

County Council  
– 18 November 2020

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### **Lead Member Children’s Services: Annual Report**

Cabinet Member: Cllr Frances Nicholson, Cabinet (Lead) Member for Children and Families

Division and Local Member: All

Lead Officer: Julian Wooster, Director of Children’s Services

Authors: Claire Winter, Deputy Director Children’s Services  
Helen Price, Assistant Director Commissioning  
Amelia Walker, Assistant Director Education Partnerships and Skills  
Mark Barratt, Interim Strategic Improvement Lead – Inclusion

Contact Details: [cwinter@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:cwinter@somerset.gov.uk), [awalker@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:awalker@somerset.gov.uk),  
[mbarratt@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:mbarratt@somerset.gov.uk), [jwooster@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:jwooster@somerset.gov.uk),  
[hprice@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:hprice@somerset.gov.uk);

|          | <b>SUMMARY</b>  |
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| <b>1</b> | <b>THE STRATEGIC &amp; PROFESSIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILDREN’S SERVICES</b>   |
| 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 strategic multi-agency framework for children’s services in Somerset, is met by ‘Our Plan’ – the Somerset’s Children and Young People’s Plan 2019–2022 <a href="https://www.somerset.gov.uk/how-the-council-works/children-and-young-peoples-plan/">https://www.somerset.gov.uk/how-the-council-works/children-and-young-peoples-plan/</a><br><br>The plan for 2019–2022 was co-produced through a series of consultation and engagement events in 2018 with children, young people, their families, practitioners and decision-makers from the local authority, health, police and the voluntary and community sector. |
| 1.3      | The plan has four priorities to enable our children and young people to be happy, healthy and prepared for adulthood: Supported Families, Healthy Lives, Great Education and Positive Activities. Each priority has a supporting governing body. Accountability and challenge in relation to these priorities is provided by the Partnership Business Group of the Somerset Safeguarding Children Partnership (SSCP) and the Scrutiny for Policies, Children and Families Committee.  |

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| 2   | <p><b>Children’s Social Care</b></p>   |
| 2.1 | <p><b><u>Edge of Care Services</u></b></p> <p>The Family Intervention Service (FIS) was launched in January 2020, a specialist county-wide service developed through the joining of established Team 8 (Edge of care) and getset level 3 (complex family needs) services.</p> <p>Working to the Effective Support for Children and Families in Somerset guidance, <a href="https://sscb.safeguardingsomerset.org.uk/download/2632/">https://sscb.safeguardingsomerset.org.uk/download/2632/</a> FIS operates where complex family needs are present at level 3 (as the case holder) and at level 4 (safeguarding, in support of the allocated Social Worker), with children and young people from birth up to 18 years. This includes holistic assessment, support and interventions with young people who go missing, young carers and young people at risk of homelessness and/or exploitation.</p> <p>There are two FIS teams in each of the four district council areas, a total of eight teams. At end of March 2020, there were 931 CYP (471 families) open at level 3 and 119 CYP (71 families) open at level 4.</p> <p>The service provides flexible support to families by operating between 7am to 10pm, including a duty service for over 10s in crisis after 5pm and at weekends. From January to March 2020, there were 575 duty call outs involving 177 CYP.</p> <p>The service also has a Rapid Response (RR) element that operates between 10pm and 7am, Friday to Monday and is generally an EDT call out service. This service ensures young people and parents/carers experiencing significant stress or dysfunction which can lead to family or placement breakdown are supported to prevent escalation and the young person coming into care.</p> |
| 2.2 | <p><b><u>Youth Offending Service (YOS)</u></b></p> <p>The overall case load of YOS has remained stable over the last year, with 85–90 children actively involved with YOS at any one time.</p> <p>The Somerset reoffending rate remains below the national average, but of more significance we continue to see an increase in serious youth violence which, from local intelligence, is believed to be associated largely with the drugs trade and County Lines type activity. Staff continue their learning around this type of work and are forming strong links with colleagues from agencies, including the Police, to understand this ever changing national and local issue.</p> <p>Four young people were remanded to custody between April 2019 and March 2020. This is an increase of one from the previous year.</p> <p>Key areas for YOS activity going forwards are:</p>  |

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|     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Building upon, and maintaining close links across children’s services including Children’s Social Care and the Family Intervention Service</li> <li>• 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</li> <li>• Ensuring partner contributions, including premises and staffing, are reviewed and are sufficient to reflect current and projected need and demand</li> <li>• Supporting staff and partners through the YOS inspection process, led by HMI Probation, which is likely to take place this financial year.</li> </ul>  |
| 2.3 | <p><b><u>Children Looked After</u></b></p> <p>The Somerset rate per 10k of children looked after remains low compared to other authorities in the South West and our statistical neighbours. Between March 2019 and March 2020, the number of children in care remained relatively stable, (529 in March 2020 compared to 534 in March 2019). Key priorities for the service include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensuring the voice of the child is central to service development and delivery – this has included the launch of the Family Time Service, so children have a dedicated staff team providing positive time with their birth families</li> <li>• Placement sufficiency and stability – A Fostering Service transformation programme is underway to increase in-house fostering provision, use of Family Group Conferences to support placements, and engagement work with residential providers, particularly those within the county of Somerset to develop good quality care provision locally</li> <li>• Achieving permanence – there is a continued drive to achieve permanence for our children at the earliest opportunity, with a focus on avoiding drift and delay. This includes regularly considering whether children in our care can return to a family member.</li> <li>• The quality of direct work with children.</li> </ul> <p>At the end of March 2020, there were 299 Care Leavers aged 18 years and over open to the service and a further 61 17-year-olds where the Leaving Care Service had started working alongside the young person and their social worker in relation to their transition to adulthood. During the year there has been an increase in the number of Care Leavers over the age of 21 who have requested advice and support.</p> <p>There continues to be a drive to ensure Care Leavers are supported to achieve the best outcomes possible.</p> <p>The Service is committed to decreasing the number of Care Leavers who are not</p> |

