development in 17/18, up 0.8% from 16/17, above the national average which stands at 71.5%.

Moderation for settings working with children 0–4 is being embedded to ensure that Reception entry data is fair, consistent and accurate so that Reception teachers can accurately assess children's starting points. This will ensure that appropriate provision can be put into place to enable better outcomes for children at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage.

4.2 **Early Years Childcare**

Work continues to monitor and address sufficiency of early years child care places in collaboration with partners in education and the private and voluntary sector.

The proportion of 3&4 year olds taking up an early years place in 2018 was 96%, up from 95% in 2017, and above the national rate (England) of 94%.

5 **West Somerset Opportunity Area**

The Opportunity Area Programme is a key part of the Education Secretary's priority of tackling social mobility and improving opportunities for young people across the country. West Somerset is one of 12 areas nationally, which have both poor social mobility and schools that face challenges. These areas will receive a share of £72 million to boost opportunities for young people in these communities up to March 2020. West Somerset was 324th out of 324 council areas in the social mobility index in both 2016 and 2017. The key issues are early years attainment and West Somerset has the highest proportion of people living below the national living wage.

The programme is led by the DFE and co-produced with local stakeholders. The programme started in October 2017 with the first tranche of funding allocated. The agreed plan focused on 4 priorities: Early years, Excellence in the classroom, Transition to Adult hood and Business and Employment.

Following further engagement four additional cross cutting themes have also been included: Mental Health, Extra Curricular Activities, Access to Services, and Special Education Needs.

West Somerset has 16 Early years settings and 18 schools, all of whom are involved in the programme.

During this year the Opportunity Area has:

- delivered in line with the plan for 2017/18.
- consulted on a 2018/19 delivery plan.
- Worked with a significant number of partners, and with new service

providers including The Youth Sports Trust, Home Start, Fare Share and Inclusion Expert to deliver interventions.

Early successes include:

- Fare Share providing food for 2,200 meals for children during the summer holiday proving a model that can be rolled out for the whole County to address Holiday Hunger. A community led and delivered Summer activity programme of over 350 activities for young people during the holidays.
- Doubling the number of students taking part in the National Citizenship service, and facilitating pupil premium students to take part
- Improved levels of development for Early years pupils.
- To find out more about the opportunity our website is: <https://westsomersetopportunityarea.co.uk/>

6 Commissioning & Performance

6.1 Early Help

The Strategic Commissioner for Early Help and Stronger Communities has been in post since February 2018 and the focus has been to strengthen the role of the Early Help Strategic Commissioning Board, evidence the impact of early help and ensure early help is delivered more collaboratively across the partnership.

The development of the Family Support Service, Phase 1 integration has been supported alongside public health colleagues; progress has been made particularly on accommodation which includes both staff accommodation and the de-designation of 16 children's centres across Somerset.

In line with the financial imperative, the proposed changes to the support and services for children and their families and the proposed removal of getset level 2 has led to a public consultation to understand the impact of this change. This process also resulted in the Scrutiny for Policies, Children and Families Committee calling in the cabinet decision originally taken in September 2018. The public consultation has been a welcomed opportunity to speak to partners and communities across Somerset and to develop a set of proposals which will improve the early help approach and offer for families in Somerset.

Service level agreements for both the Team Around the School (TAS) and the Parent and Family Support Advisers (PFSA) has been completed. This will lead to an ongoing termly (x3 a year) contract review cycle to measure effectiveness and impact of both these service delivery models.

Work to develop an early help scorecard is progressing well through the Early Help Strategic Commissioning Board. Partners are more aware of the early help systems and processes in place. The board is becoming more effective in driving the early help offer forward with stronger collaborative relationships in place.

The Local Offer which is delivered through the Somerset Choices website was relaunched at the end of the Summer which has resulted in a better online offer for children and families which will continue to develop.

Work is starting on the redesign of the early help system and will be part of the new Children's Services Transformation Programme. The outcome of the public consultation will inform the future direction of travel.

6.2 **Sufficiency/placements**

Improving the number and quality of placements in Somerset available for our Children Looked After has been a key focus this year. As a result of improved relationships and more detailed market intelligence, we have increased the number of children placed in residential settings within the county from 35% to 43%. Work with providers in Somerset has resulted in improved quality; from 3 independent providers rated inadequate in 2017 to none currently rated inadequate. Increased engagement with independent providers has helped us to gain positive partnerships in the market and increase the number of placements available to us. The Council's Sufficiency Statement was rewritten at the beginning of 2018 and is being refreshed for 2019, showing improvements and challenges in practice, along with the actions we will take to improve further in 2019.

