

Somerset Council

Full Council
20 February 2024



Annual Report – Lead Member for Adult Services, Somerset Council

Executive Member: Councillor Bill Revans, Leader of Somerset Council

Local Member(s) and Division: All

Lead Officer: Mel Lock, Director – Adult Social Care (ASC), Somerset Council

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1. Summary

- 1.1 We are proud to present the Lead Member’s Annual Report setting out key highlights and achievements of Adult Social Care services in Somerset over the past year. In doing so, we wish also to pay tribute to Councillor Dean Ruddle, who was serving as the Lead Member for Adult Services at the time of his death last month.
- 1.2 Councillor Ruddle was a committed, compassionate and very popular elected Member; a remarkable advocate for Somerton and dedicated to serving the wider community with enormous energy and drive. We will greatly miss his input and contributions, and formally recognise his significant work in and support of our Service as we reflect on our progress this past year and drive forward our ambitions into 2024/25 and beyond.

2. Background

- 2.1 Social care is an essential part of the fabric of our society. At its best, it enables and transforms lives. It supports people to live the lives they want to lead, where they want to live them. The scale of adult social care and support is vast, affecting the lives of over 10 million adults of all ages in England. People of all ages and with a diverse range of needs draw on care and support in different ways and at different stages of their life; some people will require support throughout their life whilst for others care needs will develop suddenly or gradually. Some people may only use social care for a short period (for example after a hospital stay). Care and support can cover a range of activities to promote people’s wellbeing and support them to live independently, staying well and safe. It can include ‘personal care’ as well as

wider personalised support to enable people to stay engaged in their communities and live their lives in the way they want.

2.2 *In Somerset, we want people to live healthy and independent lives, supported by thriving and connected communities, with timely and easy access to high quality and efficient support when they need it.*

We formally launched our Adult Social Care Strategy (2023-26) ¹in July 2023, setting out how we would continue to work to deliver our vision in partnership to ensure we deliver the right kind of care and support for our local communities, and the best possible outcomes within the resources available to us.

2.3 There are many recognised challenges currently facing the adult social care right across the country. The cost-of-living crisis is biting harder for the public, staff and social care providers, and workforce pressures persist. Local Authority budgets right across the country have also struggled to keep pace with rising costs and increasing complexity and rising numbers of people needing support. This is a recognised and current concern here in Somerset, with the Council forced to take significant emergency measures to address the funding gap (due in large part to a significant increase in the cost of adult social care for 2024/25), limit spend and mitigate the risk of having to issue a s114 notice.

2.4 In spite of these financial, demand, and capacity-related pressures, our staff and partners continue to work tirelessly to deliver our statutory duties to the best of our ability. We are very proud of the many developments and successes achieved over the last 12 months in relation to how we work with people, provide support, ensure safety, and lead our service, as well as the feedback we receive from stakeholders.

Performance and demand: Adult Social Care in numbers during 2023

- We received an average 5,462 contacts per month via our Customer Contact Centre for care and support related advice or activity. The overall resolution rate at first point of contact was 60.8% against a target of 60%.
- We supported over 8,000 adults through our Local Authority Adult Social Care service, and many more as part of our wider health and care system.
- Our social care teams completed over 8,740 assessments (including Care Act, Occupational Therapy, Carers, and Mental Capacity Assessments) and 5,456 reviews of individuals care and support needs.
- We undertook 594 Safeguarding Enquiries, reducing or removing the identified risk in 92% of cases.
- We supported over 84.1% of individuals aged 65 and over to be discharged back home from hospital each month - over 26,000 people.

¹ [Adult Social Care Strategy 2023_2026.pdf \(somerset.gov.uk\)](https://www.somerset.gov.uk/adult-social-care-strategy-2023-2026.pdf)

- We sourced 24,371 hours' worth of home care provision for people assessed as requiring care and support at home, and 726 residential and nursing placements.
- We received 282 independent submissions of stakeholder feedback, of which 226 (80%) rated the service received by our staff as 'Good' or 'Excellent'. We received 253 complaints during 2023 – most commonly relating to 'provision' or 'funding'.
- We conducted over 490 Practice Quality Audits (Sept-Nov 2023) focused on 'working with people', 'case recording', and 'strengths-based practice'.
- 80.3% of Somerset's active (independent) residential care settings and 85% of active community-based adult social care settings were rated 'Good' or 'Outstanding' by the Care Quality Commission as of end of December 2023, exceeding national and regional averages in both instances.