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|     | <p>in education, employment or training (NEET). During the year the Emotional Health and Wellbeing Service has extended its offer to Care Leavers recognising the impact of emotional health and wellbeing on the NEET figures.</p>   |
| 2.4 | <p><b><u>Adoption</u></b></p> <p>The national Adoption and Special Guardianship Board (ASGLB) reports that for 2019–2020 the number of children across the country moving into and through the adoption process is declining. This is not the case in Somerset. Of the 198 children who left care 42 (21.2%) children left due to an Adoption Order being granted which was an increase of 12 percentage points on the previous year.</p> <p>In accordance with Government’s requirement for local authorities to work in partnership with others, and with voluntary adoption agencies in a regional adoption agency, Somerset County Council transferred its adoption services to Adopt South West (AdoptSW) hosted by Devon County Council (DCC) on 1 October 2018. It should be noted that Somerset County Council retains accountability for these services for Somerset’s children.</p> <p>We have a small number of children who can wait a long time (18 months+) for an adoptive family as we strive to find a suitable family for as long as we think appropriate. These children are often older with complex health and emotional needs. The children are regularly reviewed jointly with AdoptSW to ensure that appropriate plans are in place for them.</p> <p>In 2019–2020 13 children with ‘harder to place’ characteristics were adopted.</p> <p>Some Somerset children’s adoption has been delayed by a lack of Medical Advisor capacity to carry out the child’s adoption medical and to meet the prospective adopters to give them information about the child’s health prospects. Senior managers and AdoptSW continue to work closely with the CCG to resolve this issue.</p> <p>DCC’s Children’s Services received an Inadequate Ofsted judgment in March 2020. Since AdoptSW is hosted by DCC, a regionally agreed external review is considering governance issues for Adopt SW arising from this judgment.</p> <p><b><u>Special Guardianship</u></b></p> <p>The Kinship Team, based in the Council, assesses and supports Special Guardianship arrangements for children. These arrangements are court mandated and provide a permanent home for children away from their birth parents, but often within their wider birth family network.</p> <p>Special Guardianship assessments are increasing year on year – 2016/17 = 35 assessments, 2017/18 = 55 assessments, 2018-2019 = 76 assessments.</p> |

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|     | <p><b><u>Adoption Support Fund</u></b></p> <p>Special Guardians (and, through AdoptSW, adoptive parents) can access funding for placement support such as therapy for the child through the national Adoption Support Fund. 35 Adoption Support Fund applications for special guardians have been approved during this year with a total value of £94,212.54.</p>   |
| 2.5 | <p><b><u>Assessment and Safeguarding</u></b></p> <p>Over the last 12 months the service has remained focused on developing confident social work practice which is relational, and strength based. This has included work to ensure:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Involvement with the right children at the right time;</li> <li>• Proportionate and effective responses and intervention which is the least intrusive necessary to address need and is always in the child's best interests;</li> <li>• Confidence to work with risk (safe uncertainty), shifting conversations to talk about needs not thresholds and interventions that are focused on children's and family's needs;</li> <li>• Children and their families understand what is happening and why and see themselves as part of the solution;</li> <li>• Children are supported to remain within their families and communities wherever possible.</li> </ul> <p>This impact of this work has seen:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A reduction in re-referrals with this holding steady at 19%.</li> <li>• A continued reduction and then predicted plateau of Children in Need (CiN) numbers (just below 900) and a reduction in children subject to a Child Protection Plan to below 300 from a high of 444 in May 2018. These figures reflect the developing understanding of statutory threshold</li> <li>• A reduction in the number of children subject to Public Law Outline meetings and care proceedings.</li> </ul> <p>The Front Door structure has been reconfigured, providing advice, signposting and support for low level issues, quickly directing parents to early help interventions and rapidly escalating any child protection matters to the First Response (social work) team as required. This work has also included: a relocation of social work resource from First Response to the Early Help Hub to support the move to an early help led model, ensuring a focus on prevention and that all Early Help options have been explored prior to escalation to statutory social work services; targeted outreach work with referrers with the lowest conversion rates (where children are assessed as not needing a social worker) and those with lower than expected referral rates, and further promotion of the consultation lines (Early Help and First Response) to support more appropriate understanding of need.</p> |

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|     | <p>The service continues to develop its response to adolescent risk, including exploitation, and seeing parents as partners in safeguarding. A successful bid to Research in Practice was made to strengthen the partnership system response to exploitation.</p> <p>Learning from Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews has been put in place, including pre-birth tracking alongside midwifery and health visiting colleagues for all babies where concerns arise antenatally, and work to improve the quality, consistency and recording of child protection strategy discussions.</p> <p>The key priorities now are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To continue into Phase 2 of the Front Door redesign;</li> <li>• To launch and embed the Family Safeguarding Model successfully. This involves integrating adult workers (domestic abuse, drug and alcohol and mental health) into the social work teams to support families to make positive and lasting changes;</li> <li>• To launch and embed the Wider Safeguarding Teams successfully. These have a focus on exploitation, neglect and working with parents with learning needs, and include the DFE funded Social Workers in Schools pilot.</li> <li>• To ensure social care practitioners understand their role and responsibilities in relation to the SEND improvement programme.</li> <li>• To embed a strength-based approach and improve the quality of planning for children.</li> </ul> |
| 2.6 | <p><b><u>The Quality Assurance Service</u></b></p> <p>The Quality Assurance service has continued to make good progress in all areas of work over the last year. Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) and Child Protection Co-ordinators (CPCs) have been joined by Route 1 Advocacy (R1A) to become the Children’s Advocacy and Independent Reviewing Service (ChAIRS).</p> <p>Closer working with R1A has enabled expansion of advocacy capacity to provide additional Independent Visitors for children in care, and more volunteer advocates for children in child protection (CP) conferences. The use of advocates in CP conferences has increased significantly, allowing the independent voices of children to be heard in these important meetings.</p> <p>As a result of improvements in the service we are seeing much more evidence of the impact of IROs and CPCs in monitoring the progress of children, and providing strength based supportive challenge to social workers and team managers.</p> <p>We have seen significant improvement in planned and responsive Quality Assurance (QA) activity in the last 12 months. Practice Evaluations have been</p>  |

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|     | <p>embedded via whole team days of joint audit activity. Dip sampling by managers is becoming routine practice, and team diagnostics have continued to develop, with increasing numbers of teams being judged as working to a good standard. We are paying increasing attention to the impact of our work in improving children's lives, with regular feedback on QA activity provided to operational teams, and 6 monthly meetings taking place with Learning and Development colleagues to ensure that commissioned training is able to close the loop and support improved practice in those areas identified as needing development.</p> <p>The work of the team will be expanding to support additional QA activity in SEND services and Family Safeguarding over coming months.</p> <p>We have made some good progress on the gathering and analysis of feedback from families, but this remains an area of focus over the next 12 months. Another area of focus will be our programme of Multi-Agency Practice Evaluations (MAPEs), bringing together professionals from all agencies working with a child to evaluate the effectiveness of our interventions in improving the child's outcomes.</p>   |
| 2.7 | <p><b><u>Children with Disabilities</u></b></p> <p>Children and young people who have a disability are entitled by law to an assessment of their needs. In Children's Social Care in Somerset we are committed to ensuring that children and young people with disabilities are seen as children first. We want to ensure that our children and families receive the right support in the right place at the right time. With this in mind the Children with Disabilities Service continues to provide a proportionate, graduated response to disabled children and their families as discussed with Somerset Parent Carer Forum.</p> <p>The Social Work Team provides a service to children and young people whose needs are assessed as requiring a social worker. The Family Intervention workers in our Early Support Team provide a service to children whose needs are assessed as benefiting from this service. The Resource Team comprising the Community Inclusion and Activity Team and the Somerset Supporters Team can provide the assessment and services required at a lower level.</p> <p>The Social Work Team now works with 140 children with social workers, having reduced average caseloads of 15 which means they are better able to provide the support required to these complex families in a more effective way.</p> <p>The Early Support Service works with 190 children and the Resource Team directly with 68 children. However, we also provide activities through grant funding community partners that families can access from our short break calendar which is available on the Local Offer.</p> <p>The Community Inclusion and Activity Team now co-ordinates the provision of</p> |