We have retendered our residential and fostering frameworks with our partners in Devon, Plymouth and Torbay this year, gaining good quality and stable prices from our most valued providers. We have also created a framework for semi-independent provision focussed on meeting the needs of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, enabling us to find safe, good quality accommodation at short notice.

Developing work with the voluntary sector began in 2018 to pilot community-led services which support families and prevent children from coming into care. This is an exciting area for expansion in 2019, aiming to empower communities to be resilient and keep families together. This work will be evaluated in 2019 to determine how it will go forward.

6.3 **SEND – Commissioning of Specialist School Places**

As part of the Local First Strategy we are exploring ways to reduce the reliance on the Independent and Non-Maintained Sector (INMS).

The early years and schools' capital programme (outlined in the Cabinet Member for Education's and Business Transformation annual report) will provide additional capacity in our maintained settings and this offers an opportunity for Somerset to support children and young people with SEND to attend their local education provision, reduce the reliance on independent and non-maintained provision, and deliver efficient use of resources. Currently 172 pre-16 children (135-day placements, 37 residential) at a cost of £7,895,096 and 70 post-16 young people (35 day, 35 residential) at a cost of £5,775,812 are placed in INMS. If we can reduce these costs, we will be able to increase funding in the maintained sector to meet the needs of children and young people with SEND.

This project will require a range of expertise working together from across the education sector, local authority officers, social care, commissioning and the Somerset Parent Carer Forum to successfully meet the needs of children and young people with SEND and their families to identify those able to return to local provision and to support the transition process. A steering group is being developed and will report through the High Needs Sub Group of Schools Forum.

The quality assurance of independent non-maintained schools has been improved through the development of a provider scorecard enabling us to see at a glance the provider performance, value for money and contract management.

6.4 **Joint Commissioning and Integration**

The Strategic Commissioner for Joint Commissioning and Integration has been in post since February 2018 and the focus has been across a number of areas as outlined below:

- Responsibility for the Troubled Families recovery plan, ensuring that difficulties with data can be addressed, and that this intelligence is used to inform future commissioning activity and that our maturity model is monitored effectively and informs strategic planning.
- Strengthening the relationship with the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) Children's Mental Health Commissioners which has included contributing to Somerset's Transformation Plan for Children and Young People's Mental Health and Wellbeing 2015–2020; developing greater coherence between Public Health, CCG and Children's Commissioning activity; networking with over 50 level 2 mental health providers in Somerset and facilitating their contributions to Somerset Choices; reviewing case studies and understanding the relationship with NHS England commissioners whose provision is necessary for some of our young people.
- Working with District and Borough Councils, Adults' Commissioners, providers, Leaving Care and Children Looked After Teams to explore our offer and improve accommodation and support for 16–25-year-olds. This has included establishing a new 16+ panel to consider the needs and outcomes for our young people and the range of options available at 16+; improvements within the Pathways to Independence commissioned service (P2i); development of a forum for 16+ semi-independent providers to share key learning; contribution to the Adults' Complex Lives Board to ensure their future commission is sympathetic to the needs of Care Leavers who may be eligible for the service as they move into adulthood; putting a framework in place to secure placements for any new Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children.
- Working with existing Youth and Community Groups as well as Community Infrastructure Organisations, offering development advice and supporting their plans to develop a partnership across Somerset, which will continue to offer support to smaller organisations, develop quality and consistency in youth work provision as Somerset County Council withdraws its offer to Youth and Community Groups in line with MTFP proposals.
- Working with Public Health Commissioners to re-commission the Somerset Drug and Alcohol service, ensuring not only that services,

advice and guidance for young people are available to them, but also that services, advice and guidance to adults who are parents include the direct impact of effective parental drug and alcohol treatment on a child's life.

6.5 **Partnership Business Unit**

This year has been spent in preparation for the new Children & Young People's Plan (CYPP) 2019 – 2022. This has involved streamlining reporting mechanisms to ensure all activity is correctly captured and reducing duplication. This work has been carried out collaboratively with partners to align with new strategies and transformation plans – including the launch of Improving Lives and the Somerset Sustainability and Transformation (STP) plan for Health and Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS).

Participation Workers engaged with over 200 children, young people and their families about the issues that matter to them, to include in the new CYPP. Three face-to-face consultation events brought young people and decision makers from the Children's Trust to work collaboratively on the priorities of the plan. The 7000 + responses from the Schools Survey will also influence and direct the new CYPP.