The following reflects just a small selection of our key Adult Social Care achievements and developments across our 4 Strategic Plan priority areas:



Prevention and early help

We have continued to develop viable care alternatives to reduce and delay the need for long-term care. This includes our ongoing investment in digital and community equipment:

- Our county now benefits from 3 **Somerset Independent Living Centres** (Wellington, Shepton Mallet, and – most recently – Yeovil). These therapy-led services focus on prevention and offer free, practice advice. We take a 'whole life' approach to how people can use technology to support all aspects of their lives – managing health conditions, reducing falls, supporting daily tasks or reducing social isolation. Demand for SILC appointments continues to grow and customer feedback is very positive. SILC intervention was projected to delay the need for/an increase in home care services in 16% of attendees looking at the period Dec 2023-Jan 2024, delaying 168 projected home care hours (per week) at a cost of £3,722. Our Adult Social Care Technology Enabled Care offer will be available in all SILCs, allowing staff to demonstrate all items on the catalogue and prescribe directly where appropriate.

We remain committed to ensuring unpaid carers are valued, recognised and supported across Somerset:

- We jointly commission a **Somerset Carers' Support Service** with Somerset NHS ICB. This provides a one-stop shop approach to ensure all unpaid carers in Somerset can receive the support they require, when they need it, via a single point of contact. There is a focus on early help and prevention with the service helping

carers find support within their local communities. The service supports approximately 3k carers directly per annum, with the addition of a digital offer supporting approximately 20k carers currently and continuing to rise. A refresh of Somerset's Commitment to Carers will be launched in March 2024; this has been co-produced with carers in Somerset and sets out some key priorities and recommendations to ensure that local services continue to meet carer needs.

We have maintained an effective 'front door' service that enables earlier intervention and prevention:

- Somerset has long adopted a strengths-based approach to assessment to ascertain people's assets, needs and wishes, and ensure our focus is on improving outcomes for people. This is an approach adopted from the very first point of contact with our **award-winning Customer Contact Centre**, which shifted its focus over the years from traditional 'scripted' conversations and the monitoring of outputs, to person-centred conversations and monitoring of outcomes. By changing the conversation to focus on what matters to the person, what they can do to help themselves and promoting what is available in their local community, we have seen the proportion of contacts resolved with no costed service at first point of contact significantly improve (averaging around 60% month on month despite call volumes remaining high).



Right support, right place, right time

We have invested in the development of voluntary and community enterprises:

- Since 2014/15, we have supported the development of over 1,250 new micro-providers with numbers continuing to rise. Collectively they deliver over 30k hours of support a week to just under 6k people in Somerset. This increased personalised 'care at home' capacity of local, flexible and responsive support has meant that people are getting a greater opportunity to choose bespoke, local and small services to help meet their care and support needs.

We have promoted direct payment options enabling people to maximise their choice and control about how to meet their care and support needs:

- Somerset has a much higher than average take-up of direct payments. This is a good indicator of how the LA is helping people exercise independence through autonomy choice and control. Much of this is associated with the development and success of our thriving micro-provider offer (outlined above). Between 2015-2019 we had 610 adults join the scheme. In 2023 alone we had 351 join. Since March 2023, we have been running a Direct Payment Plus pilot with Enham Trust providing options for people who want to exercise strong influence over their support but cannot manage the responsibilities that come with a Direct Payment themselves and

have no one available to support them. 21 individuals are currently benefitting from this pilot out of a cohort of 25; the pilot runs to the end of March 2025.

We have enhanced our ability to source suitable, timely care and support:

- Levels of unmet homecare need have vastly improved and are being sustained at very low levels despite demand for home care remaining significant. In December 2022 48 packages of care had not been sourced after a week of promotion to care providers; by December 2023 this end of month position figure had dropped to 0. This is a significantly improved position and consequent to a variety of focused commissioning and workforce-related activity. Care package contract handbacks have also significantly reduced when compared with recent years suggesting a stabilisation in the market, averaging 13 per month in 2023 compared to 20 per month in 2022.

