

**Annual Report Executive Lead Member Children, Families and Education
Cllr Tessa Munt**

Somerset Children, Family and Education Services

I am delighted to present my annual report for 2022 - 2023, setting out the highlights and achievements of the services for which I am Executive Member.

Overall, I want to celebrate our children and young people, their resilience in difficult times and the quality of the support and services we are able to offer them.

As you will see, we have had two inspections in the last year which validated the high quality of our social care services and recognised the improvements made for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) by the partnerships of which we are part.

We are, however, not complacent and continue to work on the areas identified by Inspectors, to further improve the experience of our children and their families, and the outcomes that they deserve.

In a time of significant financial strain for our most vulnerable families and in a period when there is an up to 25% increase in referrals to our social care and SEND services, we have worked creatively with our partners in the NHS, in schools and in the voluntary sector to ensure that families can access support when they need it within the resources available to us. Whilst the case studies in this report celebrate our successes, we recognise that, particularly for our SEND families, there is still much to do.

We have also launched four major long-term projects this year which are the foundations of our plan for the forward year and beyond:

- Our Education for Life Strategy - with the ambition and confidence to improve outcomes for children in both our maintained and academised sector schools over the next five years. This is a central pillar of the Council's work.
- Our SEND strategy – focussing with our partners on ensuring that our children with SEND are included with their peers in their schools and communities and well supported in all aspects of their lives
- Connect Somerset - an early help partnership between the Council, the NHS, schools, the voluntary sector and our communities, ensuring that professionals and communities work together to help families and residents to improve their lives. This work is integrated with the Neighbourhoods, Local Community Networks and Primary Care networks.
- Homes and Horizons - a strategic partnership with the charity, the Shaw Trust, to deliver up to 10 homes for children, up to 20 foster homes and therapeutic education provision for the most complex children in our care. This aligns with our political ambition to ensure that children from Somerset in our care have a home in the county and allows us to bring children who have been placed elsewhere home to their communities.

As an annexe to this report, I have included a new quarterly report which will enable all Councillors to understand the diversity of services my Directorate delivers and provide an update on our progress.

Tessa Munt,

Executive Member for Children, Families and Education

Social Care

Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services

Children's Social Care welcomed Ofsted in July 2022 for their first ILACS (Inspecting Local Authority Childrens Services) inspection since 2017.

The Ofsted inspection provided great confirmation of the fantastic work achieved by all staff in Childrens' Services and by our partners to keep improving the quality of support for vulnerable children in Somerset. The inspectors graded Somerset Children's Social Care Good in all areas of our services for children.

Judgement	Grade
The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families	Good
The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection	Good
The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers	Good
Overall effectiveness	Good

The report [50192873 \(ofsted.gov.uk\)](https://www.ofsted.gov.uk/reports/publications/50192873) evidences the high-quality work Ofsted found, which gives us an excellent trajectory to build upon to become Outstanding at our next inspection. Every service is reported on positively with an emphasis on how determined staff are to engage with children and their families, and other professionals to ensure children have what they need to thrive and stay within their family wherever possible.

Inspectors found:

- An amazing workforce
- A culture of openness, shared accountability and support
- Child focussed, skilled practitioners and managers
- Incredible Early Help services
- Child focused work leading to good outcomes for children
- Great direct work with children that is individualised to the child's needs
- Voice of the child is woven through our work with children
- Insightful and reflective recording
- Meaningful, timely and creative visiting
- Fantastic support for care leavers
- Strong and insightful management oversight and analysis
- Reflective supervision
- Great use of adult workers in family safeguarding
- A strong sense of ownership of risk
- A strong quality assurance framework where professional curiosity and challenge is welcomed to improve outcomes for children
- A strong team ethos and learning culture
- Approachable and trusted managers and leaders
- A strong response to child exploitation across the whole service
- Good collaboration to support children to be in school and stay in school

There was repeated mention of how well we work with fathers and non-resident parents and the good work we do around domestic abuse as well as championing children's identity. Having had those issues as areas of focus in the service for several years, it was great to see Ofsted recognise the determination with which we have challenged ourselves to improve these areas of practice.