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|     | <p>advice and information for a statutory SEND assessment about the social care needs of a child not known to Children’s Social Care services.</p> <p>Our three children’s homes which provide overnight short break services to children requiring them, or in the case of Beechtrees both short breaks and full-time accommodation are rated as follows:</p> <p>The Lodge – Good<br/> The Elms – Good<br/> Beech trees – Requires Improvement to be Good</p>  |
| 2.8 | <p><b><u>Listening to the Voice of the Child and Young Person</u></b></p> <p>The progress of work under the Children and Young People’s Plan is enhanced by listening to and understanding the experiences of children and young people in receipt of universal and specialist services.</p> <p>There are many opportunities for children to express their views such as through the Somerset Youth Parliament, the Somerset in Care and Leaving Care Councils, the Unstoppables and the many school councils. The Participation &amp; Engagement team in SCC support the following:</p> <p><b>SSCP Youth Forum</b></p> <p>An SSCP Task and Finish group considered how best to hear and learn from children’s views and experiences. As a result, a proposal for an SSCP Youth Forum was put to the SSCP Partnership Business Group and was approved. The new SSCP Youth Forum will start in Year 2 of the Children and Young People’s Plan, and children and young people will be recruited through networks and partners around the county. This forms part of the overall scrutiny of the SSCP, which includes 15 days of time from an Independent Scrutineer as well as regional activity across the Avon &amp; Somerset Constabulary area.</p> <p><b>Somerset Youth Parliament</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Launched the Somerset Young Persons Fund with resources from the SCC Prevention Fund match funded by #iWill to promote youth social action in local communities; 17 applications received, 11 funded and all £50K spent.</li> <li>• Visited the annual House of Commons debate where Somerset took the lead on the environment debate</li> </ul> <p><b>Somerset In Care Council &amp; Somerset Leaving Care Council (SiCC and SLCC)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Following co-production with the Somerset Care Councils, the arrangements for children to spend time with their families are now called Family Time and the Contact service underwent a redesign to</li> </ul> |



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|     | <p>reflect the values of building strong family support.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Young people from SiCC and SLCC and from in-house leaving care accommodation worked with Children’s Commissioning on a project to help residential staff in P2i (Pathways to Independence) to hear the voices of the young residents more clearly.</li> </ul> <p><b>The UnStoppables</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Produced a film for the Joint Local Area SEND Inspection and presented it when they met the inspectors</li> <li>• Held interviews for Educational Psychologists, Public Health posts and Engagement officer</li> <li>• Worked on the Local Offer with the Somerset Parent Carer Forum</li> <li>• Were hosts at the Short Breaks Family Fun Day</li> </ul>   |
| 3   | <b>Inclusion</b>  |
| 3.1 | <p><b>Joint Ofsted/CQC inspection report into SEND services</b></p> <p>In March Inspectors from OFSTED (Office for Standards in Education) and the CQC (Care Quality Commission) visited Somerset to assess how well our support is working for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities and their families. The report was published in May and it judged how well the local area has worked together to put the 2014 SEND reforms into place which includes services that are available to support children and young people with SEND.</p> <p>The local area comprises Somerset County Council (education, public health, children’s social care, and adult social care), education providers, the NHS Somerset Clinical Commissioning (CCG) and associated health partners.</p> <p>Inspectors identified nine key areas where improvement is required</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We all need to work more closely with children and young people with SEND and their families to understand and learn from their experiences as we develop strategies to improve the area. Inspectors recognised that there are many strengths in this area, but we are not consistent in our practice.</li> <li>• We need to improve leadership capacity across services in Somerset to provide effective support to children with SEND.</li> <li>• We need to continue to strengthen and embed partnership working across Education, the NHS, Public Health and Social Care.</li> <li>• Our pathway for children with autistic spectrum disorder needs substantial development to address the poor service too many families are receiving.</li> <li>• We need to improve the outcomes for all children with SEND, through ensuring effective identification of needs and the right support to make the difference for children.</li> </ul> |

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|     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The quality of professional input for Education, Health and Care Plans needs to be at a consistently high level.</li> <li>• The multi-professional assessments and planning required for Education, Health and Care Plans needs to be carried out more swiftly.</li> <li>• By improving joint commissioning arrangements between Somerset County Council and the NHS, we can improve leaders' abilities to ensure they meet area needs, as well as improving outcomes and achieving cost efficiencies.</li> <li>• We need to extend inclusive practice in schools across the local area and in turn reduce exclusion rates which currently mean too many children and young people are not accessing education.</li> </ul> <p>SCC staff together with the Somerset Clinical Commission Group, other NHS colleagues and School leaders worked extremely hard over the Summer and have developed a Written Statement of Action (WSOA) focused on three main areas of work to address the actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improving joint working between the NHS and Somerset County Council</li> <li>• Supporting Inclusive Schools</li> <li>• Improving the effectiveness of Inclusion Services</li> </ul> <p>Government launched a national review of Special Educational Needs arrangements, announced September 2019, as overall the reforms launched 5 years ago are not having the intended effect, and while it is no excuse, over 50% of local areas inspected are in a similar position to Somerset. The review is expected to be published in early 2021, and the Written Statement of Action will be updated as required.</p> |
| 3.2 | <p><b><u>Education, Health and Care plans</u></b></p> <p>The SEND Statutory team are responsible for co-ordinating statutory Education, Health and Care assessments and maintaining Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP) for children across Somerset.</p> <p>Between 1 September 2019 and 31 August 2020, the Local Authority:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Considered 953 assessment requests</li> <li>• Issued 916 EHC plans</li> <li>• Maintained 3091 plans</li> <li>• Received 1970 Annual Reviews requests and processed 98% of these (this compares with processing 54% 2018-2019)</li> <li>• Held mediation for 26 children and young people</li> <li>• Had 176 Tribunal appeals registered</li> <li>• The 20-week performance during this period was 25%</li> </ul> <p>In order to fulfil the Local Authority's statutory duties, the team has been restructured to create clarity about the duties relating to assessment and those relating to annual reviews. With the support of other services EHCP completion timeliness has significantly improved</p>   |

