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**North
Northamptonshire
Council**

Democratic Services
The Corby Cube,
George Street,
Corby,
Northants,
NN17 1QG

Meeting: Council
Date: Thursday 25th April, 2024
Time: 6.00 pm
Venue: Council Chamber, Corby Cube, George Street, NN17 1QG

The meeting will be available for the public to view live at our Democratic Services' YouTube channel:

<https://www.youtube.com/c/DemocraticServicesNorthNorthantsCouncil>

Council Membership:

Councillor Barbara Jenney (Chair), Councillor Lora Lawman (Vice-Chair), Councillor Jean Addison, Councillor Tim Allebone, Councillor Valerie Anslow, Councillor Ross Armour, Councillor Paul Bell, Councillor Charlie Best, Councillor Matt Binley, Councillor Jennie Bone, Councillor David Brackenbury, Councillor Wendy Brackenbury, Councillor Scott Brown, Councillor Cedwien Brown, Councillor Leanne Buckingham, Councillor Lyn Buckingham, Councillor Lloyd Bunday, Councillor Jon-Paul Carr, Councillor Robin Carter, Councillor Melanie Coleman, Councillor William Colquhoun, Councillor John Currall, Councillor Alison Dalziel, Councillor Mark Dearing, Councillor Dez Dell, Councillor Scott Edwards, Councillor Jonathan Ekins, Councillor Emily Fedorowycz, Councillor Martin Griffiths, Councillor Jim Hakewill, Councillor Clive Hallam, Councillor Ken Harrington, Councillor Helen Harrison, Councillor Kirk Harrison, Councillor Larry Henson, Councillor Helen Howell, Councillor David Howes, Councillor Philip Irwin, Councillor Bert Jackson, Councillor Ian Jelley, Councillor Matt Keane, Councillor King Lawal, Councillor Graham Lawman, Councillor Anne Lee, Councillor Richard Levell, Councillor Paul Marks, Councillor Dorothy Maxwell, Councillor Bill McElhinney, Councillor Peter McEwan, Councillor John McGhee, Councillor Zoe McGhee, Councillor Andy Mercer, Councillor Gill Mercer, Councillor Macaulay Nichol, Councillor Steven North, Councillor Jan O'Hara, Councillor Dr Anup Pandey, Councillor Tom Partridge-Underwood, Councillor Mark Pengelly, Councillor Harriet Pentland, Councillor Roger Powell, Councillor Elliot Prentice, Councillor Simon Rielly, Councillor Russell Roberts, Councillor Mark Rowley, Councillor Geoff Shacklock, Councillor David Sims, Councillor Jason Smithers, Councillor Chris Smith-Haynes, Councillor Joseph John Smyth, Councillor Sarah Tubbs, Councillor Michael Tye, Councillor Malcolm Ward, Councillor Malcolm Waters, Councillor Andrew Weatherill, Councillor Keli Watts, Councillor Kevin Watt and Councillor Lee Wilkes

Members of the Council are invited to attend the above meeting to consider the items of business listed on the agenda.

This agenda has been published by Democratic Services.

Contact: democraticservices@northnorthants.gov.uk

Item	Subject	Page no.
01.	Apologies To receive any apologies for absence.	
02.	Minutes of the meeting held on 7th March 2024 To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 7 th March 2024.	9 - 40
03.	Declarations of interest. Members to declare any interest in respect of items on the agenda.	
04.	Chair's Announcements To receive any announcements from the Chair.	
05.	Leader's Announcements To receive any announcements from the Leader of the Council.	
06.	Public Participation (i) Public Statements To consider public statements received in accordance with public meeting procedure rule 15. (ii) Public Questions To consider public questions received in accordance with public meeting procedure rule 16. (iii) Petitions To receive petitions qualifying for full Council in accordance with the council's petition scheme.	
07.	Executive Presentations To receive any presentations from the Executive in accordance with meeting procedure rule 3.1 (vi).	
Items requiring decisions		
08.	Annual Report of the Service Delivery Contract between Northamptonshire Children's Trust and West and North Northamptonshire Councils 2022/23 and Update on the Annual Review To provide an update on the progress of the 2022/23 Annual Review of the Service Delivery Contract which includes the 2022/23 Annual Report.	41 - 384

09.	<p>Audit & Governance Committee Annual Report 2023</p> <p>To inform the Council on the work of the Audit and Governance Committee during the twelve-month period of 1st October 2022 to 31st September 2023.</p>	385 - 402
010.	<p>Planning Improvement Board</p> <p>To advise Council of the findings of an internal review and propose the adoption of a Planning Improvement Plan (PIP) and Planning Improvement Board (PIB) to address the action plan recommended in the report.</p>	403 - 420
011.	<p>Start time of Full Council meetings</p> <p>To determine the start time of future full council meetings.</p>	421 - 438
012.	<p>Political Balance on Council Committees</p> <p>To set out the revised political balance of the Council following the results of the Council's Desborough Ward by-election held on 4th April 2024.</p>	439 - 448
013.	<p>Request for Dispensation for Attendance</p> <p>To request a dispensation to a Councillor who is currently unable to attend any Council meetings due to illness.</p>	449 - 454
014.	<p>Motions on Notice</p> <p>Motions on Notice</p> <p>To consider motions received in accordance with Meeting Procedure Rule 18 as follows: -</p> <p><u>Motion 1</u></p> <p>To be proposed by Cllr Jim Hakewill and seconded by Cllr Joseph Smyth -</p> <p><i>"We call upon North Northamptonshire Council to place all current and potential locations (permanent and temporary) for our Gypsy and Traveller communities into the council's agreed Local Plan preparation and consultation stages concluding with formal adoption in March 2026."</i></p> <p><u>Motion 2</u></p> <p>To be proposed by Cllr John McGhee and seconded by Cllr Matt Keane –</p> <p><i>"Corby and North Northants has had steel making and tube making in the area for decades now and with that many people past and</i></p>	

present have been employed in the industry. There is a long history in our area of steel and how it has helped grow the area and provided employment for people from all over North Northants.

This council believes that keeping a steel industry in the UK is vital for the long-term economy of Corby, North Northants and the UK.

This is the time for all MPs to stand up and be counted and back UK Steel and UK workers.

With the right investment nationally, linked to job guarantees, the UK can become the green capital of steel – creating more jobs not losing them. This will save 1000s of jobs and help keep the Corby and North Northants economy strong and keep our residents in Employment.

We call on this Council to support the safe UK steel campaign and ask the Leader of the Council to write to the prime minister asking that Parliament support our local people and the economy by supporting the campaign to save UK steel by supporting these 5 points.

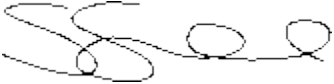
1. ***Expand steelmaking ability by at least double.*** This would take us back towards the European average, while introducing innovative technology and increasing jobs.
2. ***Tackle energy prices.*** Bring in electricity price caps and public ownership of the grid to make our steel even more competitive.
3. ***Change procurement rules*** to ensure UK public contracts use 100% UK steel. This alone can create thousands of jobs.
4. ***Take a public stake in our steel industry.*** No more money for nothing. Public investment for steel must come with solid job guarantees.
5. ***Public investment of £12 billion.*** This will fund a Workers Transition that doubles ability and protects every job. It will pay for itself in as little as 10 years.”

Motion 3

To be proposed by Cllr Alison Dalziel and seconded by Cllr Zoe McGhee

“North Northamptonshire Council is committed to ensuring that any waste product should be recycled where possible to do so. Community Centre waste management currently falls under the commercial waste provision, and centres are provided with a large, single commercial waste bin, for all waste types.

While waste is sorted and recycled after collection, a large proportion of community centre waste could be placed into recycle bins, which includes both dry recyclable and green waste. There is no current provision for community centres to separate and have recycled waste collected, nor is there any green waste collection,

	<p><i>despite many centres having open green space attached to their site and green waste is unfortunately placed into the commercial bins.</i></p> <p><i>This motion calls upon North Northamptonshire Council to provide both dry recyclable and green waste bins to community centres within its own estate/ownership by March 2025, so that dry and green recycling can be collected for NNC's community centres and they can play their part to encourage service users to recycle by having accessible bins available."</i></p>	
015.	Councillor Questions	
	To receive questions from members.	
Urgent Items		
To consider any items of business of which notice has been given to the Proper Officer and the Chair considers to be urgent, pursuant to the Local Government Act 1972.		
016.	Close of Meeting	
<p>Sanjit Sull, Monitoring Officer North Northamptonshire Council</p>  <p>Proper Officer Wednesday 17 April 2024</p>		

Public Participation

The Council has approved procedures for you to present petitions or request to address meetings of the Council

ITEM	NARRATIVE	DEADLINE
Members of the Public Questions	Questions may be submitted by members of the Public who live or work in the North Northamptonshire council area to meetings of the Council. The question must be in writing and submitted 2 clear working days prior to the meeting. There are no supplementary questions permitted, and no debate on questions or answers. A period of 30 minutes (Chair's Discretion) is allocated for Public Questions.	5:00 pm Monday 22 nd April 2024
Members of the Public Agenda Statements	Members of the Public who live or work in the North Northamptonshire council area may make statements at meetings of the Council in relation to reports on the agenda. A request to address the Council must be received 2 clear working days prior to the meeting. The member of the Public has a maximum of 3 minutes to address the committee.	5:00 pm Monday 22 nd April 2024
Other Members Questions	Written questions of up to 50 words maximum permitted. To be received at least 2 clear working days prior to the meeting. Chair's discretion on supplementary question. A period of 30 minutes (Chair's Discretion) is allocated for Other Members Questions.	5:00 pm Monday 22 nd April 2024
Members of	Anyone who lives, works or studies in North Northamptonshire may	

the Public Petitions	submit a petition to the Council. Depending on the size of your petition it will be responded to as follows:-		
	Category	Signatory Threshold	Description
	Petition which triggers a debate	1,500 +	Any petition with 1,500 or more signatures will trigger a debate at a Full Council meeting
	Petition which calls an officer to account	750 – 1,499	Any petition with 750 – 1,499 signatures will summon a senior officer of the Council to give evidence at a public Council meeting
	Standard Petition	5 – 749	Any petition with 5 – 749 signatures will be referred to a senior officer of the Council to provide a response

These procedures are included within the Council's Constitution. Please contact democraticservices@northnorthants.gov.uk for more information.