We have continued to focus on ensuring safety, preventing abuse and neglect and identifying risk early through effective local safeguarding arrangements:

- Somerset continues to perform strongly in comparison to national and regional figures in relation to 'Making Safeguarding Personal' measures; latest comparative data published in the autumn of 2023 reveals that where risks were identified, these were reduced or removed in 92% of cases. Our Safeguarding Adults Board has benefitted from the appointment of a nationally renowned and very experienced Independent Chair and has delivered significant improvements over the last 12 months. This includes the production and maintenance of a range of professional guidance to support adult safeguarding knowledge (including risk decision making tools and a self-neglect toolkit), and a range of public-facing communications to promote awareness of abuse and neglect including a [new campaign](#) launched for Stop Adult Abuse Week in November 2023.



A supported, skilled and flexible workforce

We have progressed our Adult Social Care Workforce Strategy and action plan

- Our Workforce Board meets monthly to monitor recruitment and retention trends and progress the 10 themes within our Workforce Strategy. We have invested in developing our own workforce and that of partner organisations involved in providing services as a way of supporting sustainability and filling hard-to-recruit critical posts. This has included overseas recruitment initiatives, with 12 Social Workers recruited into adult social care as part of our **International Recruitment project with Morgan Hunt** since September 2022. We are now commencing Cohort 3 recruitment.

We have worked to create the right environment and conditions for robust and effective strengths-based practice:

- A significant amount of focused work has been undertaken to support our workforce and enhance our **practice development and oversight offer**, led by our Principal Practice Leads. Over the last year we have embedded a range of new or revised approaches to support us in this space and respond to staff feedback, including:
 - o a refreshed and co-produced Practice Quality Framework aligned to a monthly auditing schedule and informed by people who draw on our services. The PQF sets out clear practice standards and expectations for our workforce and forms an important part of our governance and assurance approach.
 - o clear competency frameworks to support the continued professional development of our operational workforce;
 - o a revised supervision and appraisal approach taking into account staff feedback and audit findings.

Since September 2023, 668 internal practice standard audits have been completed by staff at all levels in the service. These have reassured us of practice in aspects such as how we work with people (with 95.4% of audits undertaken evidencing we built positive relationships based on trust, kindness and respect) and the quality of case recording (with 88% evidencing that our records are person-centred and capture the views, wishes and feelings of the person or their representative). They've also offered us valuable learning opportunities including improving the use of case transfer summaries and reducing the use of acronyms in our records, which we're progressing with the support of our Practice Development Advanced Practitioners.

We have re-structured our adult social care operational teams as part of our commitment to integrated working with partners at a neighbourhood level

- This has included the **introduction of specialist Learning Disability teams and Mental Health teams** under dedicated Strategic Managers, reinforcing the unique identity of these functions and providing expertise and professional leadership and management to drive the performance of the workforce and deliver priorities and service targets for those requiring care and support. The teams work very closely with commissioners and health colleagues, and this degree of collaboration and joint-working is a particular aspect of health and social care that we are very proud of in Somerset.



Future focused

We are contributing and responding to external assurance, assessment and sector-led improvement activities

- We continue to seize opportunities for learning and improvement. In early March 2024, we will welcome a Local Government Association Adult Social Care Assurance Peer Challenge to assist our preparations and readiness for an upcoming (yet to be notified) Care Quality Commission assessment² following the launch of this new national regulatory regime in April 2023. We are maintaining a detailed self-assessment to support both internal and external scrutiny and assurance, and welcome the opportunity for external scrutiny of our Somerset offer and provision under the Care Act 2014.

We have strengthened our capacity and capability for transformation

- In the summer of 2023, Somerset Council engaged Newton Europe as a delivery partner to deliver its Adults Transformation Programme, titled 'My Life, My Future'³. This programme is aligned to our Strategy and details 5 workstreams impacting different teams and with different operational and financial targets associated:



We are already starting to see some really encouraging results and impacts, including **more people going home from hospital** (7 more people per week are being supported by health or social care teams at home rather than unnecessarily staying in hospital or equivalent), and, by exploring more creative ways to meet people's care and support needs, people are requiring fewer hours of council-funded care per week, reducing by 24% from 14.3 hours per week in September 2023, to 10.8 hours per week in December 2023.

