

Somerset County Council  
Scrutiny Committee  
– 26 January 2022

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## Adult Social Care Performance Update Report

Lead Officer: Mel Lock, Director of Adults Social Care

Author: Niki Shaw and Jon Padfield, Quality & Performance, Adults Social Care

Contact Details: [NXShaw@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:NXShaw@somerset.gov.uk); [JPadfield@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:JPadfield@somerset.gov.uk)

Cabinet Member: Cllr David Huxtable, Cabinet Member for Adults

Division and Local Member: All

### **1. Summary**

- 1.1.** This report provides an update to Scrutiny Committee members on key developments in relation to demand and performance activity across adult social care both nationally and locally, as well as associated risks, mitigation activity and reform plans.
- 1.2.** 2021 has proved another demanding year; one that has further demonstrated the fragility of the broader care sector and required the Local Authority to flex and respond to wider system pressures in a range of creative and/or resource-intensive ways. Workforce capacity challenges, both within and outside of the service, have hampered the delivery and achievement of some ambitions and performance targets, with the pandemic resulting in additional demand and pressure on an already over-stretched and nationally under-resourced set of services and supports. Workforce challenges across the independent adult social care provider market in particular is an ongoing cause for concern for health and care services given our shared reliance on its sufficiency and capacity.
- 1.3.** As the New Year commences, the service will focus its attention on supporting Somerset's Integrated Care System (including the ongoing Covid response), contributing to Unitary-related planning, responding to the government's new plans for adult social care reform<sup>1</sup> in England, reviewing its structure, and preparing for external monitoring and assessment from 2023, as well as continuing to deliver core required activity.

### **2. Issues for consideration / Recommendations**

- 2.1.** For Scrutiny Committee to note the key updates provided in relation to Adult Social Care demand and performance, and to consider whether it wishes to make any recommendations arising from the report and wider discussion.

### **3. Background**

- 3.1.** On 29/11/2021, ADASS (The Association of Directors of Adults Social Services) published a further [survey report](#), indicating that, for most areas of care, the national trends previously evidenced within their July 2021 [Spring Survey](#) and September 2021 [Rapid Survey](#) had not only continued, but had escalated.
- 3.2.** The survey evidenced that despite more care at home being delivered across the

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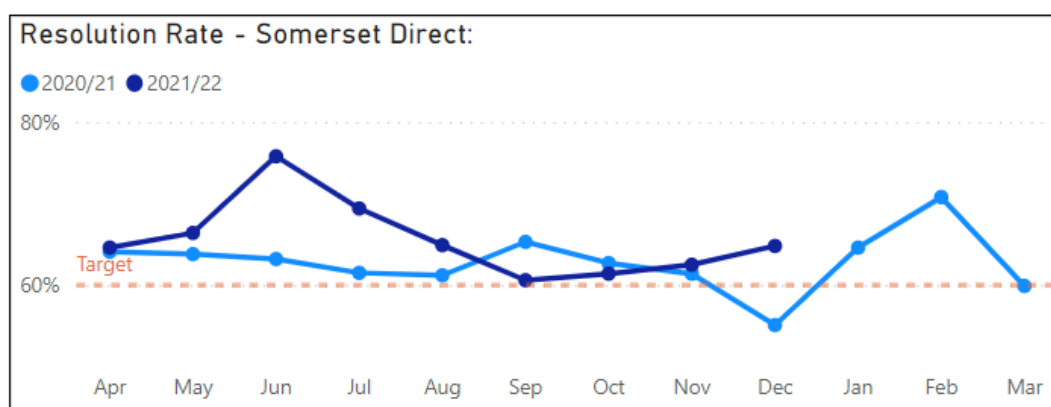
<sup>1</sup> [Adult social care charging reform: further details - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/adult-social-care-charging-reform-further-details)

country, it was failing to keep pace with increasing demand and complexity of need. More people were waiting for assessments, care and support, or reviews, and – as a result of the unavailability of care and support due to workforce recruitment and retention issues – some people were only able to be offered care options that would not have been what they might have ordinarily chosen or need. Concerns about staffing levels, business closures and care package ‘handbacks’ were also evidenced to be much more profound.