Members' Declarations of Interest

Members are reminded of their duty to ensure they abide by the approved Member Code of Conduct whilst undertaking their role as a Councillor. Where a matter arises at a meeting which **relates to** a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest, you must declare the interest, not participate in any discussion or vote on the matter and must not remain in the room unless granted a dispensation.

Where a matter arises at a meeting which **relates to** other Registerable Interests, you must declare the interest. You may speak on the matter only if members of the public are also allowed to speak at the meeting but must not take part in any vote on the matter unless you have been granted a dispensation.

Where a matter arises at a meeting which **relates to** your own financial interest (and is not a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest) or **relates to** a financial interest of a relative, friend or close associate, you must disclose the interest and not vote on the matter unless granted a dispensation. You may speak on the matter only if members of the public are also allowed to speak at the meeting.

Members are reminded that they should continue to adhere to the Council's approved rules and protocols during the conduct of meetings. These are contained in the Council's approved Constitution.

If Members have any queries as to whether a Declaration of Interest should be made please contact the Monitoring Officer at – monitoringofficer@northnorthants.gov.uk

Press & Media Enquiries

Any press or media enquiries should be directed through Council's Communications Team to communications@northnorthants.gov.uk

Public Enquiries

Any press or media enquiries should be directed through the Council's Communications Team to media@northnorthants.gov.uk

Webcasting

Meetings of the Council will be filmed by the Council for live and/or subsequent broadcast on the Council's website. The whole of the meeting will be filmed, except where there are confidential or exempt items. A copy will be retained in accordance with the Council's data retention policy.

If you make a representation to the meeting, unless you have specifically asked not to appear on the webcast, you are taking positive action to confirm that you consent to being filmed. You have been made aware of the broadcast and entering the Council Chamber you are consenting to be filmed by North Northamptonshire Council and to the possible use of those images and sound recordings for webcasting.

If you do not wish to have your image captured you should sit in the public gallery area that overlooks the Chamber.

The Council is obliged by law to allow members of the public to take photographs, film, audio-record, blog or tweet the proceedings at public meetings. The Council will only seek to prevent this should it be undertaken in a disruptive or otherwise inappropriate manner.

The Council intends to webcast all of its public meetings held at the Corby Cube, but if it is unable to do so, for the avoidance of doubt, the meeting will continue as scheduled and decisions and minutes made available on the Council's website in the normal manner.

If you have any queries regarding webcasting or the recording of meetings by the public, please contact democraticservices@northnorthants.gov.uk

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Minutes of a meeting of the Council

Held at 6.00 pm on Thursday 7th March, 2024 in the Council Chamber, Corby Cube,
George Street, NN17 1QG

Present:-

Members

Councillor Barbara Jenney (Chair)	Councillor Lora Lawman
Councillor Jean Addison	Councillor Ian Jelley
Councillor Tim Allebone	Councillor Matt Keane
Councillor Ross Armour	Councillor King Lawal
Councillor Charlie Best	Councillor Graham Lawman
Councillor Matt Binley	Councillor Anne Lee
Councillor Jennie Bone	Councillor Richard Levell
Councillor David Brackenbury	Councillor Paul Marks
Councillor Wendy Brackenbury	Councillor Dorothy Maxwell
Councillor Scott Brown	Councillor John McGhee
Councillor Cedwien Brown	Councillor Andy Mercer
Councillor Leanne Buckingham	Councillor Gill Mercer
Councillor Lyn Buckingham	Councillor Macaulay Nichol
Councillor Lloyd Bunday	Councillor Jan O'Hara
Councillor Jon-Paul Carr	Councillor Dr Anup Pandey
Councillor Robin Carter	Councillor Tom Partridge-Underwood
Councillor Melanie Coleman	Councillor Mark Pengelly
Councillor William Colquhoun	Councillor Roger Powell
Councillor John Currall	Councillor Elliot Prentice
Councillor Alison Dalziel	Councillor Simon Rielly
Councillor Dez Dell	Councillor Russell Roberts
Councillor Emily Fedorowycz	Councillor Mark Rowley
Councillor Martin Griffiths	Councillor Geoff Shacklock
Councillor Jim Hakewill	Councillor Jason Smithers
Councillor Clive Hallam	Councillor Joseph John Smyth
Councillor Ken Harrington	Councillor Sarah Tubbs
Councillor Helen Harrison	Councillor Malcolm Ward
Councillor Larry Henson	Councillor Malcolm Waters
Councillor Helen Howell	Councillor Andrew Weatherill
Councillor David Howes	Councillor Keli Watts
Councillor Philip Irwin	Councillor Lee Wilkes
Councillor Bert Jackson	

Officers

Adele Wylie – Chief Executive
Sanjit Sull – Director of Law and Governance (Monitoring Officer)
Kamila Coulson-Patel – Chief Lawyer, Governance and Litigation
Ben Smith – Head of Democratic Services

311 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Valerie Anslow, Paul Bell, Mark Dearing, Scott Edwards, Jonathan Ekins, Peter McEwan, Zoe McGhee, Steven North, Harriet Pentland, David Sims, Chris Smith-Haynes, and Kevin Watt.

312 Minutes of the meeting held on 25th January 2024 and 22nd February 2024

The minutes of the extraordinary meeting of the Council held on 25th January 2024 and Budget Council meeting held on 22nd February 2024 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair, subject to the 22nd February 2024 minutes being amended to reflect the correct spelling of Cllr Elliot Prentice's forename, and to reflect that at minute 309 it was Cllr Hakewill rather than Cllr Fedorowycz who moved the Green Alliance amendment to the motion.

313 Declarations of interest.

The Chair asked those members who wished to do so to declare any interests in respect of items on the agenda.

No declarations were made.

314 Chair's Announcements

The Chair welcomed members, officers and members of the public to the meeting, announcing that the civic role continued to be very busy with two notable events having taken place.

- Firstly, a royal visit from Princess Anne, the Princess Royal to Wellingborough to recognise the work carried out by the charity 'Off the Streets' which aimed to eradicate knife crime in Northamptonshire.
- Secondly, representing the Council at a service of installation and welcome of the Right Reverend Deborah Mary Selin as the 39th Bishop of Peterborough Cathedral.

Other notable events attended included:-

- Holocaust services in Kettering and Rushden;
- County swimming championships in Corby;
- Indian Republic Day hosted by the Hindu Association in Wellingborough.

The Chair also reported that the Vice Chair had also attended events in Corby, Stanford, Wellingborough, Raunds and thanked her for her continued support.

315 Leader's Announcements

The Leader made a statement to Council, as follows:-

International Women's Day

'As many of you know, tomorrow is International Women's Day. This day marks not only achievements and progress of women worldwide but also services as a pointed reminder of the road ahead in pursuing gender equality.

As Leader of the Council I wanted to address you ahead of this significant day. Gender equality is not merely a matter of social justice, it's a foundation upon which a fair, inclusive and prosperous society is built. Our commitment to gender equality reflects our dedication to upholding the principles of equality, equity and justice for all members of our community.

Throughout history, women have been the backbone of society's pioneering change and driving progress. Despite this the struggle for equal rights, opportunities and representation persists. As a father to Michaela and Holly my two daughters, and a beautiful granddaughter Ruby, it has always been important for me to instil an attitude that just because you are a girl, you can't or shouldn't do something. I have always encouraged them to feel no limitations to what is possible. They have grown up to be inspiring, intelligent and amazing young ladies of which I am incredibly proud, and I am sure so will Ruby as she journeys on into her life.

Tomorrow provides the opportunity to mark progress in breaking down the barriers that hinder women's full participation in all aspects of public life. I am proud that North Northamptonshire Council welcomed its first female chair of the Council last year. I am also proud that the Council appointed its first female Chief Executive earlier this year. It's also worth noting that they are joined at the top table by Councillor Lora Lawman, our vice-chair, and Sanjit Sull, our monitoring officer, and Kamila Coulson-Patel, our deputy monitoring officer.

This year's International Women's Day theme is Inspire Inclusion and I am sure everyone in this room and colleagues throughout North Northamptonshire Council will agree that greater female representation at all levels of local government is both good and right.

So as we mark International Women's Day tomorrow, this Council can continue its splendid work in inspiring future generations of inclusion through our policies, debate and action. Together we can forge women's equity, celebrate women's achievements, raise awareness about discrimination and take action to drive gender equivalence.

International Women's Day belongs to everyone everywhere in pursuit of equity, every day, thank you.

Former Lord Lieutenant David Lang, CBE

I also wanted to take a few moments to say a few words about the former Lord Lieutenant of Northamptonshire David Lang who has sadly passed away. Mr Lang served as the Lord Lieutenant from 2014 to 2020 and many of you will know that he was recently acknowledged in the 2024 New Year's honours List where he was awarded the CBE by Her Royal Highness Princess Anne for his services to charity and philanthropy.

Without any doubt Mr Lang significantly and positively impacted the local area. He worked to support a wide array of charities and voluntary organisations and did a

tremendous amount of work to help promote enterprise and business in the area too. He played a vital role in establishing the Northamptonshire Community Foundation which has issued over £20m in grants to causes across the area. He also served as the County's High Sherriff and was Pro-Chancellor at the University of Northampton.