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|     | <p>It has been recognised through the Written Statement of Action that within the Statutory SEND Team our improvement focus must be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improving the experience of the statutory process for children, young people and their families</li> <li>• Increasing compliance in relation to timeliness</li> <li>• Improving the quality of EHC plans</li> </ul> <p>In order to achieve this, we will appoint new members of the team who will have a key lead role in achieving key improvement targets and will work collaboratively with statutory partners.</p>   |
| 3.3 | <p><b><u>Permanent exclusions</u></b></p> <p>Permanent exclusions for 2019-2020 dropped to 80 but were significantly depressed by Coronavirus and the resulting closure of schools. At the point schools closed, permanent exclusions were on par with 2018-2019, the second year in a row they have not increased.</p> <p>South Somerset (30) saw the most permanent exclusions with persistent disruption (37) being the most common reason.</p> <p>Of the children permanently excluded, 46 had SEND, and 7 of these had an EHCP. 1 CLA was also permanently excluded but this has been successfully appealed against.</p>  |
| 3.4 | <p><b><u>Safeguarding in Education</u></b></p> <p>The Education Safeguarding Service (ESS) continues its development as its focus shifts from statutory processes relating to attendance to improving safeguarding practices in education settings 0–25.</p> <p>The service, with the arrival of its new service manager, has been restructured and now has teams based in Mendip, South Somerset, Taunton Deane &amp; West Somerset, and Sedgemoor.</p> <p><b><u>Elective Home Education (EHE)</u></b></p> <p>EHE was a key focus for the service and 2019-2020 saw 413 children become electively home educated, down from 528 in 2018-2019 and 554 in 2017-2018.</p> <p>The total number of children who were electively home educated at any point during 2019-2020 was 1362. This was a reduction from 1424 in 2018-2019. This reduction counters the national trend of increases of 10%–20% in each of the last 5 years.</p> <p>ESS will shortly be undertaking a survey of parents who have chosen to educate their children so we can understand the reasons for EHE better.</p> |

### **School Attendance Monitoring**

A revised School Attendance Monitoring Protocol has been co-produced with schools for 2020/21. This enables the LA to monitor a range of data on attendance, exclusions, part-time timetables, elective home education and persistent absence.

Where schools trigger a threshold relating to the attendance issues listed above, an informal enquiry letter is sent, so the LA can work with the school to explore any issues and agree any support that might be required. This supportive approach has been welcomed by schools across the county.

### **Safeguarding Practice**

ESS has been continuing to support education setting (0–25) to develop their safeguarding practice. Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) briefings have been held each term with sessions delivered using Microsoft Teams during Coronavirus. These sessions have covered a range of topics and included input from a range of other agencies.

In addition to DSL briefings, local education safeguarding networks are being established across the county. These will bring together DSLs and multi-agency officers to discuss safeguarding issues and good practice. This will not only enable better collection of intelligence which can be used for strategic purposes but create a forum where local DSLs can network and begin to support each other, reducing demand on services with limited resource.

The first of these (Sedgemoor) was delivered in September 2020 and was well-received by local DSL and multi-agency partners.

### 3.5 **Education for Children Looked After**

The Virtual School and Learning Support Team is responsible for promoting the educational achievement of children looked after. The number of children looked after (CLA) within Somerset fluctuates by about 10% but is generally in the region of 500 children between National Curriculum Years -2 and 11.

Following a recent restructure, the team is now a significant service, able to support both schools and CLA. The team is structured much like a school, with Deputy Head Teachers responsible for overseeing CLA and SEND services, and a team of advisory teachers who hold caseloads of both CLA and Schools. In addition, there are learning mentors and tutors within the team, who work directly with our young people in need of additional support.

There have been some significant developments in the Virtual School offer throughout the year as we continue to work towards our key priorities:

- Building an effective team

- Ensuring all young people can access their education successfully
- Supporting schools to be more inclusive

Within these three key priorities, are the actions identified in the Corporate Parenting Board Action Plan, under section five: To promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes for children and young people.

The first of the actions identified in the Corporate Parenting Board (CPB) action plan was around ongoing improvement of monitoring systems for our children looked after. This aspect of our work covers multiple outcomes including monitoring attendance, attainment, and progress for the young people we work with. Attainment has been difficult to measure this year with the limitations of the current school and exam situations; however, a manual data trawl has evidenced improvement in end of Key Stage attainment from the previous academic year.

An Attendance App has been developed which enables us to track the attendance of CLA daily. Advisory Teachers are sent a notification as soon as a young person is marked as 'Excluded' or 'Unauthorised Absence', allowing us to respond quickly when a child or young person is not at school.

Personal Education Plan (PEP) completion rates have increased, meaning that more young people are having PEPs regularly. We have done significant work with the schools and designated teachers on the quality of targets within the PEP and have also improved the allocation of PP+ funding to ensure we can see the impact and the cost of different interventions. A Quality Assurance framework is in development for PEPs, and we aim to have an Electronic PEP ready to launch in January.

A governing body has been established and meets regularly to ensure accountability and support for the Virtual Head and members of the team in line with the second action identified on the CPB plan.

A third identified action was around the reduction of exclusions for CLA. Although our data shows a significant reduction, it is difficult to assess the extent that Covid has impacted on that figure. Training on alternatives to exclusion has been postponed, although we continue to work tirelessly on individual circumstances surrounding exclusion and supporting schools where exclusions of CLA take place.

The action relating to PEP surgeries is closely linked to our aim to develop the ability of schools to be more inclusive. From a CLA perspective, we have engaged with schools through the Designated Teacher Networks, and PEP surgeries. We have also attempted to launch a Previously Looked After (PLAC) Conference. Much of our training has been amended to be delivered virtually since March, and we continue to evaluate the impact and feedback from these sessions.

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|     | <p>Regarding the development of our Post-16 processes, the Advisory Teachers now retain the children on their caseloads until they leave education. Previously their remit would finish at the end of Year 11, meaning another transition for the young people. We have a post-16 team who are on hand to support with young people in Years 12 and 13. They also work with any NEET young people, or those who are at risk of becoming NEET at an earlier stage. This is helping to reduce the number of CLA currently missing education. We have four tutors within the service that are qualified teachers. They work with individual young people who are struggling to access a school offer, and aim to re-engage them in education, while ensuring they do not fall any further behind. Post-16 remains a key area of development for us into the coming year.</p> <p>When assigning Teaching and Learning Responsibilities (TLRs) for the advisory teachers within the team, the other aspects within the Corporate Parenting Board Action plan have been considered. An example of this is that we now have an advisory teacher with the lead responsibility for Pupil Voice, and another for the development of our extra-curricular activities, to include our close working relationships with Somerset Outdoor Learning. We have also identified joint leads for Social, Emotional and Mental Health, who have a key role in reducing exclusions and supporting schools with inclusive practice.</p> <p>In working towards these objectives, we have delivered training and many opportunities for staff members to work together. We have demonstrated professional generosity and worked determinedly to develop partnership working across local authority and wider teams. It has been an extremely busy and challenging year for the Virtual School as we try and support the most vulnerable children through such unusual times. The team has been heartened by positive feedback about the changes taking place, and the improvements to the service which are being recognised by colleagues.</p> |
| 3.6 | <p><b>SEND Advisory Services</b></p> <p>The strategic direction of the SEND Advisory Services is to provide:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased focused support for CYP with the highest SEND needs</li> <li>• Re-integration support for CYP with the highest SEND needs</li> <li>• Increased inclusive practice with maintained mainstream colleagues</li> <li>• Aligned and streamlined services, for example therapies, ASC support</li> </ul> <p><b><u>Autism and Communication Team (A&amp;C)</u></b></p> <p>The A&amp;C Team has seen a consistent rise in the number of requests for involvement in new cases via early help assessments (EHA) over the past 7 years. From Sep 2012 the EHA referrals have increased year on year from 180 to 360+. The advisory teachers continue to provide support for children and young people with or without an EHCP, and with or without a diagnosis of autism, speech, language, and communication needs. To support schools further, capacity for relevant EHAs, the A&amp;C Service was successful at interview in July 2019 for Autism Education Trust (AET) training. Somerset holds the</p>   |