This national picture mirrors the experience and evidence within Somerset, as outlined in the key performance messages for Adult Social Care below:

### 3.3. Demand for care and support in Somerset:

- Demand for care and support has risen sharply since the start of the pandemic. In 2019, Somerset Direct (the Council’s ‘front door’) handled 53,379 adult social care related enquiries; this figure rose to 64,413 in 2020 and has again remained well above pre-pandemic levels this year with a total of 70,139 contacts/calls received between 1<sup>st</sup> January and 31<sup>st</sup> December 2021. Despite this, the proportion of calls resolved by Somerset Direct at ‘first point of contact’ has consistently been well above target every month of 2021/22 ytd (year to date). This supports our ongoing objective for an effective front door that helps people find solutions to their problems and demonstrates its impact in terms of the delivery of good outcomes and diversions from formal/statutory care services:



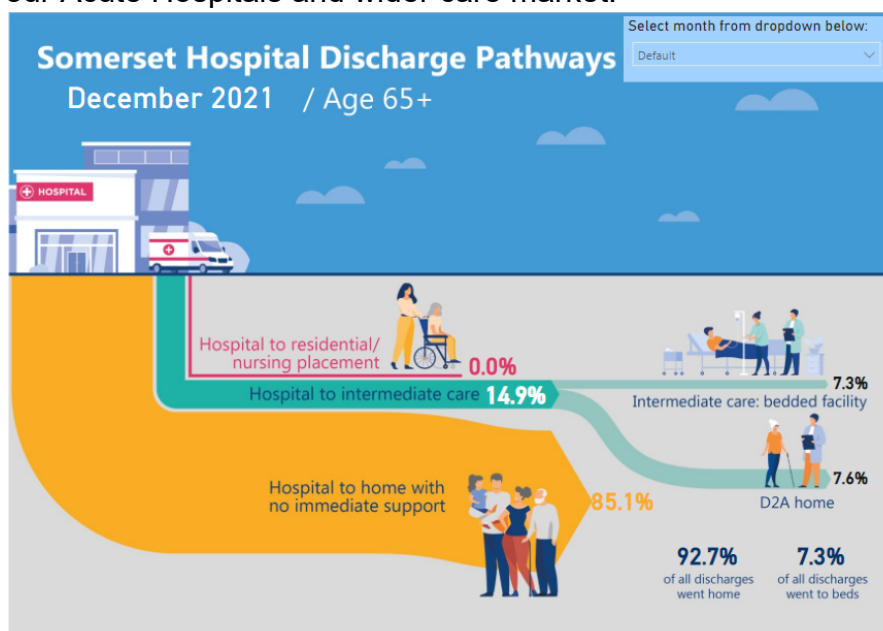
- High demand is also evident within the work of our frontline operational Adult Social Care teams (which are also impacted by staffing challenges), impacting on performance within desired targets and timeframes. Whilst 4,937 assessments and 6,560 reviews were completed during the year, at the time of writing, there are 438 overdue Care Act assessments and 2,369 reviews more than a month beyond the year overdue. To address this, the Service has procured the support of Diverse Rec/Imperium Resourcing (as a contracted out managed service) to undertake all non-allocated overdue Reviews (0-180 days) across our four Locality Teams, both in and out of county. At the time of writing, the Managed Service had secured 15 Social Workers, 3 Quality Assurance leads and a project lead to comprise the team. Recruitment is continuing in January with the aim of having 25 Social Workers and 5 Occupational Therapists in post for February. The aim is for each worker to complete a minimum of 3 reviews per week. An experienced internal Service Manager has been appointed to oversee the work of the Reviews team, routinely reporting on progress and ensuring compliance with required quality standards and local process expectations.