² <https://www.cqc.org.uk/guidance-providers/local-authorities/assessment-framework-local-authority-assurance>

³ [Somerset County Council](#)

Adult Social Care Stakeholder Feedback, 2023

The feedback continues to offer us valuable insights into the experience of service users and carers, our partner colleagues and other key stakeholders, providing opportunities for learning or improvement, reducing risks of complaints escalating, and enabling monthly 'staff shoutouts' and greater recognition based on independent feedback.

Analysis shows that the single biggest element and influencer of both positive and negative feedback is communication – how clear, responsive, professional and compassionate we are in our respective job roles makes a fundamental difference to the experience of those we engage with and support. **Keeping in touch with people goes a long way, even if to only explain a situation or delay, and helps prevent more time-intensive activity further down the line.**

"From the moment I was first referred, I have never felt so cared for and treated as if I mattered. So much has come from the first meeting, problems I have put up with for years are now being resolved. I am truly grateful for the help and support"

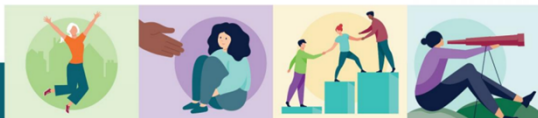
"At a very difficult time Sarah was absolutely superb; my Father had a stroke 8 years ago and although he presents well, she saw through this to understand his true vulnerability. She cut through a lot of issues taking pressure from me and my siblings allowing us to focus on caring for our mother who has just been diagnosed with stage 4 cancer.

"I honestly cannot fault the care, communication and hard work provided to help assess my father's dementia needs. I have been kept informed every step of the way with very well explained emails & phone calls. It is so refreshing to have someone who really cares about the welfare of all concerned"

"Tabitha was fantastic from first to last contact. She was always very caring and attentive and was great with my dad. She always explained everything very clearly and I always felt like she cared about my dad and his family. That must be very hard when I'm sure you are all very busy"

"Prior to the stroke my father was completely independent and living a fulfilled life- even going for a cycle ride at 6.00am on the morning of his stroke which has been life changing. The adjustment for my father has been enormous- physically, mentally and emotionally and for family also. Heather has been amazing. Calm, professional, positive, understanding, fantastic listening skills, and very person centred. My dad felt supported and that he was important. Heather did everything she could to help. Thank you, Heather, and thank you adult social care for all you do. I do not think it is recognised enough how social work can make such a difference in people's lives".

"Before you came into our lives I was physically and mentally a mess; no-one to talk to; no-one to help, no future. I got to the stage where I was tempted to end it all. It wasn't till I spoke to you that I started to think maybe there is possibly hope. Over the months I have spoken to you the problems we faced are not so big. I could say thank you a million times, but it would never repay you".



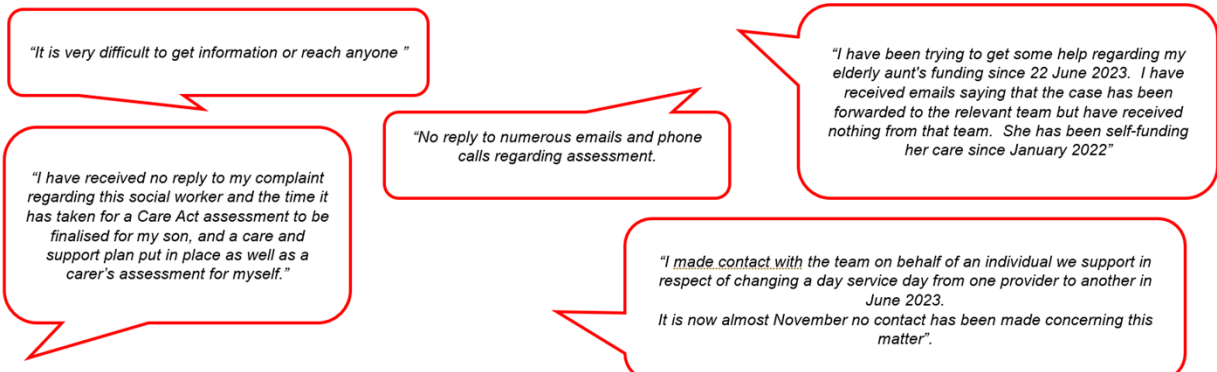
Adult Social Care Stakeholder Feedback, 2023