licence for AET training for early years, schools age and post-16. Delivery was introduced in September 2019 to support schools and all school staff. For schools age, the advisory teachers have so far trained to date just over 3000 staff and half of schools. This is a 3-year programme. Early years SENCOs are delivering the early years programme and the A&C team the post-16 programme. All are having a good impact and QA and evaluations are measuring this. AET is supporting with confidence building of being able to meet the needs of pupils at school and who have a diagnosis of autism, awaiting diagnosis or who have social communication needs.

Currently the team has 4.6 full time equivalent (fte) advisory teachers and a full-time team leader who is lead for the advisory teacher's team, Children's Autism Outreach Team (CAOT) Team, North Somerset Enhanced Provision higher level teaching assistants and operational manager for ASC bases in Somerset.

A primary focus for the team this year is to move towards a model of service delivery that is needs led, based upon available data and local intelligence.

### **Children's Autism Outreach Team (CAOT)**

CAOT has seen a consistent rise in the number of requests for involvement in new cases via EHAs over the past 3 years the number has increased from 200 to 280 +. CAOT team moved to be part of the SEND Advisory Services in April 2019.

CAOT works with children and young people 0–13 with a diagnosis of autism or who are awaiting diagnosis and with or without an EHCP and their families in the home and educational settings children and young people. CAOT provides home visits to help parents/carers with strategies and new skills, and activities including clubs that would otherwise be inaccessible for many families. CAOT for children on roll in a school require an EHA to be completed, where this support is not part of an EHCP.

Currently the team has 3.7fte, of whom 1 is a senior children's autism outreach worker and 4 are CAOT workers.

### **Sensory, Physical and Occupational Therapy Service (SPOT)**

The SPOT service merged under one operational manager in April 2019 to improve the support for children and young people within the SEND Advisory Services in line with the SEND Code of Practice.

In June 2020, the service was restructured and now has two deputies overseeing the sensory teams (Hearing support team and Vision support team) and the physical teams (Physical Impairment and Medical Support team and the Occupational Therapy team).

A primary focus for the SPOT service overall this year is more integrated support for CYP, both across the SPOT teams and with health provider colleagues.

### **Hearing Support Team (HST)**

During 2019-2020 the HST supported 319 children and young people with a hearing loss that would affect their ability to participate in an educational setting. The team is aligned to the National Sensory Impairment Partnership (NatSIP) recommended support pathways that identify support for children and young people according to their level of need: out of the 319 children and young people 11% have high needs, 27% have medium needs, and 62% have low needs. Additional support is offered to children and young people moving to new educational settings. In 2019-2020 the team supported 54 such children and young people.

CYP reported 68% of the support provided by the HST has been very successful and met their needs.

### **Vision Support Team (VST)**

During 2019-2020 The VST supported 236 CYP with visual impairment that affects their ability to participate successfully in an educational setting. The team is also aligned to the NatSIP recommended support pathways. Out of the 236 CYP 6% have high needs, 17% have medium needs, 45% have low needs and 21% supported in special schools. Additional support is offered to CYP moving to new educational settings. In 2019-2020 the team supported 48 such CYP. 50

CYP reported 88% of the support provided by the VST has been very successful and met their needs.

### **Physical Impairment and Medical Support (PIMS) Team**

During 2019-2020 the PIMS team supported 316 CYP with physical disabilities or medical conditions that affect their ability to participate safely in an educational setting. The team supported 36 CYP with medium needs and 257 CYP with Low needs. 35% of the CYP have an EHCP.

Special Educational Needs Assistive Technology Advisory Service (SENATAS) is part of the PIMS team. The service provides high end technology to support access to curriculum and communication for CYP. During 2019-2020 SENATAS supported 172 CYP: 35 high needs, 53 medium needs, 94 low needs. 65% of the CYP have Education Health Care Plans. 25% of all PIMS involvement with CYP was to co-ordinate a smooth transition to new educational settings.

CYP reported 97% of the support provided by the PIMS has been very successful and met their needs.

### **Occupational Therapy Team (OT)**

During 2019-2020 the OT team supported 314 CYP with difficulties to perform daily occupations in their home, plus educational and respite settings. The team supported 205 CYP with high needs and 119 CYP with medium needs. 65% of the CYP have an EHCP.



CYP reported 97% of the support provided by the OT has been very successful and met their needs.

### **Educational Psychology Service (EPS)**

Educational Psychologists deliver a wide range of services to support inclusion in Somerset schools. All schools have a link educational psychologist and community pyramid meetings provide an opportunity for all schools to meet with educational psychologists and organise bespoke support. The service regularly offers training for staff on a range of topics, support to parents, psychological supervision, advice, guidance and signposting. Educational psychologists work directly with children and young people of all ages to support the accurate identification of needs and support school staff to provide appropriately.

The service has a fundamental role in the statutory EHC needs assessment process and provides psychological advice for all young people going through assessment. From April 2019 to March 2020 only 30% of the psychological advice produced by the service was within statutory timeframes. Measures have been taken to address these issues including the use of temporary staff to address the backlog, a new recruitment strategy, and a sufficient service budget to ensure the resources available to deliver timely educational psychological.

As a result, by September 2020 the service has successfully eliminated the backlog of psychological advice and, with the exception of complex situations, advice completed within statutory timeframes.

Compliance with statutory timelines remains a key focus for the service.

Another key focus for the team this year is to move towards a model of support to providers that is needs led, based upon available data and local intelligence.

### **Early Years SENCo team**

There are 7.8 F/T equivalent advisory teachers working as early years area SENCos, a nationally recognised role within the SEND Code of Practice. The service provides advice for early years (EY) settings about early identification and support for young children with special educational needs and disabilities. Currently, the service is involved with supporting 550 children across Somerset.

Through training and local workshops, we provide on-going professional development for SENCos in EY settings. Our training has been adapted in the current climate to use a predominantly virtually format which has been received positively by EY practitioners.

Alongside educational psychologist colleagues, the EY area SENCos oversee the MAISEY (multi-agency identification and support in the early years) process which was recognised as strength in the Local Area SEND Inspection.

The EY area SENCOs led 194 school entry planning (SEP) meetings for children with high needs in Summer term 2020 to support these children's successful entry to school. Previous evaluations of the SEP process have shown that parents and schools have found this to be supportive with over 80% of agreed outcomes being achieved by almost all children.