### 3.4. Adult Safeguarding in Somerset:

- Safeguarding adults means protecting a person's right to live in safety, free from abuse and neglect; it is a critical aspect of Local Authority work. Data and performance in this area is also routinely monitored via the county's statutory, multi-agency Safeguarding Adults Board, which published its most recent [Annual Report](#) in October 2021 and also contributed to 'Stop Adult Abuse Week' across the region (15-19 November 2021), leading a training session on 'Safer Cultures'.
- Somerset has seen a further decline in the number of safeguarding contacts received this year, with fewer enquiries undertaken as a result, contrary to national trends. Close analysis suggests that this trajectory is a consequence of the significant work undertaken by the service, the Board and Somerset Direct over recent years to improve clarity and understanding of adult safeguarding criteria, and to reduce or re-direct the previously high proportion of inappropriate safeguarding contacts to more appropriate settings, services or functions.
- Neglect and Acts of Omission remain the most common safeguarding risk type locally, with the person's own home the most common risk location. At the time of writing, 93% of concluded safeguarding enquiries for this financial year to date have resulted in the risk being either reduced or removed.
- Somerset's Adult Safeguarding service has received valuable feedback direct from service users, carers, relatives and advocates following the launch of new safeguarding questionnaires in May 2021, supported by the input and recommendations of Healthwatch Somerset. To date, the majority of individuals report very positively about their experience of support received as part of the Somerset Safeguarding process and feel safer as a result.

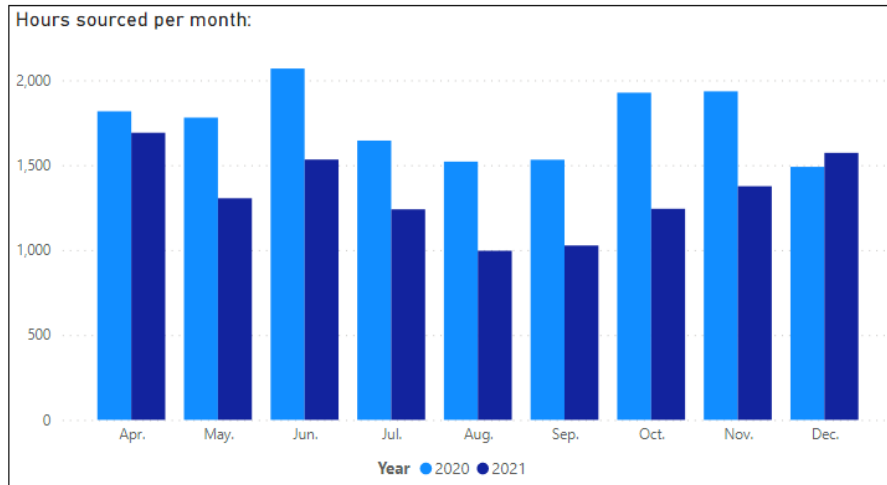
### 3.5. Intermediate Care and Discharge to Assess in Somerset:

- Large numbers of older people referred from acute hospitals are likely to require a service or some form of help from social care, even if only for a short period of time. We work closely with local health system partners, with a focus on a 'home first' approach that promotes a focus on rehabilitation and reablement. Latest available Hospital Discharge Pathway outcomes data for December 2021 is captured below, with 92.7% of all hospital discharge patients returning home – a positive result given the many pressures within our Acute Hospitals and wider care market.

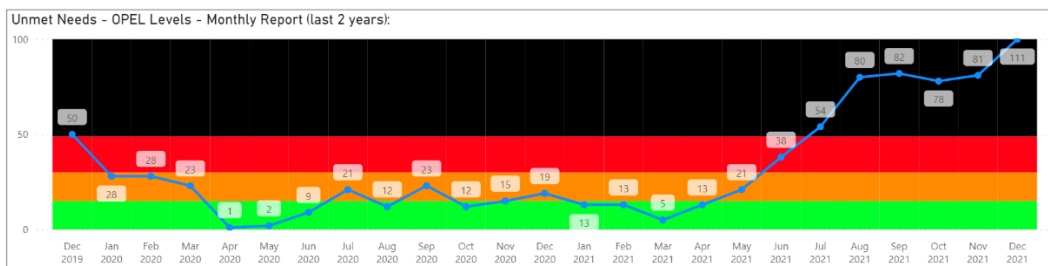


### 3.6. Somerset's Care Provider market and external social care workforce:

- Demand for homecare has remained very high both locally and nationally, but supply has been severely impacted by provider workforce capacity and availability. The service has seen a reduction in the number of average hours of homecare sourced per month during 2021/22 ytd when compared with the previous financial year (see chart below), but an increase in the average care package size (*average of 10.2 hours per package in 2020 compared to 11.0 hours in 2021*), suggesting an increasing level or complexity of need.