Mr Lane will be remembered at a private family service, but I understand there will be a public memorial service to be held later this year to celebrate his life. I propose that we hold a minute's silence as a mark of respect to David Lang, a remarkable person who was a force for good in the area and who will sadly be missed.

[Members, officers and the public stood in silent tribute to David Lang.]

Officer Terms and Conditions

Chair, I do have one further announcement to make. Members will recall that we agreed our new terms and conditions back in August 2023. This was a fantastic achievement for this authority, and they were developed to support our ambitions of being an employer of choice. Those colleagues who have joined us since vesting day will have moved into new roles since April 2023, have had their jobs evaluated under the new scheme and are now moving onto NNC pay terms and conditions.

In addition, all new recruits are being appointed to our new pay arrangements and this is enabling us to attract talent that will help us drive this fantastic Council forward. However this has left us with feelings of inequality and unfairness from some of our employees who transferred in to NNC on their previous employers' terms and conditions.

To give an example, our social workers who are on TUPE protected County Council terms and conditions and who have given our Council and the previous County Council long service will now receive less pay in some cases and less favourable terms and conditions than a new social worker joining the organisation. That is because the NNC pay band for our social worker role is higher than it was at the County Council. The resulting pay differential is quite simply not fair. Why would you come to a job where you're doing the same job and being paid less, it just doesn't make sense.

The situation we are in is not of our own making. It is a hangover of the local government reform in Northamptonshire. But just because we did not create the inequalities it doesn't mean we shouldn't fix them. We need to fix them, and we need to make sure everyone feels valued. We have always said that we would not be able to unilaterally move all employees to new pay terms and conditions but if we are truly to stick to our word of wanting to be an employer of choice and if we want to support our staff in the way that we say we do we can longer sustain differences that make some of our staff feel less valued than others.

We will therefore be offering every employee the opportunity to voluntarily move onto the new North Northamptonshire terms and conditions. This will give those employees who would receive preferential pay terms and conditions if they were to move on to our terms the opportunity to do so. This will enable more fairness and it will move us closer to the 'one council' approach that we are striving for. This will support our ambition to be an employer of choice.

Clearly a significant amount of work was undertaken to achieve the implementation of the pay and grading and this will also be a huge undertaking. We need to manage expectations regarding the timeline for staff, how and when we start this implementation and relevant details will be communicated to staff by officers.

This is a fantastic piece of work from officers and I hugely applaud them for that. It will make our Council so much fairer for all grades within the authority.

Thank you.

316 Public Participation

Two members of the Public were invited to speak before Council, having registered their interest under public participation procedure rules.

Martin Toms made a statement urging the Council to do as much as it could to preserve and enlarge the forest and other green spaces within North Northamptonshire to ensure that residents and other users would derive benefits well beyond the cost of maintaining them.

James Town also made a statement in favour of green spaces, stating that green spaces were essential for promoting community wellbeing and nurturing both physical and mental health. By investing in the creation and maintenance of green infrastructure, he stated that policymakers, urban planners, and communities could create vibrant, liveable environments that support the holistic well-being of individuals and enhance the quality of life for generations to come.

A public question to Council in accordance with meeting procedure rule 16 had also been received from Mr Nick Shaw, who was unable to attend the meeting in person. The question and answer received were therefore taken as read, having previously been circulated, a copy of which is attached to these minutes at Appendix A.

317 Executive Presentations

The Leader confirmed that there were no Executive presentations to be made on this occasion.

318 Pay Policy Statement 2024/25

Council considered a report seeking approval of the Pay Policy Statement attached at Appendix A and which asked Council to note that a package of new pay, terms, and conditions of employment and associated pay and employment policies for North Northamptonshire Council were still to be agreed.

Cllr Jason Smithers moved and Cllr Lora Lawman seconded the recommendations in the report.

Following a short debate, the motion was voted on, with 59 councillors in favour, 2 abstaining and 0 against.

Resolved:-

That Council:-

- a) Approves the Pay Policy detailed in Appendix A of the report; and
- b) Delegates to the Chief Executive the making of any in-year amendments to the Pay Policy Statement that may be required to complete the Pay Data and Chief Executive Remuneration relative to other Council Employees after 1st April 2024, when the Green Book pay award is agreed.

Reasons for Decision: -

- *It is a statutory requirement under the Localism Act 2011 for the Authority to approve and publish a Pay Policy Statement;*
- *Due regard has been given to the requirements of the Localism Act 2011 and associated guidance issued or approved by the Secretary of State, in setting out this Pay Policy Statement.*

Alternative Options Considered:-

- *It is a statutory requirement that Council approves and publishes a Pay Policy Statement and therefore no alternative options were considered.*

319 Political Balance on Council Committees

Council considered an addendum report setting out a number of additional changes to Group appointments following the issuing of the original report on 28th February 2024. The addendum report encompassed both the contents of the original report and those changes notified to the Monitoring Officer since that date. A copy of the report is filed with the report at item 9 on the agenda for the meeting.

Cllr Jason Smithers moved and Cllr Matt Keane seconded the recommendations in the addendum report to Council.

It was noted that following recent changes to the political makeup of the Council, there were now four political groups, with the Conservative Group holding 52 seats, the Labour Group 17 seats, Green Alliance Group 4 seats and Independent Alliance Group 4 seats. One seat remained vacant.

Following the debate's conclusion, the motion was voted on, with 61 councillors in favour, 0 abstaining and 0 against.

Resolved:-

That Council:-

- a) Approves the revised distribution of seats across the political groups for ordinary committees and area committees, as set out in Addendum Appendix A, recommendations a) and b);
- b) Notes the following changes in the leadership arrangements of the recognised political groups for the municipal year 2023/24:-

- Deputy Leader of the Green Alliance Group – Councillor Charlie Best;
 - Leader of the Independent Alliance Group – Councillor Cedwien Brown;
 - Deputy Leader of the Independent Alliance Group – Councillor Jim Hakewill.
- c) Notes that in accordance with the Council’s Scheme of Delegation, any changes to places on committees arising from the new political balance will be made by the Monitoring Officer in consultation with the leaders of the political groups represented on the Council.

Reason for Decisions: –

- *To ensure that the revised political balance of the Council is applied to the governance structure of the Council, in accordance with law and approved guidelines contained in the Council Constitution.*

Alternative Options Considered:-

- *None, as the revised political balance calculation is required to be reported to full Council under the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 and Local Government (Committees and Political Groups) Regulations 1990.*

320 Motions on Notice

Motion 1 – Green Spaces

Cllr Emily Fedorowycz moved and Cllr Dez Dell seconded the following motion to Council.

“This Council believes that every North Northants resident should have access to green spaces and recognises the importance of public access to these spaces for community well-being. This Council strives to achieve and advocate for “everyone to have access to green space or water within a 15-minute walk from their home as set out in the National Environmental Improvement Plan. This Council further acknowledges the benefits of green spaces for physical and mental health.

This Council resolves:

1. *To ensure all North Northants residents have easy access to quality green spaces*
2. *Will take steps to protect and enhance our green infrastructure.*
3. *To explore integration of access to green spaces as part of the development of the Urban Green Space Strategy*
4. *That the relevant EAP is made aware of the opportunity to apply to be a new national forest, and consider if this aligns with our strategy for green spaces.”*

During debate, the importance of maintaining and improving access to green spaces was raised by all councillors speaking on the motion.

Following the debate’s conclusion, the motion was voted on, with 60 councillors in favour, 0 abstaining and 0 against.

Resolved:-

This Council believes that every North Northants resident should have access to green spaces and recognises the importance of public access to these spaces for community well-being. This Council strives to achieve and advocate for "everyone to have access to green space or water within a 15-minute walk from their home as set out in the National Environmental Improvement Plan. This Council further acknowledges the benefits of green spaces for physical and mental health.

This Council resolves:

1. To ensure all North Northants residents have easy access to quality green spaces
2. Will take steps to protect and enhance our green infrastructure.
3. To explore integration of access to green spaces as part of the development of the Urban Green Space Strategy
4. That the relevant EAP is made aware of the opportunity to apply to be a new national forest, and consider if this aligns with our strategy for green spaces.

Motion 2 – Fostering

Councillor Jim Hakewill moved and Cllr Charlie Best seconded the following motion to Council:-

“This council welcomes the improvements achieved by Northamptonshire Children’s Trust Fostering Agency to being rated as “Good” following Ofsted’s January 2024 inspection.

As corporate parents it is reassuring that our friends and colleagues at the Trust are succeeding in protecting and enriching the lives of children and recognising the amazing role of Foster carers.

This Council calls on the Leader of the Council to write to the Chief Executive of the Northamptonshire Children’s Trust to reinforce the Councils commitment to supporting it in continuing to move forward positively.”

During debate, councillors spoke about the benefits of fostering to improving the lives of looked after children and gave thanks to foster carers for their commitment to the children of North Northamptonshire was heard.

Following the debate’s conclusion, the motion was voted on, with 60 councillors in favour, 0 abstaining and 0 against.

Resolved:-

This Council welcomes the improvements achieved by Northamptonshire Children’s Trust Fostering Agency to being rated as “Good” following Ofsted’s January 2024 inspection.

As corporate parents it is reassuring that our friends and colleagues at the Trust are succeeding in protecting and enriching the lives of children and recognising the amazing role of Foster carers.

This Council calls on the Leader of the Council to write to the Chief Executive of the Northamptonshire Children's Trust to reinforce the Councils commitment to supporting it in continuing to move forward positively.