Our work is increasingly linked with the EHC assessment process as higher numbers of requests to assess preschool children are received each year. We contribute to outcomes meetings as part of the statutory assessment process and attend the panel meetings led by the statutory SEND service.

In addition, we have strong links to the Virtual School as we are designated teachers for preschool children looked after.

### **Portage Team**

Portage is a home visiting service for children aged 0–5 with significant and complex SEND. During the academic year 2019-2020 a team of 12 home visitors (7fte) supported 31 children. 100% of children made progress as a result of the intervention and 75% met or exceeded the identified outcomes on their portage plans.

The portage service is also developing a group 'stay and play' provision to offer support to families who are waiting for home visiting interventions.

The portage team increased their support to vulnerable families in response to the Covid-19 restrictions. A RAG rating exercise identified the most vulnerable families so support could be co-ordinated and targeted appropriately. During the summer term, the portage service was in contact with 70 families providing a variety of personalised virtual support.

Service user feedback for the portage service is always outstanding. All parents who responded to the survey identified that their child had benefited from the home visiting intervention or from attending the stay and play groups. All were 'satisfied' with the service they received with 97% suggesting they were 'very satisfied'.

### **The Virtual School Learning Support Team (VSLST)**

The work of the Virtual School element of this service is largely covered in the previous section - the Education of Children Looked After, however the Learning Support aspect is better defined within the context of the other Inclusion Services.

The Learning Support Team is led by one of the deputies of the VSLST (currently delivered by a job share). They are supported by three Lead Advisory Teachers, and a further three Advisory Teachers. Each member of this 'sub-team' holds a caseload of schools, as well as their caseload of CLA.

The role of this team is to support schools in offering inclusive provision to all learners, including those identified as SEND Support, or with an EHCP. They do

this on several levels:

- Strategic – schools are invited to request a Strategic SEND Inclusion Discussion (SSID). At this meeting, the Head and the special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCo) will reflect on their inclusive practice, and action points will be agreed with a set date for review. This is a new development this year, and currently over 150 schools have requested such a meeting. In addition, schools may be flagged to the service via School Improvement, Statutory SEND team, or self-referral, if additional support is required.
- School/SENCo Support, Capacity Building – A range of training is offered to schools and SENCo. This is part of the core offer, and may be delivered via staff meetings, conferences, or training events with multiple schools. New SENCos are also offered support via SENCo Induction. The team also runs the SEN Award as a Masters level qualification on behalf of Plymouth University. The Team are a key partner in the delivery of SEND Networks with Special Schools. They also work closely with the services described formerly in this section to facilitate peer to peer support, and problem solving.
- Individual Level – There are several members of the team who are qualified to deliver APC recognised assessments. School may request these for individual young people who they suspect may be experiencing barriers to learning related to specific learning difficulties. More general cognition and learning assessments may also be requested. Due to the increase in our strategic and school support work, the delivery of these has reduced this year.

As with many other services, our delivery has been significantly impacted by Covid-19, with most of the training now delivered virtually. Practitioners continue to visit schools for face-to-face meetings wherever possible. Recently approximately 100 colleagues accessed our SENCo and Governor conference, and positive feedback was received on both content and delivery.

### **Park Road Support Centre (PRSC)**

Park Road Support Centre (PRSC) Autistic Spectrum Condition (ASC) Resource Base, is currently a SCC managed specialist provision located in Frome which supports up to 12 pupils with ASC and Education, Health & Care Plans. The base is for pupils aged 11 to 16, whose needs are not be able to be met in mainstream school provision.

The SEND thematic review in 2015/16 recommended that all ASC bases should be under school management, to enable more effective integration of children into a range of school activities. With the exception of Park Road all have been successfully addressed. Negotiations have taken place with local schools in relation to Park Road, however none have been successful, until now. With the support of the DfE and the Regional Schools Commissioner and agreement with

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|   | <p>the Midsomer Norton Schools Partnership (Trust) (MNSP), a transfer to the multi-academy trust is planned in the New Year. MNSP has in principle, committed to a two-phase project in collaboration with the Local Authority to develop and manage the PRSC ASC base. This will clarify the formal status of the PRSC ASC base as part of a school and ensure the PRSC ASC base becomes equitable with the other ASC bases in Somerset. The plans will enhance the provision available to pupils with ASC in the Mendip area and will meet the SCC statutory duty to provide sufficient local specialist places with mainstream opportunities for pupils who have ASC.</p>  |
| 4 | <p><b>Education – Early Years</b></p> <p><b><u>Sustainability of Childcare provision</u></b><br/> Several settings have opened or closed since lockdown: six group settings closed although two had sister settings which the children went to and two were replaced by school-run settings. Three new group childcare settings have opened, resulting in a net gain of one setting. 26 childminders closed for good during lockdown although 12 new childminder businesses opened, resulting in a net loss of 14 childminders.</p> <p><b><u>Quality of Childcare Provision Somerset</u></b><br/> % Good = 77%<br/> % Outstanding = 19%</p> <p><b><u>Early Years Communities (EYC)</u></b><br/> The EYC delivery of CPD has been dormant during Covid-19 however a recent leads meeting took place with good levels of attendance. Link workers are supporting the EY leads to start to plan future CPD events.</p> <p>Area SENCoS will be delivering tier 1 autism training across the communities. Discussions are being held on delivering emotion coaching sessions across the communities.</p> <p><b><u>Support for providers during Covid-19</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provided link workers for each EYC and emergency PPE kits to all providers open in the summer term</li> <li>• 100% of entitlement funding was paid at the start of the summer funding period (with no adjustment process) for all eligible children whether they were attending a setting or not.</li> <li>• A financial support grant was made to all providers that remained open to children of key workers and vulnerable children. £500 per child was granted in April and £300 per child (capped at £6K) in May.</li> <li>• A hardship grant was made available for any providers that experienced financial hardship (e.g. were unable to pay rent or salaries) subject to a successful application process. The hardship grant is in place until the end of this year.</li> </ul> |