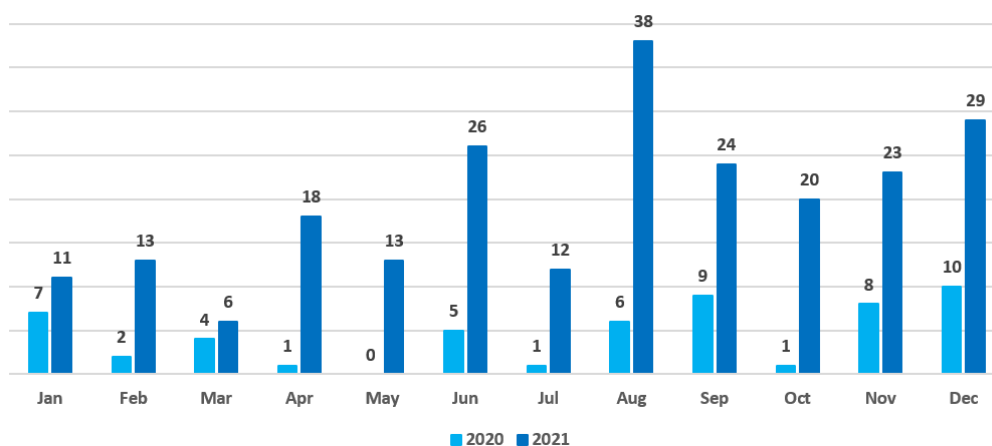
- Although 17,512 hours of homecare were sourced during 2021, levels of unmet care need (*unmet need defined as care packages requested and advertised that have not been sourced within a week*) have remained stubbornly high since the summer, consistently reporting at high OPEL 4 escalation level:



In December 2021, it took our Sourcing Care Team an average 12 working days from date of request for care being submitted to the care package being sourced and commencing; this compares to 6 working days in April 2021.

- In addition to packages of care proving hard to source, the Local Authority has also had to manage and risk assess unprecedentedly high levels of care package 'handbacks' during 2021; the most common cause for these have been staffing capacity challenges within domiciliary agencies to enable the safe delivery of care. Although occasional care package handbacks are not uncommon and can occur for a variety of reasons, during 2021 there were a total of 233 package handbacks, compared to 54 during 2020, placing additional pressure on Local Authority staff to find replacement care within an already over-stretched care market:

Number of homecare package handbacks by month and year



From 3 January 2022, we have been paying domiciliary care providers to hold packages of care open for up to 2 weeks when a person is admitted to hospital. This change will not only provide better care continuity, but is also expected to reduce hospital delays and care package handbacks.

- Direct payments allow individuals to receive cash payments from the Local Authority instead of our commissioned care services. This offers people greater flexibility, choice and control of their support package, and has been encouraged and prioritised over the pandemic, enabling people to benefit from the growing numbers of micro-provision and other forms of more localised support. 1,454 people were in receipt of a direct payment at the end of April 2021; by December 2021, this had risen to 1,573 people, an increase of 8.2%.
- New placements into residential and nursing care continue to be closely tracked and monitored. So far this year for people aged 65 and over there have been an average of 45.2 permanent placements per month compared to a target of 52 per month. The monthly average for the same period last year was 44.2. We have also made an average of 3.1 placements per month for working age people (aged 18-64). This is the same as the same period last year. As well as permanent placements, we are also closely monitoring the number of temporary or interim placements being made. A key part of this is ensuring that temporary placements are reviewed in a timely manner. We do however know that the Covid response and challenges with homecare capacity has meant that more temporary placements have been used and is leading to more permanent placements or increased dependency. Currently we are utilising 110 additional beds as part of our system coordinated response, supported by Athena which have a small team working across 3 sets of additional beds used for hospital discharge and due to be expanded in the new year. Covid has also led to more complexity in peoples' recovery and ongoing needs, and the Omicron variant had caused a further challenge in relation to capacity due to care home outbreaks being subject to 28 days closure to admissions and visits rather than 14 days up until 8 January 2022.
- The sustainability of Somerset's adult social care provider market has also been affected during the year, with the Local Authority's Adult Social Care Commissioning, Quality and Operational teams having to support a growing number of Care Home or business closures over the last twelve months and

ensure the safe transfer of residents or clients to suitable alternative provision. Commissioners have also stepped in to provide financial assistance to mitigate the business failure or short-term issues of pivotal suppliers where it has been deemed essential to do so. To date this has meant bespoke support of c.£200k to a number of different providers, as well as other coordinated non-financial help. This is in excess of provider allocated grant funding but has been funded via the contingency elements of the various infection control and workforce funding as per the guidance.