321 Councillor Questions

The Chair noted that 18 councillor questions had been received for this meeting in accordance with meeting procedure rule 17.

Each of the 18 questions were asked and responded to, as well as supplementary questions and answers, where requested.

A full copy of the questions and responses made, as well as any supplementary questions and responses, are filed with these minutes at Appendix B.

322 Close of Meeting

There being no further business to be transacted, the Chair thanked members, officers and the public viewing the meeting both in person and online for their attendance and closed the meeting.

Chair

Date

The meeting closed at 8.15 pm

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Public Questions and Responses – 7 March 2024

PUBLIC QUESTIONS Council – 7 th March 2024				
No.	Received from	Executive Member	Question	Answer
1.	Nick Shaw	Cllr Matt Binley	‘Were any risk assessments carried out prior to the roll-out of LED streetlighting which has resulted in very dim lighting levels on Deeble Road in Kettering, leaving residents feeling unsafe and how much money has been saved since the lights were changed?’	<p>Once completed, the conversion of the Highways streetlights across the network to LED will result in an annual saving of over £1m in energy costs alone. With predictions in energy costs, this saving is expected to rise to £1.5m per year by 2032. The conversion is set to reduce the Council’s carbon footprint by 500 tonnes/year thus contributing towards the Council’s commitment to become net zero by 2030. Given the extent of the network, the Council does not calculate the costs of street lighting per individual street or road.</p> <p>Furthermore, the LED lights are much more controlled, so any private properties and non-highway areas currently impacted by older lights will get less nuisance light and the ‘warm light’ we have specified is less intrusive for local wildlife.</p> <p>The LED lighting meets the Council’s lighting standards, which have not changed. These standards are not a precise light level, but a range with upper and lower limits. Levels are affected by: the distance from the lamp; road layout; junctions; light spacing and height; vegetation and other obstructions; and what brightness we can set lights to.</p> <p>There is no set level of lighting required by law, so the Council decides on a discretionary basis: where to provide light; to</p>

				<p>what level; when and if they dim; whether they operate on a part-night basis. The Council provides higher standards of lighting in areas where there are more pedestrian movements such as pedestrian crossings and close to amenities. This enables the Council to assess the risks of potential conflict points and if appropriate and practical, amend the lighting accordingly.</p> <p>Given the lighting standards are not changing as a result of the LED roll-out, there is no need to carry out risk assessments in advance of the change. Since the switch to LED, the lighting standards along Deeble Road have been checked and the Council's contractor, Balfour Beatty, have confirmed that they meet those standards. Given new pedestrian crossings are due to be installed along Deeble Road, the lighting will be assessed again given the potential risk for conflict between vehicles and pedestrians at these locations. This will consider whether there are any particular risks that may arise as a result of insufficient lighting between vehicles and pedestrians at those crossings and consider whether enhanced lighting is feasible and necessary.</p> <p>The Leader has requested a review of the lighting standards along Deeble Road. An assessment is being carried out by the contractor, Balfour Beatty, to determine whether the lighting could be enhanced and how much it would cost to do so. I expect to receive this assessment later this month.</p>
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End of Public Questions

Councillor Questions and Responses – 7 March 2024

No.	Received from	Executive Member	Question	Answer
1.	Cllr Anne Lee	Cllr Jason Smithers	Which trips abroad by councillors have been funded by North Northants Council?	<p>In 2022 NNC funded a trip to the annual International Walking Association Conference. It was a requirement of the IML Walking Association that if the council wanted to continue as a member to enable it to host the Waendel Walk that a representative must attend. The conference was held in Norway.</p> <p>The relevant Executive Member was chosen to attend. Flights and transfers were booked on an officer’s government procurement card. In the end that Exec Member could not attend, and Councillor Graham Lawman attended instead.</p> <p>There was a budget allocated for this expenditure which NNC inherited from the former Wellingborough BC. The expenditure for the trip made on the government procurement card was £654.</p> <p>The Waendel Walk has since been transferred to Wellingborough Town Council so any costs associated for the 2023 event or conference have not been met by NNC.</p>
2.	Cllr Mark Pengelly	Cllr Lloyd Bunday	What were the Legal costs for past 12 months on fighting SEND cases by the council ?	The reported spend on Legal support for the Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) process up to period 10 was £42k. The full year budget for these costs for the 2023/24 financial year is £95k.

No.	Received from	Executive Member	Question	Answer
Page 22			<p>Supplementary Question:- Does the Executive Member agree with me that it doesn't sit right with parents and guardians that the Council has a budget of £95k to fight parents and guardians who are trying to get their children into school and of the £42k spent fighting how much of that was given in the parent's favour and how many cases did the parents win?</p>	<p>Supplementary Answer:- I will pass the supplementary question on to Councillor Scott Edwards for a written response, who unfortunately is unable to attend this meeting.</p>
	Cllr Mark Pengelly	Cllr Mark Rowley	<p>How many children are now not in school or waiting to be allocated places in North Northants?</p> <p>Supplementary Question:- How many children have an allocated school place but are still not present in the school because</p>	<p>The total reported number of pupils without a school place at the end of January 2024 was 312. Of these, 150 are currently in the School Admissions process, 49 are excluded or absent from school and 113 are awaiting a specialist placement linked to an Education, Health and Care Plan or other identified SEND need. As a comparison, at the end of the summer term in July 2023, the equivalent figure was 291, so there has been a small increase over this period. This is linked to the increased demand, and limited supply, for specialist places locally. Council officers work closely with DFE colleagues on understanding changes in demand and developing plans to address any areas of challenge.</p> <p>Supplementary Answer:- I will pass the supplementary question on to Councillor Scott Edwards for a written response.</p>

No.	Received from	Executive Member	Question	Answer
			<p>of its suitability and how is that reported as some parents and guardians are having to home educate whilst waiting to get their EHP place.? Does the Executive Member recognise that one child not in school is one too many?</p>	
<p>4.</p> <p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Page 23</p>	<p>Cllr Mark Pengelly</p>	<p>Cllr Jason Smithers</p>	<p>The Leader of the Tory Group says Kier are failing, can he say where he believes we need improvements and who is to blame for these failures?</p>	<p>Kier are contractually responsible for repairing our highways network in line with the Council's standards, which are laid out in the contract. A key indicator within the performance framework relates to the time taken to repair potholes. These standards are published on our website.</p> <p>Each month we report to Executive Kier's performance in relation to repairing potholes within the timeframes specified in the contract. Kier are currently performing ahead of those standards and have been for many months. It is important that our in-house contract team continue to push Kier to provide the highest standards possible so that we can get the best value for money for our residents.</p> <p>Whilst Kier carry out routine inspections of the highways network to assess for defects, we also encourage residents to report defects via our website using the reporting tool: Fix My Street. On some occasions, Kier have not provided updates in a timely manner on some of the cases that have been raised by residents. The contract team have raised this with Kier and an improvement plan has been put in place.</p>

No.	Received from	Executive Member	Question	Answer
Page 24			<p>Supplementary Question:- Does the Leader agree with people on this side of the Council also most our residents that kier wasn't fit for purpose in April 2020 when he proclaimed that Kier were the new contractor that were going to be working on behalf of NNC at the time, also 2022 when he said that we need a fit for purpose highways contractor that's essential in the delivery of services. Who is to blame for the failure of Kier, is it the previous Executive Member or Cabinet Member at the County Council who brought this in or is the present Executive Member?</p>	<p>I know how important the condition of our highways is to local residents and I shall continue to monitor Kier's performance to ensure they are delivering on their contractual commitments for the benefits of our residents.</p> <p>Supplementary Answer:- I don't feel that the highways Authority is failing, I think it is doing the work we require of them. I think there is some attention we need on key performance indicators to bring them up to speed and let them understand the high expectations that all of these members here all of the members over there expect of our highways contractor. Apportioning blame to Executive Members – I do not think that is conducive to a good discussion in this chamber. I am happy to have an offline conversation with Councillor Pengelly.</p>

No.	Received from	Executive Member	Question	Answer
5.	Cllr Lyn Buckingham	Cllr Matt Binley	<p>How many play parks does NNC have across the district and out of those NNC play parks how many have a provision for disabled children and where are these located?</p> <p>Supplementary Question:- Will NNC be consulting with specialist disability groups and SEND groups on what sort of equipment or play areas are needed in the future?</p>	<p>There are 107 play areas managed directly by NNC in our open spaces and country parks. This does not include play parks within North Northants that are managed by Town and Parish Councils on sites they own. All parks within NNC management are inspected by qualified inspectors on a cyclical basis to comply with the relevant legislation, defects and repairs are carried out by suitably qualified persons. All parks are designed to cater for a range of ages and abilities, including relevant disability access legislation and inclusive equipment.</p> <p>The Council is also consulting on the development of an Urban Green Space strategy, backed by £1.5 million from the Government’s UK Shared Prosperity Fund. We are actively looking for feedback on how our urban green space can be enhanced, including improvements to accessibility.</p> <p>Supplementary Answer:- With regard to people with SEND needs there are already designs that are in existence such as the sensory domes which are the types of equipment that are used. I certainly know of one that is due to be delivered this year in North Northamptonshire.</p> <p>It is not so much about consulting about what type of equipment is needed and wanted in an area because of course that type of thing is already known about so that it caters for</p>