There were two areas identified for improvement which the service are working hard to make progress with:

- 1) Placement sufficiency, including for emergency admissions, for older children with complex needs.**
- 2) The take-up of return home interviews and use of data to inform individual and service planning.**

Social Care

Homes & Horizons

“The project that we are doing actually has the voice of the child actually at the heart of everything.”

– Care leaver, Chloe, who has supported the project from its conception at the MJ Awards.

Video: [The MJ Awards 2023](#)

Press release: [Somerset Council wins national award for ground-breaking children's home partnership](#)

The first four 'Homes and Horizons' children's homes have now opened and our first six young people are settling in well, supported by a strong, partnership approach to supporting their transition into their new homes from unregistered provision.

The programme continues at pace with homes five (due to open early in August) and home six due to open towards the end of 2023. Planning work continues for the first annexes (for crisis provision) and pods (for Staying Close provision) and for the establishment of the registered Therapeutic Education Provision. Following a continued positive response to the recruitment campaign for Homes and Horizons High Needs Foster Carers, initial assessments for four new Carers are underway with two more applications in the pipeline.



Social Care

Case study: Homes and Horizons – caring for our most complex children

In July 2022, A referral was received due to the Police being called to the family home as Martha, aged 15, had allegedly assaulted her mum and her sister and made threats to kill. Martha's mum refused to have her home following this incident, which resulted in Martha being made the subject of Powers of Police Protection.

Martha came into care and due to her distress found it difficult to settle in any foster home or care home. She has had 6 moves in the last year, as providers did not feel able to look after her for long.

Martha continues to present with mental health difficulties, displaying depression and anxiety. She is also diagnosed with ADHD and can struggle to take her medication. Due to the level of aggression shown towards family, Martha has not yet been able to return to her family's care. Martha can be challenging towards staff supporting her and also displays distress where she will cause considerable damage to her living environment. Martha has some periods of stability however will then have extended periods of time where she will present as unsettled and struggle to be contained. The trigger for the periods of instabilities remains unknown.

Martha's mum continues to be a key part of Martha's life and there is regular contact between Martha and her mum.

Child and Adolescent mental health services are working with us to support her too.

Martha was placed in a Homes and Horizons home for children in June 2023 and has settled well. She feels safe and knows that we will stay with her throughout the rest of her childhood and help her move home or to independent accommodation as she moves towards adulthood.



Homes and Horizons



Social Care

Case study: Helping families to stay together

M is an 11-year-old boy with a diagnosis of moderate deafness, developmental language disorder, Autism, Hyperkinetic Disorder and borderline learning disabilities. M's parents, both of whom are profoundly deaf, had requested for M to come into care after several incidences of M hurting his family members. The police / ambulance were called out every day of the week for several weeks. His parents were struggling to know how to manage M's distress resulting in him also getting hurt – this resulted in a Child Protection Plan. They were clear that M could no longer stay at home.

Following the social care co-ordinating support from the Learning Disability / Autism Key Working service, support from CAMHS, Adults Social Care and care agency support, the family's stress has reduced significantly. There has been a period of 4-5 weeks where the police / ambulance have not been called at all. M is having fun with his parents and key workers on day activities. His Dad has made a commitment to spend 15 minutes every evening after work with him and has built M a purpose built play area in the home. The family are now talking to their social worker about taking M on holiday. This shows their increased confidence as it is something that they had never considered before because they didn't feel able to manage M's behaviour previously.

The family are no longer requesting for M to come into care.



Social Care

Case study: Supporting homeless teenagers

The Pathways to Independence (P2i) service is commissioned from local YMCA providers and offers accommodation and support for young people aged 16 and over who would otherwise be homeless. Some of these young people are Children Looked After. A key role of the service is to strengthen young people's self-confidence by providing positive opportunities for change.