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|   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A one-off grant payment was made to providers that opened or re-opened from 1 June of £2,000 for group settings and £750 for childminders.</li> <li>• Autumn term variance funding is by application.</li> </ul>  |
| 5 | <p><b>West Somerset Opportunity Area</b></p>   |
|   | <p>West Somerset was the lowest ranking district in the Social Mobility Index (January 2016), a measure that compares the chances that a child from a disadvantaged background will do well at school and get a good job. There are signs that West Somerset is starting to narrow the gap within the next generation with the achievement of all pupils and of disadvantaged pupils at the end of key stage 4 now in line with the national average, but still too few young people then progress to higher education and good careers. We have seen significant improvements already in early years with the 2019 data showing we have exceeded our target with 73% of children achieving good levels of development at the end of early years. 2019 data also supports good progress against the phonics target where we are at 83% and the target is 85%. More work has to be undertaken to close the attainment gap as it remains a challenge, the 2019 data shows the gap as: 41% disadvantaged against 57% all children (16%) compared with the 2017 gap: 36% disadvantaged against 50% all children (14%).</p> <p>Year 4 priorities are currently being determined and a programme of work is being designed to embed the progress to date and ensure a legacy of sustained and sustainable change.</p> <p>Year 4 will also include a programme of twinning activity with districts with a similar socio-economic profile to West Somerset. The twinning area are Mendip, and Weymouth and Portland. Lessons learned from the success of various aspects of the Priority 1 work in West Somerset will be applied to these regions.</p> <p>The programme was due to close at the end of August 2020, but with Covid-19 the programme was suspended before being reinstated till the end of March 2021. In July 2020 additional funding £980,000 was secured to see the programme through to the end of the Academic year – August 2021. The programme has been reworked in the context of Covid-19 and focused more funds within the community as well as improving education standards.</p> <p>Partners from across West Somerset supported all Somerset schools with the new outdoor curriculum enabling children to continue their studies outside when they returned from lockdown, ensuring social distancing measures and Covid-19 management strategies are in place.</p> <p>Our partners, led by SSE Outdoors, included SASP, SCC Public Health, Education Psychology Service, Exmoor National Park Authority, Avon Wildlife Trust,</p> |

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|     | <p>Carymoor Environmental Education Centre, Blackrock Outdoors, Outpost, LIFEbeat, Channel Training, and the Youth Sports Trust.</p> <p>Our community work including working with Fareshare and Home Start West Somerset provided learning for the rest of the county during lockdown.</p> <p>In future a key part of the agenda be to ensure that improvements can be sustained beyond the OA funding period and partnership board members are committed to do this. There is a shared vision for strong partnership working across the area between schools and the voluntary sector together with education and business. Equally, the need to ensure that the voice of young people is developed and considered in planning of services for the area is key to that vision.</p>  |
| 6   | <p><b>Commissioning &amp; Performance</b></p>  |
| 6.1 | <p><b><u>Early Help</u></b></p> <p>Early Help Fund has been distributed to a range of organisations delivering across Somerset. Not all services have been able to start due to social distancing rules and organisational pressures due to the pandemic.</p> <p>Young Carers Fund has been partially allocated, and will be opened for further bids, looking for more innovative solutions to reach a wider group of young carers.</p> <p>A review of graduated response guidance has taken place with the safeguarding partnership and all documents were approved as fit for purpose</p> <p>The early help strategy for 2021 is being co-produced with partners in the Early Help Board and has recently taken views and ideas from the Youth Parliament. An online event will be held in November with stakeholders to develop the final draft strategy for the board in December.</p> <p>Electronic early help assessment technology has been purchased and is being implemented.</p> |
| 6.2 | <p><b><u>Sufficiency/placements</u></b></p> <p>Nationally and locally securing enough, good quality homes for children and young people looked after or who are care leavers remains challenging. National examination has found 11 private companies own just under a quarter of all residential children’s homes, acquisitions and sales of Independent Fostering Agencies have realised profits for private equity investors and have left a high debt burden. Competition has not reduced prices. This context coupled with more young people with complex needs, has meant that increased costs with fewer available placements is evident. The delayed care review led by the DfE is awaited.</p>  |

There is an increase in the number of residential children's homes placements over a 4 year period from 55 to 66 placements. This equates to an increase in spend by £1.2 million from 17/18 to 18/19, £1.8 million from 18/19 to 19/20 and £2.3 million from 19/20 to the current year until the end of September 2020.

Some young people are presenting with complex multiple needs. A number of these children and young people are known to the full range of teams and agencies and present multiple times at multiple services across Somerset. These young people tend to be older (over 11) and are referred and supported through social care or mental health services or a combination of both.

In Somerset work is underway to disrupt the children's placements market and increase the availability of good quality children's homes and complex fostering homes for Somerset children and young people. Commissioners are working with market providers to offer a range of options for children and young people. They are seeking to ensure there is a diverse offer that can be personalised and will deliver both short and long-term outcomes for children in preparation for adulthood.

Over the past year commissioners have taken time to understand and talk to providers about a different, more innovative way of working. Commissioners are having ongoing dialogue with placement providers to reflect the need for flexibility, more manageable costs and the need to encourage the growth of smaller and medium sized providers. This approach allows for deeper partnerships with providers and shared risk-taking regarding occupancy and stability.

Breakdown of current externally provided placements as at end of September 2020:

|                                |   |     |
|--------------------------------|---|-----|
| ○ External foster placements   | = | 152 |
| ○ Residential children's home  | = | 55  |
| ○ Semi-independent living      | = | 26  |
| ○ Parent and child fostering   | = | 11  |
| ○ Educ/Boarding                | = | 5   |
| ○ Parent and child residential | = | 1   |

In response to the Covid-19 pandemic a web page for providers was set up to provide the latest advice and guidance and regular calls were put in place to ensure issues were raised and discussed promptly.

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

Some children and their families require places in independent schools and colleges when local maintained, maintained special schools and colleges cannot meet their needs. All children and young people placed in independent provision have an EHCP which is reviewed annually.

Currently they are placed across 43 education providers. All providers are

registered with the DfE and are inspected by Ofsted. Contractual terms and conditions are set out in the National Schools and College contract.

Children and young people attending schools and specialist post-16 provision at September 2020:

- Pre 16 (school) = 159
- Post 16 (school) = 8
- Post 16 (College) = 45
- Total = 212

Most children and young people remain in the setting for at least one academic year and around 60% remain for at least 3 years. On average fewer than 10 will move out of independent provision in an academic year. The number of placements remains at the same level as 2019-2020. Of these placements in the pre-16 age range 101 are for children with social, emotional and mental health needs (SEMH) and 53 are for autism.

These schools and colleges are inspected by Ofsted and where residential post-16 have joint inspections from Ofsted and CQC.

Category Number of Providers Number of CYP in setting

| Category                          | Number of Providers | Number of CYP in setting |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|
| Outstanding                       | 3                   | 28                       |
| Good                              | 31                  | 150                      |
| Requires Improvement              | 5                   | 11                       |
| Inadequate                        | 3                   | 15                       |
| Not yet inspected (new Provision) | 1                   | 8                        |
|                                   | 43                  | 212                      |

There is a robust QA process in place. Providers rated good or outstanding receive an annual QA review and for those rated requires improvement or inadequate monthly quality improvement meetings (QIM) are arranged to monitor progress against post-Ofsted action plans. The QIM process is led by Commissioning and includes professionals from the SEND, Safeguarding, Education Psychology and where appropriate Adult services.

Attendance monitoring is an area that has been improved over the last six months with a new system in place that provides real time attendance data available to all professionals working with children placed in independent settings.