We received particularly consistent levels of positive feedback for the work of our **Sourcing Care team** (89.5% Good or Excellent during 2023) and **Care Provider Quality & Contracts Team** (93.3% Good or Excellent during 2023). Our **Independent Living Centres** also generate great feedback:

Sourcing Care feedback examples	Quality/Contracts feedback examples	SILC feedback examples
"Communication is always very good"	"This was an unannounced visit to the Care Home. The team that visited showed understanding and shared very useful links and resources to support the service. They had a job to do and they did this with fairness and respect."	"Everyone involved today were professional but so caring and thoughtful. Excellent all the way through. Fantastic service"
"When we started our business, you helped us to grow and develop. We are very grateful and much obliged for all your unconditional support over the years. Few years ago, when we started, we were only providing a single run in Taunton area, then we were able to make 3 runs in Taunton itself and later we were able to extend our services to other parts of Somerset including Wellington, Bridgewater, Minehead, Watchet etc. We would not have gone this far without your invaluable support"	"Always going above and beyond with her support and paying attention to the small details. Sharing her skills and knowledge openly and sign posting to the right services and professionals when needed. She has been invaluable during the quality improvement"	"What an interesting and enlightening appointment with Sophie. We had attended for an assessment for my elderly mother to see what help would be available to her to enable her to stay in her own home. Sophie was compassionate, sympathetic, and explained very clearly all the wonderful things that would make life much easier for mum. The future looks much more positive for her now."
"Any request or issue are very seriously and responsibly treated by Sourcing Care"	"Christine has been hugely supportive of Baobab Care, and has been flexible with our needs and changes too and giving us strong advice and guidance on compliance including giving us advice on how to do competencies with specific subject matters"	"SILC appointment came quickly, we were seen on time, we were treated professionally and with care. Communication since the appointment has been brilliant via email and phone. The service is 10/10 and a gold star should be awarded."
"Charlie was really helpful when I called for support for an urgent placement. The whole team is very responsive and helpful in emergency situations"	"The assessment/meeting was conducted in a professional manner. The conversation flowed and we certainly learnt a lot which will benefit our service. Both were available to answer any questions or queries. We felt the meeting was invaluable and welcome more in the future"	"What can I say? Sophie was our knight in shining armour. She came into our home at a time where we were feeling very overwhelmed with processes, Sophie came in and explained them in simple terms and made us feel so much more reassured. Sophie is going to arrange for our bathroom to be adapted which is going to make a huge difference to my partners life and enable her to stay living at home for the rest of her life as she is desperate to"
"Charlie and Shaunna have both gone over and above to support me in sourcing a placement for an individual who is a Somerset resident but currently a patient in a community hospital out of area. I am very grateful for their support in working towards achieving the right outcome of the individual and their family"	"Kelly gave us a courtesy call today following our CQC inspection and was compassionate and supportive towards us, we didn't feel ashamed and felt listened to. We will most definitely be making the most of her support"	"We and I (my wife with memory loss becoming more severe- now reflected in her lack of mobility) had been told about SILC. Access into the bath has become a huge problem. The visit to the SILC at Shepton Mallet has shown me a solution to the problem, and Helen was most courteous and helpful"

Adult Social Care Stakeholder Feedback, 2023

Responsiveness is a key area for the service to continue to monitor and address. Whilst very likely reflective of recognised assessment and review backlogs and workforce capacity challenges faced by Local Authorities across the country, the overwhelming majority of poor/very poor rated feedback made clear reference poor communication and engagement from our (operational) teams/staff, or waiting for care and support:



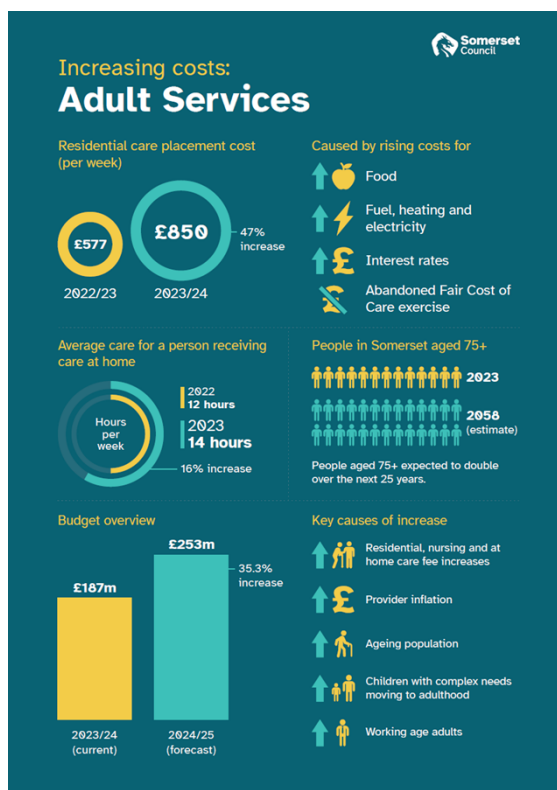
3. Key areas requiring our continued focus and attention