Riley has fully submerged himself in our Sailing partnership opportunity. He has done so well he has been recruited as a volunteer trainee watch leader, assisting with courses provided by our partner which other young people attend. Riley has talked about his experience and what he has gained from this opportunity in a way in which we simply couldn't ignore. In turn, Riley has created an opportunity for 10 more young people who call YMCA Dulverton Group home at this time and will be assisting in promoting this experience to others.

Riley brings a lot of positives to every situation and we strongly believe he will continue to make a difference for other young people, some we know locally but other young people across the country as well.



Inclusion

Inspection of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

In November 2022, OFSTED and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) undertook a revisit inspection of Somerset's SEND services. The purpose of this inspection was to assess the progress made by the Council, NHS and other partners since the previous inspection in March 2020. Inspectors found that Somerset had made good progress and successfully addressed seven of the nine areas of weakness that they had identified in their 2020 inspection.

OFSTED and CQC noted significant improvements in a number of areas, for example:

- Leaders across the partnership had worked to resolve differences and come together to improve services. Immediately following the previous inspection, leaders brought in parents and carers to work alongside them to write their written statement of action. This spirit of co-production has continued. This has meant that children, young people, parents and carers and leaders have all contributed to strategic plans and decisions.
- Children and families were benefitting from recent improvements, such as access to newly established enhanced specialist provision within mainstream secondary schools, and the parents and carers who have received advice and guidance, such as the Toucan course, as part of the new assessment pathway for autism.
- Actions to improve the lived experience of the youngest children and their families, such as dramatically reduced waiting times for the portage service (which provides education support at home for pre-school children with SEND). In addition, this service is now available 52 weeks a year, which has increased parental confidence in their children's readiness for nursery and school.
- Significant improvements to the timeliness and quality of education, health and care plans, with parents and carers routinely involved in discussions around the assessment and the outcomes agreed.

The 2022 inspection marked the end of Somerset's written statement of action – the plan put together to improve services after the 2020 inspection. This comprehensive programme of work led to a broad range of improvements, in particular better working together, a better offer of services and better access to support, as summarised below:

Better working together

- Involvement of parent carers in strategic developments
- Spirit of collaboration, mutual trust and support.
- System performance information
- Comprehensive strategic needs assessment

Better offer of services

- Autism pathway
- Specialist education provision
- Education, health and care plans
- Joint commissioning of SEND Information and Advice Service

Better access to support

- Therapy services (SLT, OT, Physio)
- Reduced waiting times for Portage
- Access to social care advice and support
- Schools taking lead on EHC requests

Inclusion

Case study: Enhanced Learning Provisions

In 2022, as part of the Council's commitment to promoting an effective and inclusive approach to education, we worked with two secondary schools, Wadham School and Holyrood Academy, to set up an Enhanced Learning Provision in each school.

The transition to secondary school from primary school represents a significant shift in environment for all children, but particularly so for those identified as having Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND).

The Enhanced Learning Provision sits within a mainstream secondary school and delivers tailored and high-quality teaching to pupils with SEND who are working at very low curriculum levels or who may have other identified needs which makes them more vulnerable than their peers at transition. It uses skilled teachers with additional training and experience and small groups to maximise achievement and progress primarily in core subjects, while supporting these pupils to access the wider mainstream curriculum alongside their peers.

Since September 2022, Year 7 Students, in these schools, have been attending these Enhanced Learning Provisions as part of their timetable and feedback from the teaching teams, parents and pupils themselves has been extremely positive.