No.	Received from	Executive Member	Question	Answer
				<p>individuals who have a whole spectrum of different needs, it's more about where those are best situated.</p>
6.	Cllr Lyn Buckingham	Cllr Mark Rowley	<p>How many tenants are waiting to downsize under the council's Fresh start (for Corby) and other similar scheme for Kettering, if they have a downsizing scheme (please let us know if there is one for Kettering)</p> <p>Supplementary Question:- Would Cllr Rielly look into the speed of people being able to downsize because we are hearing that it can still take up to two years so we have a lot of tenants who are</p>	<p>There are 163 active applications on Keyways for North Northamptonshire Council tenants requiring to downsize as of 04 March 2024. Housing currently have two schemes and provide one-to-one support throughout the process:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fresh Start in Corby • Home Moves in Kettering <p>Both schemes can help tenants to downsize to a smaller, more suitable accommodation and free up much needed larger accommodation. Housing Officers/ Financial Inclusion and Support Officers promote both schemes in particular under occupied properties, people struggling with affordability due to “bedroom tax” or with heating/decorating and maintaining their home or if the property no longer meets the needs of the tenant due to medical issues or specific succession cases.</p> <p>Housing Options also advise and support transfer applications about the schemes.</p> <p>Supplementary Answer:- Yes, happy to look into that and see what we can do.</p>

No.	Received from	Executive Member	Question	Answer								
			waiting to move up into two or three bedroom properties who are unable to do so due to the blockage.									
7.	Cllr Lyn Buckingham	Cllr Mark Rowley	Please could you let us know if the backlog of housing repairs (for which NNC put in £900K) has been completed in both Corby and Kettering if not what is still outstanding?	<p>The Backlog Repairs' Project was approved in 2023 to complete the backlog repairs that had accrued during the pandemic and to run for one year from May 2023 and conclude in May 2024.</p> <p>The project was allocated an additional budget of £900,000 across both neighbourhood accounts.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In May 2023 there were 5,352 outstanding/backlog repairs. • As of the 28th February 2024, there are 1,124 outstanding repairs. <p>The project is now in month nine of the programme and on target for the final quarter.</p> <p>As such, we have hit 79.0% of the Repairs Backlog against an agreed target of 79.5%.</p> <p>The table below shows the budget allocation for this project and current spend:</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th><i>Neighbourhood Area</i></th> <th><i>Initial Allocation</i></th> <th><i>Spend to date (28/02/24)</i></th> <th><i>Budget remaining</i></th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td> </td> <td> </td> <td> </td> <td> </td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	<i>Neighbourhood Area</i>	<i>Initial Allocation</i>	<i>Spend to date (28/02/24)</i>	<i>Budget remaining</i>				
<i>Neighbourhood Area</i>	<i>Initial Allocation</i>	<i>Spend to date (28/02/24)</i>	<i>Budget remaining</i>									

No.	Received from	Executive Member	Question	Answer								
Page 28			<p>Supplementary Question:- Are there any current backlogs of repairs occurring because of work that's gone on? Have we been able to keep up with day to day repairs, not just the backlog?</p>	<table border="1"> <tr> <td>Corby</td> <td>£500,000</td> <td>£229,146</td> <td>£270,854</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Kettering</td> <td>£400,000</td> <td>£157,265</td> <td>£242,735</td> </tr> </table> <p>We have employed an additional contractor to undertake fencing works and remain on track to complete the backlog project on time and to budget.</p> <p>Supplementary Answer:- There are two teams actually working on this I believe, one doing the old backlog that's highlighted in your supplementary and the ongoing repairs undertaken by another team. So there is a backlog but they are working on it.</p>	Corby	£500,000	£229,146	£270,854	Kettering	£400,000	£157,265	£242,735
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Kettering	£400,000	£157,265	£242,735									
8.	Cllr Anne Lee	Cllr Helen Howell	<p>What is being done to safeguard the accreditation of Kettering's museum?</p>	<p>Officers are preparing to embark on a comprehensive North Northamptonshire Heritage Masterplan. This initiative, supported by funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, will provide strategic direction for the restoration of the museum and the optimal storage and care of collections across North Northamptonshire.</p> <p>All archaeological archives under the care of North Northamptonshire and West Northamptonshire will be housed in the ARC, ensuring their safety and preservation. These archives will be made available to local museums, including our own, as and when required. This will include those that are currently housed in Kettering.</p>								

No.	Received from	Executive Member	Question	Answer
Page 29			<p>Supplementary Question:- Since most of the collections of Kettering Museum that are in storage are social history items rather than archaeological items, do we have the Executive Member's assurance that those collections in storage are being looked after properly and regularly visited to check for signs of woodworm etc?</p>	<p>Upon completion of the heritage masterplan, officers will collaborate with the National Lottery Heritage Fund to commence the restoration and eventual reopening of the museum. In the meantime the Gallery and Museum collections are being managed and officer are in regular liaison with our regional contact for Museum accreditation. The accreditation remains in place but reaccreditation is currently paused.</p> <p>Supplementary Answer:- The answer to that is yes.</p>
9.	Cllr Ross Armour	Cllr Helen Howell	<p>When will a condition survey take place for the disused sports pavilion at Lake Avenue in Kettering so it can be brought back to life for the community to use?</p> <p>Supplementary Question:-</p>	<p>A condition survey has been completed for the pavilion at Lake Avenue. This, along with condition survey data on the wider Leisure estate, will feed into the development of the Council's Leisure Strategy, which will consider future investment need and their prioritisation. In the meantime, the property remains in use.</p> <p>Supplementary Answer:-</p>

No.	Received from	Executive Member	Question	Answer
			I was a little bit confused by the latter part of this answer because my findings are that the pavilion is essentially desolate at the present time, so can I simply ask who is using it?	It is in use and is being used by the Kettering Harriers so I am not too sure what you mean by desolate. I have been assured by officers it is in use.
10.	Cllr Ross Armour	Cllr David Brackenbury	Will the leader review and change as a matter of urgency the current taxi licensing policy that states taxi replacement vehicles need to be no older than 4 years?	It was the intention to review the policy two years after introduction. However, the Department for Transport released updated best practice guidance for hackney carriages and private hire vehicles to licensing authorities in November 2023. In light of that, the Authority will be reviewing the North Northamptonshire Council Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Policy during 2024. However, no commitment can be made to the outcomes of that review at this time. The Authority's policy will need to reflect the best practice guidance and maintain its commitments to the Authority's climate change agenda.
11.	Cllr Simon Rielly	Cllr Matt Binley	<p>The government allocated NNC additional Highways money to repair our road network, fix streetlights, repairs road signs and make our roads safer.</p> <p>Can the Leader reassure the chamber how the money will be used and will our current road network that is in desperate need of repair take priority?</p>	<p>We welcome the additional funding provided by the Government to repair and maintain our highways network. We will ensure this funding is used in the most cost-effective way so that we can make the very most of the additional funding for the benefit of our residents and road users.</p> <p>The additional funding follows the annual allocation of the Government funding that totals £9.768m for 2024/25 and was accepted by the Executive on 15th February 2024. This funding will be used to maintain the highway network to a safe standard and improve access for residents and visitors across North Northamptonshire in accordance with the</p>

No.	Received from	Executive Member	Question	Answer
Page 31				<p>Northamptonshire Asset Management Plan, Local Transport Plan and Network Management Plan.</p> <p>The Government have provided a further £2.1m (£1.069m per year) to be spent during 2023/24 and 2024/25. This funding is part of the Government’s eleven-year plan to invest in road maintenance and arises from the cancellation of the Northern HS2 line. We have already published a programme of works which have been enabled by this funding. This money will be spent on resurfacing roads, cycleways and footways and maintaining bridges, as well as preventing potholes and other road defects. We looked at the annual condition surveys of the highway network and used our highways asset management strategy to prioritise work based on the condition of the road, while considering other local factors such as: road importance; number of defects; number of customer complaints. This programme consists of additional road treatment schemes which will improve road surface and prolong the life of the road surface. Network North funding North Northamptonshire Council (northnorthants.gov.uk)</p> <p>Furthermore, the Council has allocated £9m within its own capital programme to boost our maintenance highways budget for the next three years. In total, as part of the Capital programme for 2024 – 2028 the Council agreed at its meeting on 22nd February to spend approximately £49.1m over the next four financial years on highways projects, the largest investment the council has made towards highways to date.</p>

No.	Received from	Executive Member	Question	Answer
Page 32				<p>Most recently, the Government have announced a further £149m which will be provided to North Northamptonshire over the 7 years from 2025/26. This is to be spent on the Council's overall priorities for highway improvements, not just maintenance. Whilst the Government have confirmed the overall funding package, we are waiting to hear how the funding will be profiled over the 7 years, although it is clear that the majority of the funding will be in later years. The in-house highways team are now working to devise a programme of works which will seek to get the best value from this funding. Once that programme is complete, we will publish it on the Council's website.</p> <p>The full programme for maintenance and preventative works during 2024/ 25 will be outlined in the Highways Annual Plan, which we expect to finalise in early April; an Executive Summary of which will be circulated to all Members. These funding streams do not include the further funding confirmed by the Government for the Isham bypass, which is subject to the successful submission of the necessary business cases as well as planning permission, nor the work to dual the section of the A43 between Holcot and Sywell roundabouts. Work on both of these projects is progressing well.</p>

No.	Received from	Executive Member	Question	Answer
12.	Cllr John McGhee	Cllr David Brackenbury	<p>Corby has a resident who has stolen land behind people's houses. The land is being turned into a hard stand and fires are being lit as well as rubbish being left there.</p> <p>As well stealing land neighbours are so upset with the constant disturbances and fires at their back gates. Why have we not in 2 years dealt with this? Is it a lack of resources?</p> <p>Supplementary Question:- Does Councillor Brackenbury agree with me that if we do not deal with this as soon as possible we will encourage others to do the same thing on our green land and on our green spaces?</p>	<p>Officers are aware of this particular case. Planning Enforcement, Environmental Health and Street scene teams are due to discuss the recent nuisance factors due to the nature of the complaints.</p> <p>We are aware of the encroachment into the amenity land at the rear, but the adverse possession of land is not within the enforcement remit of the authority. The council is aware who owns the land but all attempts to contact them, including several emails and calls have elicited no response. As this is ultimately a civil matter between the two landowners the Council would usually ask the landowner to deal with the encroachment, as it is their land, but as that has been fruitless the council has sought to help.</p> <p>Based on a further site visit this week, officers are now considering more formal enforcement action and will ensure the local ward members are kept up to date as this progresses.</p> <p>Supplementary Answer:- It is a bit complicated because the adverse possession of land as I explained in the answer is in fact a civil matter and it is not within the competence of the Council. However, I do know there is a lot of unpleasant environmental effects going on and we are taking a more proactive approach to work with enforcement to try and make the situation as clear as possible. I can also talk to you offline and am more than happy to keep an interest in this.</p>