- Adult Social Care is committed to **improving opportunities for effective and meaningful co-production**, taking every opportunity to include people with lived experience and community organisations in the development of new and existing services. Our Working Together Board was formed in November 2023 following a series of co-production workshops. This is a partnership arrangement with people with lived expertise and carers.
- In common with many Local Authorities across the country, Somerset has **waiting lists for care assessments and reviews due to high demand for care and support, coupled with ongoing workforce capacity challenges**. We continue to work hard to address this and ensure consistent practice is in place to identify, respond and monitor risk. The overwhelming majority of feedback we receive about the approach and impact of our staff from people we care for and support is very positive (averaging 80% 'Good' or 'Excellent' throughout 2023). However, where this is not the case, feedback and complaints most commonly reference waits or delays in assessments or support.
- We are also committed to **increasing the number of carers assessments** undertaken by our operational teams and improve areas of concern emerging from the annual Carers Survey to ensure that unpaid carers have the best possible wellbeing outcomes and support.
- We wish to improve the accessibility of information and advice, and further promoting our adult social care 'offer' in Somerset.
- In May 2023 we published a Market Sustainability Plan for the older people care and support market which has informed our Market Position Statement. It highlighted the Council's ambition to meet the **fair costs of care** by 2025. This ambition was set prior to the Council's financial emergency, and consequently work is underway to review what we can offer in relation to Adult Social Care fees and charges for the coming 2024/25 financial year. There are significant upward pressure on fees for specialist services for adults with learning disabilities and mental ill-health in particular.
- As one of our five 'My Life, My Future' transformation programme workstreams, we are **focused on achieving more ideal outcomes for young people transitioning to adulthood**. Our work is concentrating on establishing more efficient processes and information sharing between childrens and adults services to enable early identification and planning of support, and on shaping the availability of suitable and cost-effective services to promote independence.

- Stabilising our workforce and **reducing reliance on locum staff** and maintaining a robust focus on **managing our budget and spend**.

4. Implications

4.1 Financial Risk Local Authority budgets have failed to keep pace with rising costs and increases in the number of people needing care:



Our current Adult Services overspend is £24.2m due to increases in both fee levels for care home placements and delivery of home care, offset by a number of in-year mitigations to reduce it to £14.9m. 90% of our budget is spent on individual placements purchased through the market via block and spot placements. Therefore, there is a significant risk that this budget will continue to overspend. This is due to increased demand, the cost-of-living rise, particularly the increases in petrol, gas, electric, food interest rates and increase in the national living wage. We have a number of mitigations in place including:

- Enhanced Peer Forums – offering robust financial and operating challenge
- Reviews of Interim Placements – helping identify those who should be self-funding/contributing towards their long-term care.
- My Life, My Future transformation – reducing the over-reliance on bed placements and re-designing the reablement service.
- Reviewing all high cost/complex placements.
- Reviewing void costs.

4.2 Legal / Reputational Risk The service has a range of statutory duties, primarily those within the Care Act 2014. These include the provision of social care, provision of preventative services and information/advice, the promotion of individual wellbeing, the promotion of integration between health and social care services, safeguarding adults at risk and Safeguarding Adults Boards, and market-shaping duties to support the choice, quality and sustainability of the care market. The Local Authority is now subject to external regulation in relation to its delivery of these duties by the Care Quality Commission. Failure to achieve a positive judgement outcome from these assessments would negatively impact on the Council and service's reputation, and also carry associated financial and workforce risks.

5. Background Papers

5.1 Appendix A – ASC Lead Member Annual Report Presentation Slides

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