We are now working with another seven secondary schools to develop more Enhanced Learning Provisions across the county in 2023. This is progress towards our ambition that by the end of 2025 all Somerset secondary schools will have an enhanced or specialist resource of inclusive support to enable more children with SEND to go to school with their peers in their local community:

Find out more here: [Enhanced Learning Provision for Students with SEND \(somerset.gov.uk\)](https://www.somerset.gov.uk)



Inclusion

Case study: The UnStoppables

The UnStoppables are a group of young people aged between 13 and 24 years who have Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). It has been a busy year for the UnStoppables who have been very involved in making a film about the Graduated Response Toolkit for children and young people to understand how it supports them in school and working with the Somerset Centre for Integrated Learning (SCIL) to write a SEND module for the Foundation Degree in Education and Development from a perspective of their lived experience.

The group also planned a recruitment roadshow and made an animation about joining the UnStoppables – which has led to nearly doubling their membership. The inspector for the Local Area Reinspection of SEND Services met the UnStoppables as part of the reinspection to hear about the difference their voices make to service improvement.



Education Partnership and Skills

Education for Life Strategy

The Education for Life Strategy was launched at the Fleet Air Arm Museum in March 2023, building on the work of a group of educational professionals from across the varied aspects of Somerset's education sectors. Over 200 leaders from early years, schools and further education joined the council's political and officer leadership, the two Dioceses, Ofsted and the Department for Education to commit to tackling underachievement and develop better educational provision for the county's children.

The strategy has four goals over five years:

Goal 1

Improved access to support in the early years of life so that every child is ready to start school confidently.

Goal 2

Increased inclusion in all schools, settings and in our communities so every child is included in their education 100% of the time.

Goal 3

Strong and supportive leadership capacity within and between Somerset schools so that improvement is sustainable, and educational outcomes are improved in every key phase.

Goal 4

Young people have access to further and higher education in the county where they can develop adaptable skills so they can join and progress in the workforce in Somerset.

The focus of the first year of the strategy is building relationships, with a focus on strong and collaborative governance delivering sharp and tangible projects that make a difference on the ground.

Education for Life



Do more for those pupils who need it most



Change

We have established more joined up, accountable working between the council, Department for Education and Diocese of Bath and Wells.

We have established steering groups and recruited leaders from different parts of the system to shape the future direction.

We have established a baseline so we can track our progress and created a new way of looking at school performance which makes it easier to spot successes and areas for development.

We are creating a new Standing Panel on Education Standards as part of the council's scrutiny arrangements.

Impact

We are now able to regularly publish a forward plan for when schools convert to academies and develop more transparent financial arrangements for academisation.

We have identified some important reasons why things that should be helping children get help sooner are not working as well as they should be – which means we can change them.

We now have a plan to share what children have told us about their mental health, and how well schools are serving children, alongside information about what help is available to schools to help them improve.

We will have more capacity from elected members to consider educational performance in greater depth, and to enable a clearer mechanism for locally elected challenge and support.

Commissioning

Case study: Connect Somerset

Connect Somerset is about early help in the community. We want all professionals and community groups working together to help families and residents to improve their lives. Connect Somerset is a partnership between Somerset Council, Somerset NHS, Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprises, and Schools, Colleges and Early Years settings.

As part of the Education for Life strategy, Connect Somerset will be an integral part of a refreshed Team Around the School model — enabling schools to better access local support, and to be anchors in their communities.

We have appointed Connect Somerset Champions who are leaders from their communities to re-shape public services — removing barriers and blockers, so professionals can work more easily and closely together.

It will be easier for families and residents to access the help they need earlier. More support will be delivered from hubs all across the county, with services closer to home and rooted in communities. Local delivery is coordinated from 12 Connect Somerset hubs which are linked to Neighbourhoods, Local Community Networks, Primary Care Networks and social prescribing.

We will continue to make improvements to share information across services, so multi-agency professionals and community groups can wrap better around families and residents. And we'll bring together databases of local community resources so these are easier to search, and professionals can link our most vulnerable families into what makes them more resilient.

Overall, Connect Somerset is about how we all work together, wrap support around families and residents, and ensure everyone can access the help they need in the community as early as they need it.