No.	Received from	Executive Member	Question	Answer
13.	Cllr Emily Fedorowycz	Cllr Helen Howell	<p>What is the full budgeted cost of implementing the temporary Kettering library facility and when will the permanent building be reopened?</p>	<p>The additional cost to the service for the relocation to the temporary library facility in Kettering was £120 for external directional signage and £200 for a fire risk assessment to take place, (£320 in total). Everything else related to the move was managed in-house by the library team apart from the IT cabling, which cost £853 and has been covered within the allocated IT Services budget.</p> <p>The Replacement Roof project has been mobilised. It remains the intention to move the library back to its permanent home once the library roof is watertight, so long as it is safe to do so from a health and safety perspective. Project timelines at this stage indicate the earliest that might be is Spring 2025, but this is subject to change.</p>
			<p>Supplementary Question:- Knowing that the library roof has been a known issue for over half a decade, how has it not been budgeted for and actioned before it has reached a critical point, and what will the Council be doing to make up for the fact that the library cannot celebrate its 120th anniversary in May 2024 with an open facility?</p>	<p>Supplementary Answer:- I cannot answer on issues that happened prior to vesting day as the library was the responsibility of the County Council and the extension part of the library was also part of Kettering Borough Council's work as they went out for the funding.</p> <p>As for the celebrations, unfortunately there's not a great deal we can do about the library as the roof is needing replacement and I think that it is really critical that we ensure we protect that building for future generations. As soon as the library can be opened it will be.</p>

No.	Received from	Executive Member	Question	Answer
14.	Cllr Emily Fedorowycz	Cllr Harriet Pentland	<p>What is the aim and impact of the council’s Climate Conferences? Has it impacted Net Zero and Carbon Footprint targets and actions?</p>	<p>The NN climate conference has now run for three consecutive years, with 32 speakers covering a diverse range of climate topics from climate-friendly farming, sustainable food production, nature recovery, sustainable tourism, renewable energy, and sustainable travel, to name just a few.</p> <p>The aim of the climate conference is to raise knowledge and awareness of sustainable initiatives and opportunities and foster collective action and build a sustainable future for the local community in the face of climate change challenges. We have seen our own carbon footprint targets influenced by these initiatives, as evidenced by the rollout of the carbon management plan in areas such as procurement, ICT, fleet, environment, and in Council owned buildings. A report updating on the Council’s carbon management plan progress and areas of focus will be presented to Executive in April.</p> <p>However, it is important to recognise the Council’s role in influencing carbon emissions in the area, with the Council being responsible for approximately 2% of carbon emissions within North Northants, but able to influence over 33% of all emissions across North Northants.</p> <p>Therefore, we play a crucial role in influencing carbon emissions in the local area by implementing policies, programs, and initiatives that promote sustainability and mitigate climate change impacts. Through initiatives such as the NN climate conference we can demonstrate both proactive leadership and community engagement on the importance of</p>

No.	Received from	Executive Member	Question	Answer
Page 36			<p>Supplementary Question:- Regarding fostering collective action, how is a public broadcast anything more than a talking shop and how are we actually encouraging people to be engaged and generate collective action with our residents and our businesses?</p>	<p>sustainability now, and call on the convening power of the Council to draw sustainability partners together, support our Big 50 vision of giving the best life for all, and create a more environmentally sustainable future for North Northamptonshire.</p> <p>Supplementary Answer by Cllr Smithers on behalf of Cllr Pentland:- The Climate Conference is a really useful tool to getting people engaged locally about understanding what this authority is doing to reduce our carbon footprint. I think that the engagement that comes out of the online discussions that go on to YouTube is watched by quite a few people and it probably inspires some young individuals to think about their impact on the climate. We're progressively moving forward finding the baseline position here at the Council and we will continue to do so. We will continue to engage and I encourage the climate conference to continue throughout the coming years. It is a great tool to use to advertise hat we are doing.</p>
15.	Cllr Emily Fedorowycz	Cllr Helen Howell	<p>When will the consultant's business plan for the Kettering Leisure Village be available for the community to comment on, as well as a formal scrutiny committee agenda item to debate the options, as promised at full council in June 2023?</p> <p>Supplementary Question:-</p>	<p>The options review undertaken by a specialist Leisure management consultant is now finalised, and a report is being prepared to present to the Place & Environment Scrutiny Committee at the end of March. The report and feedback from the Scrutiny Panel meeting will subsequently be considered by Executive.</p> <p>Supplementary Answer:-</p>

No.	Received from	Executive Member	Question	Answer
			<p>What engagement with the KLV campaign group has taken place to get their input on this report and ongoing plan and have they been made aware of these meetings and this time frame so they can come and speak if they wish to?</p>	<p>The KLV support group has not been in contact with this Council at all. The paper is in its readiness now to go scrutiny as it states, which is a public meeting and they are able to attend and speak at that meeting should they wish to.</p> <p>The consultation paper was undertaken by an external consultant so it is their findings that we have received and are now assessing. By all means we would love the support group to come to scrutiny and then the Executive, they are more than welcome.</p>
Page 37	Cllr Jim Hakewill	Cllr Helen Howell	<p>What is the present position regarding the proposed disaggregation of the Library service between north and west and when will the next steps take place?</p> <p>Supplementary Question:- When will the proposals to be considered by the Joint Shared Service Committee be subject to scrutiny? My understanding is the Shared Services Committee is just six councillors.</p>	<p>Officers from both Councils have developed an options appraisal and impact assessment relating to further disaggregation of the library service, which is already 85% disaggregated. Currently there is no agreed position on disaggregation between NNC and WNC. If and when this is achieved the proposals will be taken through the Joint Shared Services Committee.</p> <p>Supplementary Question:- At this time there are no proposals coming forward so until we know what is coming and when, at that point there will then be an opportunity for members to call it in following the decision.</p>
17.	Cllr Jim Hakewill	Cllr Matt Binley	How many £20 Green Waste rebates were issued to residents of	We were pleased to offer a rebate to those existing garden waste subscribers in the East Northants area who had loyally

No.	Received from	Executive Member	Question	Answer
Page 38			<p>the former East Northamptonshire District Council and how much did it cost to distribute them?</p> <p>Supplementary Question:- By my reckoning the residents of East Northamptonshire received £230k back as a rebate. Residents of Kettering, Wellingborough and Corby still pay for their green waste to be collected. Within the harmonised North Northamptonshire Council tax when will residents of Kettering, Corby and Wellingborough get our rebate?</p>	<p>subscribed to the service. We welcomed a total of 11,498 returning customers who all benefitted from the £20 rebate. The team worked hard to ensure the renewing process was as easy as possible for our customers. There were no additional costs to administer the rebates as the changes to the rate were applied as part of the online renewal process.</p> <p>Supplementary Answer:- It's important to note that I think people are confusing the harmonisation in the fact of who was paying what, where and when. I think we have to look at this in the fact that over 85% of councils in the UK are charging for the collection of green waste so we are not doing anything unusual. I would also add that we are one of the cheapest councils for charging for green waste.</p> <p>There are councils that are charging over £100 for the collection of green waste and we are nowhere near that so I think we have done this in a very fair and very reasonable manner to not overly burden any of the residents in North Northamptonshire. I also think it was right and proper to do what we did with regards to those loyal customers in East Northamptonshire.</p>
18.	Cllr Jim Hakewill	Cllr Jason Smithers	When do we expect an LGA Corporate Peer Challenge team to be on site at NNC to give valuable external scrutiny on the Council's journey from April 2021?	The Leader and Chief Executive has already spoken with the LGA about a Peer Review as we welcome the opportunity for external peers to learn about our council, provide feedback and give recommendations to ensure continuous improvement.

No.	Received from	Executive Member	Question	Answer
			Supplementary Question:- When do we expect an LGA Corporate Peer Challenge team to be on site?	A meeting has been scheduled with the Local Government Association to schedule a date in late summer. Supplementary Answer:- We will be having a conversation late summer and we will update you as soon as we know what the date is and as soon as the LGA fit us in.