The SEND Participation Team of a worker and 2 Young People's Champions now facilitate a well performing young people's forum, which is at capacity and has engaged well and informed the SEND improvement journey. They facilitated the UnSung Heroes Awards in October with the Somerset Parent Carer Forum, which celebrated the achievements of young people with SEND and all the excellent aspects of SEND work in Somerset. The event was attended by over 130 children, young people, their families and SEND workers.

The In-Care Council has worked well with colleagues in Children's Social Care and the Corporate Parenting Board – notable achievements include the refresh of Somerset's Pledge to Children Looked After. They also supported the excellent work undertaken to produce the Local Offer for Care Leavers. In July they facilitated 2 Annual Achievements Awards which were attended by over 200 Children Looked After, Care Leavers and their carers and friends.

The UK Youth Parliament elections were held in December and, on selection day, 3 new Members of Youth Parliament and their deputies were voted in to campaign on mental health, environmental and child exploitation issues. The young people will use the information they gather in their 2-year tenure to inform and influence service design and delivery in Somerset.

6.6 **Getset**

Over the past 12 months significant work has been undertaken in getset to improve the quality of frontline practice and ensure clear and improved outcomes for those young people and families that getset has worked with. The data dashboard and data set now clearly evidences the increase in demand, output and improved outcomes for children following a focus on consistency of practice and compliance captured in the Early Help Module (EHM).

Service highlights comprise the following achievements:

- 74% of all cases now achieving positive outcomes and decreased need at closure: this is significant progress in evidencing the outcome of the work and interventions we deliver.
- A reduced rereferral rate, sitting consistently around 11% and most of these are as a result of step-downs following a period of statutory assessment and intervention.
- A reduction in cases stepping up to CSC
- An increase in cases stepping down from CSC
- An increasing demand on the level 3 service with open cases remaining between 880–920 children.

Much of the year involved joint working with Public Health Nursing with the proposed move to integrate the teams during 2019. The financial imperative and the LGA's recommendations as highlighted earlier in this report, have now led to a significant reduction in staffing reflecting increased caseload targets and changing levels in demand. The public consultation on the proposal to stop the level 2 service has shown how valued the service has become with both families and partners.

During 2019, the level 3 service will integrate with the edge of care / preventative team as recommended by Peopletoo to offer a more co-ordinated approach. Proposals outlined to improve early help will inform the plans for the level 2 service in the context of wider system improvements.

7. **Support Services**

7.1 **HR&OD**

The HR&OD focus for the last year has been on developing the Workforce Strategy. This has included exploring options for growing our own Social Workers such as expanding our Step-Up programme, signing up to Frontline and working with the University of Gloucester and Yeovil College to offer a Somerset Social Work degree programme. The latter includes a commitment to offering placements, job interviews to those passing the course and incentive payments. Recruitment activity has been consolidated based on evidence collated over the last three years. This includes a more active presence at select Recruitment Fairs, Try Before You Apply opportunities in partnership with Visit Somerset and an enhanced digital presence.

Retention activity has focused on face to face meetings with new staff at intervals throughout their first year. This feedback informs how we tailor our approach to recruitment and our offer to new staff. It also shapes how we provide support across the Service. Face to face meetings with leavers has resulted in colleagues being retained either elsewhere in Children's Services or in Adults Services. We have converted 13 locums into permanent staff in the last 12 months.

Partnership working has been developed through the Think Family Strategy development and Multi Agency Roadshows. The first roadshows looked at whether the multi-agency offer 'Is this Good Enough for My Child' and the second focused on the 'Lead Practitioner Role' with the intention of lead agencies working together to enable true partnership working in the Somerset system.

7.2 **Finance**

The main focus of the Finance Service over the past year has been on supporting a better organisational understanding of the cost base of Children's Services with the aim of rebasing the budget to provide an achievable budget, driving better visibility and clear accountability to operational management levels. This work has included supporting the Financial Imperative work to help services identify and fully cost robust, deliverable savings to ensure the council has a more stable financial footing for this year and future years, working with Peopletoo in the transformational changes required to deliver successful services in the future focussed on outcomes and within budget. The focus has also been to support a new structure for inclusion management and realignment of support services for education (SSE) following the change in Director responsibilities. Strong partnership working has continued to be a priority area with close work alongside the significant partners such as the Somerset Schools Forum and the Clinical Commissioning Group.