6.4

**Joint Commissioning and Integration**

Following the joint CQC and OFSTED inspection of SEND services work has



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|     | <p>progressed to resolve the weaknesses identified in joint commissioning arrangements with the NHS clinical commissioning group.</p> <p>More robust SEND and children’s executive joint commissioning arrangements are in place and these have commissioned the Institute of Public Care (IPC) (part of Oxford Brooks University) to undertake a thorough review of joint commissioning arrangements for SEND. Already underway, this work will result in a roadmap towards better joint commissioning for the council and the CCG, also support with implementation. This work is aligned with wider work (also being undertaken by IPC) towards the Somerset Integrated Care System. Both these pieces of work have been funded by NHS England.</p> <p>An increase in Somerset CCG contributions to funding of individual placements this year (both care and education) is observed and several joint funding and tentative joint commissioning opportunities have been identified.</p>  |
| 6.5 | <p><b><u>Partnership Business Unit</u></b></p> <p>The Children &amp; Young People’s Plan (CYPP) 2019–2022 has been incorporated into the Somerset Safeguarding Children Partnership (SSCP) new arrangements, which took effect on 29 September 2019. Reporting against both safeguarding and CYPP priorities has continued on a monthly basis.</p> <p>The SSCP Business Unit, hosted by Somerset County Council, has supported the work of the safeguarding partnership, which is now a tri-partite responsibility across Somerset County Council, Avon &amp; Somerset Constabulary and the Somerset Clinical Commissioning Group. The four key priorities are early help, multi-agency safeguarding, neglect, and child exploitation, all of which are underpinned by the priorities identified in the CYPP. The primary SSCP subgroups are chaired by one of each of the statutory safeguarding partners to promote an equitable partnership</p> <p>Proactive work has been undertaken across the partnership to address neglect and update the neglect toolkit, to restate the importance of pre-birth planning, and to tackle child exploitation through a successful bid to Research in Practice.</p> |
| 7.  | <p><b><u>Support Services</u></b></p>  |
| 7.1 | <p><b><u>Human Resources and Organisational Development (HR&amp;OD)</u></b></p> <p>The HR&amp;OD focus this year has been on the recruitment to and retention and development of, our existing workforce (including our external workforce via our partnerships). We have also supported a range of key projects. In terms of recruitment, the number of employees within the service has increased from 1110 to 1147 (between Aug 2019 and June 2020) with 144 new starters being recruited, including 5 locums who converted to permanent staff. We have developed a new corporate SCC Careers site which is now live, as well as increasing our social media followers to around 11,000 across our platforms. It has continued to be a challenge to recruit qualified social workers however we</p>   |

have attended physical and virtual recruitment events and have successfully recruited 26 (this includes newly qualified staff). The learning and development team has continued to expand our grow our own social workers programme. We have supported more students on more placements than ever before (a total of 53 this year), via Step-Up, Frontline, our University of Gloucester/Yeovil College initiative, social work apprenticeships etc. Each programme has been flexible during the last few months to ensure that students will still qualify on time despite difficulties arising from the pandemic. To deliver this, a programme of training to ensure the service has sufficient levels of practice educators and supervisors to support the levels of student placements has been successfully managed. This medium and long term planning and work will enable us to grow more of our own social workers rather than the historical heavy reliance on having to recruit many from other areas. This will continue next year as the second intake of social work apprentices is underway, as are further intakes of the University of Gloucester/Yeovil College and Frontline programmes. We have the largest number of degree apprenticeships in the South West (and one of the largest in the country) and by early next year anticipate that we will have at least 60 people employed by or attached to Somerset County Council studying for their social work degree.

The retention of our workforce has improved over recent months. Across the service our turnover rate in August 2019 was 24.14% and by July 2020 this was down to just 10.90%. This figure will have been impacted by Covid-19 this year however it is hoped that this increased stability will have a positive impact on the young people and their families who we are involved with as well as the staff themselves. We continue to offer talk-before-you-walk and exit interviews to all potential leavers and leavers to gain feedback on where we could improve.

We continue to support our staff as well as staff in the partner organisations who we work alongside. The broader training offer to colleagues across Children's Services has been adapted due to the pandemic and the learning and development team have collaborated with training providers to ensure that key training continues, albeit delivered in a different way. Partnership working has continued via our Multi Agency Roadshows. The intention of these is to facilitate and enable lead agencies to work together to enable true partnership working across the Somerset system. Topics this year have covered our Think Family Approach and Needs not Thresholds. Again, this will continue with virtual sessions on Family Safeguarding planned for November. On average around 80 to 100 colleagues from across Somerset join these events from agencies such as nurseries, schools, SCC, NHS, Police, Public Health, One Team etc. To promote our work to support our BME employees, a new staff network has been established and Chris Squire has carried out and published an interview with Di Hutchins, Service Manager in Children Looked After, on her experiences as a black woman growing up and working in Somerset.

Our presence and expertise has also been valued across a range of key initiatives for Childrens Services including workforce impacts and support for the new Family Safeguarding Model, Family Drug and Alcohol Courts, the SEND written

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|     | <p>statement of action in response to the recent Ofsted inspection (where HR are joint leading with the CCG on Improvement Priority 2 around leadership across the Somerset system) and the transformation programme. There is a large amount of ongoing change and support required with these key pieces of work in addition to our Covid-19 response. HR Advisory, in particular, have supported this via the introduction of bi-weekly virtual meetings between the service and our union colleagues which has maintained a very regular and positive conversation across all areas and has been well received.</p>  |
| 7.2 | <p><b>Finance</b></p> <p>The 2019-2020 budgets for Children’s Services were rebased in April 2019, providing an achievable budget and clear accountability to operational management levels at the current level of need. The finance team has worked closely with budget holders in improving financial management information, monitoring, forecasting and reporting, including</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• bringing service activity and performance data alongside financial data</li> <li>• improving financial modelling with better visibility of activity assumptions and cost</li> <li>• ensuring any mitigating actions for potential pressures are clearly defined and regularly monitored</li> <li>• regularly monitoring and reporting on the achievement of transformational changes with a focus on outcomes within an agreed financial envelope</li> </ul> <p>As a result, the organisation has a better understanding of the cost base of Children’s Services.</p> <p>The focus has also been on providing financial advice and expertise in a range of key business cases, including the Family Safeguarding Model and the restructure of the SEND statutory team, to ensure the business case is affordable and achieves value for money.</p> <p>The finance team continues to work with the service and partners to develop stronger partnership working, including building relationships with finance colleagues in partner organisations. More recently, finance has been engaged with better joint commissioning work between the council and the CCG and through engagement with the written statement of action.</p> <p>Alongside the considerable amount of service change and development that requires financial engagement, guidance and support, the finance team continues to respond to Covid-19 by working with the services to understand and quantify the financial pressures as a result of Covid-19, secure government funding and forecast the short and medium term impact.</p> <p>So far, in 2020/21 all additional Covid-19 costs that have been identified have been funded by additional government Covid-19 grant, including additional costs in children’s social care, commissioning, early years, maintained schools,</p> |

home to school transport, SEND transport and inclusion.

We have also submitted a claim against the government's Income Compensation Scheme where services such as the outdoor education service, led by Support Services for Education (SSE), have lost significant income as a result of Covid-19.