End of Cllr Questions

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Agenda Item 8



Council 25th April 2024

Report Title	Annual Report of the Service Delivery Contract between Northamptonshire Children’s Trust and West and North Northamptonshire Councils 2022/23 and Update on the Annual Review
Report Author	David Watts, Executive Director of Adults, Health Partnerships and Housing (DASS) & Interim Children’s Services (DCS) Richard Woodward, Head of Business & Performance (Interim) ICF Programme Lead
Lead Member	Cllr Scott Edwards, Executive Member for Children, Families, Education and Skills

Key Decision	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for call-in by Scrutiny?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Are there public sector equality duty implications?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information (whether in appendices or not)?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Applicable paragraph number/s for exemption from publication under Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972	
Which Corporate Plan priority does the report most closely align with?	Better, Brighter Futures

List of Appendices

- Appendix A – Northamptonshire Children’s Trust Annual Report 2022-23
- Appendix B - Fostering Annual Report
- Appendix C - Adoption Annual Report
- Appendix D - IRO Annual Report 2023
- Appendix E - Sufficiency Strategy 22-25
- Appendix F - Commissioning Strategy
- Appendix G - LAC Modelling April 23 Draft v0.6
- Appendix H - NCT Improvement Plan March 23
- Appendix I - Full SEF ILACS 2022
- Appendix J - NCT Strategic Risk Register April 2023
- Appendix K - NCT Scorecard March 2023
- Appendix L – NCT 202223 Audit Assurance

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. To provide Council with an update on the progress of the 2022/23 Annual Review of the Service Delivery Contract (SDC) between Northamptonshire Children's Trust (NCT) and West and North Northamptonshire Councils which includes the 2022/23 Annual Report.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 As part of the contractual arrangements between Northamptonshire Children's Trust (NCT) and North and West Northamptonshire Councils, there is a requirement to undertake an Annual Review and produce an Annual Report.
- 2.2 The purpose of the Annual Review set out in the SDC is:
- to consider the quality of practice in the provision of services and the outcomes for children, young people and families in the county of Northamptonshire.
 - to facilitate the Councils quality assurance of the operation of the SDC.
 - to enable the Councils to review the discharge of their statutory functions insofar as the same relate to the provision of the services by the NCT.
 - for all parties to consider whether changes are required to the SDC.
 - for the Councils and NCT to consider all applicable factors in relation to the setting of future contract sums paid to NCT including for the next financial year.
- 2.3 NCT produced a draft Annual Report (**Appendices A-L**) which was considered and agreed by the Operational Group in August 2023 in line with timescales and requirements set out in the SDC.
- 2.4 The Annual Review will be completed by the Strategic Group in October 2023 and will consider the Annual Report and if any changes to the SDC, which must be agreed by all parties, are required.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1. It is recommended that Council:
- a) Note that the Annual Report contained at **Appendices A-L** was completed in line with the service delivery contract.
 - b) Note that KPI's in the Service Delivery Contract (SDC) have remained the same since the start of the contract with Northamptonshire Children's Trust and that the Annual Review, completed by Strategic Group in October 23, will consider and agree any amendments to the SDC, including changes to KPI's.

- c) Note that any changes to the SDC would need to be agreed by all parties, presented to Childrens Trust Joint Committee meeting for approval and once approved, be implemented by a Change Control to the SDC.

3.2. Reason for Recommendations

- The arrangements to complete the Annual Review and Annual Report are set out in the SDC and provide a procedure through which the Councils can review the Service Delivery Contract and NCT's performance in delivering its functions.

3.3. Alternative Options Considered

- Do nothing - Failing to complete the Annual Review or produce an Annual Report would not be compliant with the SDC and would not allow the Councils to formally review the contractual arrangements with NCT and agree changes. It should be noted that the SDC contains a process for the Councils to propose changes outside of the Annual Review if required.

4. Report Background

- 4.1 Following a statutory direction from the Secretary of State for Education, Northamptonshire County Council was required to oversee work towards the establishment of a Trust for the delivery of children's social care services in Northamptonshire, transferring operational control for children's social care services from the Council to the Trust. Upon the creation of the two new unitary Councils, the commissioning and ownership of NCT was transferred to North and West Northamptonshire Councils.
- 4.2 As part of the establishment of NCT, a suite of contractual agreements was put in place to govern the relationship between NCT and the Councils. The core contractual agreement is the Service Delivery Contract (SDC) and its associated schedules.
- 4.3 The SDC sets out the arrangements for the completion of the Annual Review of the Service Delivery Contract between Northamptonshire Children's Trust (NCT) and West and North Northamptonshire Councils.
- 4.4 The purpose of the Annual Review set out in the SDC is:
 - to consider the quality of practice in the provision of services and the outcomes for children, young people and families in the county of Northamptonshire.
 - to facilitate the Councils quality assurance of the operation of the SDC.
 - to enable the Councils to review the discharge of their statutory functions insofar as the same relate to the provision of the services by the Trust.
 - for all parties to consider whether changes are required to the SDC.

- for the Councils and NCT to consider all applicable factors in relation to the setting of future contract sums paid to NCT including for the next financial year
- 4.5 The SDC states that the Strategic Group shall complete the Annual Review at one of its scheduled meetings and that the Annual Report shall be considered as part of the Annual Review in Quarter 3 (starting in October) in each contract year.
- 4.6 The SDC states that prior to 1st October in each contract year Operational Group shall prepare an Annual Report. NCT are required to prepare a Draft Annual Report by 31st July for consideration and agreement by Operational Group.
- 4.7 The report was agreed by the Operational Group in August 2023 and will be considered by the Strategic Group in October 2023 as part of completing the Annual Review. This is a key component of the Council’s strategic oversight and review of NCT.
- 4.9 The Annual Report was presented to the Children’s Trust Joint Committee on 6th September 2023 to “Note that the Annual Report contained at **Appendices A-L** was completed in line with the service delivery contract”. At the time of submitting the report to the committee NCT had yet to submit **Appendix L** – NCT 2022-23 Audit Assurance and as such the Committee were unable to note the report at the meeting.
- 4.8 The Annual Review, to be completed by Strategic Group in October 2023, will consider and agree any amendments to the Service Delivery Contract, including changes to KPI’s.
- 4.9 Key Performance Indicators in the SDC have remained the same since the start of the contract with NCT. Proposed changes to KPI’s in the 2021/22 Annual Review were not made following the ILACS inspection in November 2022.
- 4.10 Any changes to the SDC, including KPI’s would need to be agreed by all parties, be brought back to a future Joint Committee meeting for approval and once agreed, be implemented by a Change Control to the SDC.
- 4.11 Certain changes to the SDC could be deemed notifiable changes. This means that changes cannot be made without the prior written consent of the Secretary of State for Education.

5. Issues and Choices

- 5.1 The content of the Annual Review is defined in the SDC and covers the following topics:
- the content of the Annual Report (to be received by Strategic Group in Quarter 3 (starting in October) in each contract year).

- the contribution rates determined by the Fund Actuary pursuant to Schedule 10 (Pensions)
- any matters arising in relation to Schedule 5 (Financial Mechanism) (including whether the Contract Sum for the forthcoming Contract Year remains appropriate having regard to what is set out in the Annual Report)
- with effect from the Second Contract Year, the proportionate share of any Surplus that will be allocated to each Party pursuant to Schedule 5 (Financial Mechanism)
- the results of any audits carried out by the Council during the preceding Contract Year pursuant to the terms of this Agreement
- any significant complaints made against the Trust in respect of the preceding Contract Year
- serious incidents (including serious case reviews) involving the Trust in the preceding Contract Year
- a review of the Key Performance Indicators and the Services Specification
- a review of the Dependencies and the Support Services
- a review of the governance arrangements under this Agreement pursuant to Schedule 18 (Governance Arrangements) to assess whether they continue to be appropriate and fit for purpose
- such other matters that the Parties may agree from time to time.

5.2 At its meeting on 25th September 2023, the Council's Audit and Governance Committee considered a report on the assurance framework for NCT. This referenced the Trust's annual audit opinion for 2022/23 as provided by the Trust's chief internal auditor. The Committee expressed significant concern regarding the comparatively low level of audit coverage on which the opinion was based, including the number of risk-based audits specific to the Trust, and has sought urgent additional assurance on this and future arrangements for 2023/24 from the Trust. This was further enforced with a request from the Committee that a member working group meet with the Chair of the NCT Audit Committee to discuss the position and future audit plans. Arrangements for this are now being put in place.

5.3 The Annual Report references the NCT Finance, Resources and Audit (FRA) Committee's agreement to the auditor's annual opinion, which took place at its meeting on 28th September 2023, and after further information was supplied to the Committee. This followed the NCT FRA meeting in August when the Committee initially received the 2022/23 Head of Internal Audit Opinion. At this meeting the NCT FRA Committee was critical of the quality of the information provided and felt that there was insufficient evidence to give an opinion, which prompted the requirement for further details to be supplied to the September meeting.

6. Next Steps

6.1 The Strategic Group will consider the Annual Report as part of completing the Annual Review at its meeting in October 2023.

6.2 The Annual Report will be taken to Full Council on 7th December 2023.

- 6.3 Any proposed changes, once agreed by all parties, will be brought to a the Childrens Trust Joint Committee meeting for approval and once approved be implemented by a Change Control to the SDC.

7. Implications (including financial implications)

7.1. Resources, Financial and Transformation

7.1.1 The provisional outturn position for 2022/23 is £158.885m against the original Contract Sum of £137.450m resulting in an overspend of £21.435m. In accordance with the contract split percentage this equates to:

- NNC - £9.466m
- WNC - £11.969m

7.1.2 The outturn position for 2022/23 is still to be finalised and subject to audit – however there is a potential pressure of £481k the treatment of this is still to be agreed.

7.1.3 In the Annual Report, NCT have identified potential issues that will impact upon their budget for the 2023/24 financial year. These issues are detailed in the report but are largely related to placements for children in care. The current levels of volatility, efficiency of joint funding processes and current flux of emergency placements, increasing complexity of need in a market where demand outstrips supply are all impacting on NCT's ability to meet children's needs within the current budget envelope.

7.2. Legal and Governance

7.2.1 The relationship between NCT and the Councils is governed by a series of contractual and legal agreements.

7.2.2 The recommendations set out in this report will allow the Councils to fulfil their responsibilities as set out in the Service Delivery Contract, the Articles of Association and Support Services Agreement.

7.2.3 The arrangements as set out herein represent good governance and maintain appropriate oversight of the Trust by the Councils.