- A growing number of regulated care providers have received an overall Inspection judgement outcome of less than 'Good' by the independent regulator, the Care Quality Commission, over the course of the pandemic. In December 2020, 11.91% of providers were judged to be 'Requires Improvement' or 'Inadequate' overall; by December 2021 this figure had risen to 16.24%. The corresponding demands on our internal Quality Assurance, Contracts and Safeguarding teams has consequently increased as we work with the providers in question to monitor and help improve their provision.
- Adults Social Care has continued to actively support the care market during the year, with practical advice, guidance and routine communications concerning latest COVID impacts or implications. We have also invested significantly into our Proud to Care Somerset initiative, including through our '[12 days of caring at Christmas](#)' campaign which attracted very high engagement across media platforms, to help raise the profile of the sector and attract individuals into care. Latest available ASC Workforce Data (2020/21)<sup>2</sup> published by Skills for Care in October 2021 revealed high turnover and vacancy rates within the independent care sector in Somerset, particularly in non-residential CQC regulated settings where the turnover rate was reported at 33.7%, and the vacancy rate at 9.4%. Together with the ICS Somerset People Board, the service continues to work with the sector on other initiatives including career progression, joint posts with the NHS, salaried positions and different models of care as part of our ongoing commitment to supporting the vital care workforce. In mid-December 2021, Somerset County Council and the NHS announced a significant cash investment to increase pay and recognise the hard work and critical contribution of carers in Somerset. This included a 9% uplift to domiciliary care providers in CQC regulated settings who agree to pay all their staff a minimum of £10.50ph, a retention bonus of £250 for all those working in registered care for the last six months, and a £250 welcome payment for new starters in domiciliary care. This was widely welcomed by the market and its employees, has set Somerset apart from other Local Authorities in taking direct action, and underlines our commitment to those working in social care.

### **3.7. Somerset's internal adult social care workforce and practice quality**

- The service continues to struggle with recruitment into frontline operational roles and is remains reliant on a large number of locum staff. Recruitment activity continues, supported by the expert assistance of a new HR Business Partner and HR Engagement Partner; this is an area of continued focus and effort for the service, alongside retention of existing staff at a time of increased demand and pressure, but is contributing to some performance and quality monitoring impacts as detailed earlier within this report.
- Morgan Hunt, a multi-award winning agency with a specialism in international

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<sup>2</sup> [My local area \(skillsforcare.org.uk\)](https://www.skillsforcare.org.uk)



recruitment, has been appointed to support both Adults and Children's Social Care in Somerset through the recruitment of 20 x Social Workers from South Africa, Zimbabwe and Namibia (10 per service area). This model has worked successfully in a number of other Local Authority areas, though is reliant on effective induction, support and training, and we anticipate it starting later in the Spring.

- In November 2021, as part of our Carnival of Practice, our Principal Practice Leads for Social Work and Occupational Therapy, officially launched a new [Practice Quality Framework](#), setting out clearly the focus of adult social care in Somerset, our practice standards for staff, the tools and approaches in place to support staff to undertake their work effectively, and how we will know we are getting it right. More recently, on 10<sup>th</sup> January 2022, as part of progressing our practice quality ambitions (as well as responding to SWAP Audit recommendations), the service launched a new Stakeholder [Feedback Form](#) in order to more actively seek, learn from and report on, feedback from those receiving our services.
- In readiness for future external inspection commencing in 2023, the service is preparing a detailed self-assessment to support and inform peer review and monitoring activity during the year ahead. Understanding our strengths, challenges and opportunities for ongoing development across the '7 Ps' (*Place; Practice; Performance; Partnerships; Pounds; People; Person-centred*) will be fundamental in supporting our ongoing service planning and development ambitions.
- The service maintains an up-to-date risk register on the corporate JCAD system, and has ensured transparency of risks and all possible mitigations at levels throughout the health and care system, and County Council. Financial monitoring also takes place on a routine basis with reporting at all levels.

**Note** For sight of individual background papers please contact the report author