July 2023

Improving people's lives by working with our communities

Connect Somerset increased the amount of early help that is there for residents - connecting the most vulnerable children and families to local community resources.

12 Champions appointed from the **community** to lead the culture change in public services



New universal early help offer in development to increase the support available, **addressing inequalities** by hand-holding rather than signposting



Big comms drive to engage the **20,000 - 30,000** people working in **early help in Somerset** — this is all-age because we can't disaggregate the community



New Team Around the School model launched to build **relationships and wrap support around pupils and their families** — named professionals getting to know each other and working more organically and efficiently together — and schools becoming anchors in their communities.



Transform app for schools, data sharing agreements with a wide range of partners including housing and VCFSE, and starting to develop population risk analysis to target the new early help capacity



12 core hubs being established, and a further **100** hubs across the County to be used for drop-ins etc closer to families in rural areas



Strategic partnership with VCFSE representatives is in development, so we have **genuine shared ownership of early help**, underpinned by strong ICS governance with support and oversight from the combined Health and Care Board and ICS Board



Working with personalised care initiative in the NHS to expand social prescribing to children and build investment in community support from the NHS, Council and other partners



Help to help yourself project to join up databases of community resources and make this information **easily accessible** to residents and professionals



Commissioning

Case study: Household Support Fund (HSF)

The HSF is a scheme led by the Department for Work and Pensions, in every Local Authority area nationally, started in the Winter of 2021, to provide support for people on low incomes who are struggling due to cost of living rises. It is currently in place until March 2024. Here are some examples of how it has been used in Somerset to improve children's lives:

“One of my families has a young child who has to walk 40 minutes each way to and from school in all weathers and did not have suitable clothing and would arrive at school wet and cold. Because of the HSF the child now has wellies, a warm waterproof coat and is able to stay dry walking to school”.

“A family I am working with has a young child who was sleeping on the floor on a very old and dirty mattress. Because the HSF was awarded, they now have their own brand-new bed and bedding. This has given such a positive impact to the family and means the child is sleeping well and their school attendance has also improved because they can maintain their bedtime routine and a good night sleep meaning they are refreshed for school the next day”.



Commissioning Case study: Holiday Activities and Food programme (HAF)

This programme has been in place since 2018 and provides activities and a meal across the county, in school holidays for all children (and is free for children who receive free school meals and for some other low income families)

“My son fell asleep with the activity timetable in his hands, it's the last thing he looks at before bed. Thank you for arranging the extra transport to make it possible, we're so grateful.”

Neroche Woodlanders is a wild woodland camp set in 100 acres of forest near Taunton. Sessions are made of seasonal crafting, free play, quiet spaces and organised games. The team supports children to do what they want to do, whether that be play in the mud kitchen, craft making or helping with food preparation. Being outdoors, all hot meals are cooked on the campfire. Children help with all prep and clearing up. At the end of each HAF day, bags of food and recipes to take home are packed by the children and taken in the wheelbarrows down to the forest track to the waiting bus. Being healthy and active happens all day long without anyone having to be told.



Children's Services – Participation team

Case study: Youth Parliament

Members of the Youth Parliament (MYPs) are elected democratically. This year saw the launch of Joel's campaign on children and young people's Mental Health and Wellbeing at the Somerset Safeguarding Children's Partnership's (SSCP) Forum Week.

The MYPs attended the Annual Conference of Youth Parliament in Hull in July 2022 where they were able to strengthen Somerset's youth voice on a national stage, as well as gaining an understanding of the links between local and national voices. They also attended an assembly within the House of Commons, joining in with discussion, debate and voting processes which were facilitated by the Leader of the House and interacted able to operate confidently on panels and this helps them when they are interviewed themselves for jobs or college and university places.



Annexe

Quarterly Report on Children's Services (April 2023)

Engagement and Participation – Annual Report 2022-23