7.3 Relevant Policies and Plans

7.3.1 The Council has identified 'Brighter, Better Futures' as a key priority of the corporate plan. This will be done by supporting partners and the Children's Trust to provide higher standards of support. The Annual Report enables the Council to gain oversight of the services delivered by NCT and to help the Council to understand how better support for Children, Young People and Families can be delivered.

7.4 Risk

- 7.4.1 An opinion of 'satisfactory assurance' has been given by the Trust's Head of Internal Audit in relation to the organisation's internal controls for 2022/23; however, a definition of 'satisfactory assurance' has not been provided within the report. The Annual Audit Report recognises that '2022-23 was a challenging year from an audit perspective'. The annual opinion is not based on outcomes from a completed, risk based Internal Audit Plan for 2022/23, as would be expected under the relevant Standards. The report includes two finalised audit assurance reports from the Trust's 2022/23 Internal Audit Plan with assurance ratings. All other assurance opinions relate to assignments from the Trust's 2021/22 Internal Audit Plan (which was recognised by the Internal Auditors in 2022 as not suitably risk based) and a number of audits from West Northamptonshire Council's Internal Audit Plan - of which some resulted in opinions of limited assurance and none of which were Trust specific.
- 7.4.2 A total of four audits have been recorded as removed from the Trust's Internal Audit plan during 2022/23 - including Medium Term Financial Planning and Budget Management – which also limits the assurance to be gained in the year.
- 7.4.3 Coverage of the financial system audits delivered annually by Cambridgeshire County Council did not form part of the Trust's Internal Audit plan (and has not in prior years been referenced as a source of assurance in the Annual Audit Report). Whilst this may provide a source of wider assurance on hosted financial systems, it should not replace Trust specific, risk-based audit coverage.

7.5 Consultation

- 7.5.1 This Annual Report has been reviewed and agreed by the Operational Group and will be considered by Strategic Group in October 2023 as part of completing the Annual Review. These are the key contractual review meetings between the Councils and NCT.

7.6 Consideration by Executive

- 7.6.1 This report was considered by the Executive on 23 November 2023. The views of the Executive are detailed in the minutes of the meeting here. [Executive Minutes - 23 November 2023](#)

7.7 Consideration by Scrutiny

- 7.7.1 This report has not been considered by the overview and scrutiny committees of either Council.

7.8 Equality Implications

- 7.8.1 There are no specific equality implications arising from this report.

7.9 Climate and Environment Impact

7.9.1 There is no specific climate or environmental impact arising from this report.

7.10 Community Impact

7.10.1 There is no specific community impact arising from this report.

7.11 Crime and Disorder Impact

7.11.1 There is no specific crime and disorder impact arising from this report.

8 Background Papers

8.1 [Report to Executive - 23 November 2023](#)

Annual Report of the Service Delivery Contract between Northamptonshire Children’s Trust (NCT) and West and North Northamptonshire Councils 2022/23

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- [Appendix 1 – Assurance and Governance structure](#)
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- [Appendix 3 – Supporting Data Analysis and NCT Performance Scorecard as at end March 2023](#)
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- [Appendix 6 – NCT Annual Internal Audit Report 2022/23](#)

1. Background and Purpose of the Annual Review

Schedule 3 Annual Review in the Service Delivery Contract (SDC) details the overarching aims and objectives of the Annual Review:

- for the Parties to consider the quality of practice in the provision of children’s social care services delivered by Northamptonshire Children’s Trust (NCT) and the outcomes for children, young people and families in the county of Northamptonshire;
- to facilitate the Councils’ quality assurance of the operation of the Service Delivery Contract;
- to enable the Councils to review the discharge of its statutory functions delivered by NCT;
- for the Parties to consider whether changes are required to the Service Delivery Contract to be agreed at the Annual Review meeting
- for the Parties to consider all factors that may impact upon future Contract Sums and for the Strategic Group to make a recommendation/proposal to the Council regarding the Contract Sum payable to NCT for the next Contract Year.

The Annual Report forms part of the process of the Annual Review, the contents (as a minimum and where applicable) for the Annual Report are set out in 2.3. of Schedule 3.

The Operational Group reviews and agrees the content of the final Annual Report which is submitted to the Strategic Group for consideration as part of the Annual Review no later than 31st August or the date of submission of papers to the Strategic Group meeting in Quarter 3 (starting in October).

The governance and assurance arrangements for NCT are shown at Appendix 1.

2. Summary of NCT performance against the Key Performance Indicators

As part of the development of Northamptonshire Children’s Trust, 21 KPIs were agreed against which the councils would monitor NCT’s performance. These 21 KPIs are set out in Schedule 6 (Performance Framework) of the Service Delivery Contract. Schedule 6 also defines the targets NCT should be aiming to achieve against each KPI as well as the tolerance levels that are used when assessing whether there are performance issues or failures as defined in the Schedule.

NCT provide the Councils with a monthly performance report which outlines performance against each KPI as well as commentary and how NCT are working to improve. In addition to this NCT also provides a monthly Quality Assurance Report to the Social Care Improvement Board and Operational Group monitoring progress against the “Social Care Improvement Plan” and the “Children’s Trust Scorecard” with additional data about NCT’s performance.

A full list of KPI’s and summary of NCT’s performance against each of these in the 2022-23 contract year is included at Appendix 2 and the highlights are included below.

2.1 What worked well

- NCT achieved ‘*Requires Improvement to be good*’ Ofsted ILACS inspection judgements for North and West Northamptonshire in November 2022, reflecting an improvement in the performance, quality and outcomes for children since the 2019 ‘Inadequate’ rating of Northamptonshire County Council’s children’s services.
- The majority of performance indicators were at or within tolerance during 2022/23.
- Performance remained strong (above 90%) throughout the year for KPI 3 (single assessments taking place within timescale). The performance of this KPI was 95% in March 2023 and has been on target or above for 34 consecutive months.
- KPI 9 (percentage of care leavers aged 17-21 and in employment, education or training (EET)) and KPI 10 (percentage of care leavers aged 17-21 living in suitable accommodation) remained

better than the national averages¹. It has been above target since May 2022 and has spent the entire year above target.

- KPI 16 (% of social work vacancies) remains low (low is good) staying between 15-20% throughout the entire year, indicating that NCT are able to attract and retain social work staff. Whilst the proportion of social care posts filled with agency staff has remained within tolerance and was only slightly higher than the national average at the end of March 2023 (17.8% in comparison with 17% nationally), this, and the use of managed service teams² remain a concern in terms of continuity for families, sustainability and affordability. Despite ongoing national recruitment and retention challenges, NCT was in a better position than other children's services in the region by having a small net increase in permanent staff at the end of the financial year.
- KPI 18 (Average time between the LA receiving court authority to place a child for adoption and deciding on a match) has been below target (low is good) since April 2022 and stayed below target for the entire year. This can be attributed to strengthened family finding and matching processes which have been implemented alongside improved permanency tracking arrangements.
- KPI 19 (% of children in care placed for adoption within 12 months of an agency decision that they should be placed for adoption) has been above target (high is good).
- Compliments have continued to significantly outweigh complaints.

2.2 Challenges and areas to work on:

- KPI 1 (% of all referrals with a decision within 2 working days) has been a challenging area for most of the financial year. The measure has been below tolerance since September 2022, making it below tolerance for the final 7 months of the annual period.
- KPI 5 (% of Child Protection Conferences held within 15 days of a strategy discussion being initiated) has also been a challenging area. Performance was below tolerance (low is not good) for 6 consecutive months from October 2022 – March 2023.
- A range of factors have contributed to below tolerance performance for these two KPIs, including increases in demand; business support vacancies and a requirement to achieve vacancy factors on NCT staffing budgets; multiple systems used in MASH and turnover of staff. Actions to address these issues have been identified, are being progressed and reported to the Councils.
- As defined in the SDC, a monthly KPI falling outside of the relevant tolerance for three (3) consecutive months or more is defined as a "Performance Failure". Performance Failures can trigger a formal process being initiated by the Councils. These Performance Failures were dealt with informally during 2022/23, with regular reporting to Operational Group.
- KPI 6 (% of children that became the subject of a Child Protection Plan for a second or subsequent time) has been an area that fluctuated between being above tolerance (low is good) in June, September and November 2022 and then within tolerance or at or below target for the remaining months of the financial year. The impact of the Covid 19 pandemic and the cost of living challenges have been contributing factors, as has the robustness of the process when families are 'stepped down' from statutory interventions so that outcomes can be sustained; action is being taken to address these factors through the Early Help, Neglect and Exploitation multi agency action plans; and internally within NCT the step down process between Social Care and Child and Family Support Services will be reviewed and strengthened by Q2 of 23/24.

¹ 63% of NCT care leavers were in employment, education or training as at the end March 23 in comparison with the national average of 58% (2022; latest available figures); 95% of NCT care leavers were living in suitable accommodation as at the end of Mar 23 in comparison with the national average of 89% (2022; latest available figures).

² As at the end of March 23, NCT has 3 managed service teams, these are teams of qualified social workers and managers supplied by an external organisation and have been used to mitigate the impact of the national shortage of qualified social workers.

- KPI 11 (Social workers with caseloads above target) has remained within tolerance as NCT has taken action with use of agency staff and managed service teams to mitigate increases in demand and national recruitment and retention challenges. This continues to be a priority focus to enable manageable caseloads and the phasing out of managed service teams by Apr 2024.
- KPI 8 (Children in care with 3+placement moves in the last 12 months) has remained within tolerance, however placement stability remains a priority and implementation of the sufficiency action plan has progressed in 2022/23 with actions to achieve improvement in this area.
- Implementation of Circle to Success started before the end of the financial year and one of two new emergency children's homes partially opened, with full opening of this and the second home due in Q1 of 23/24. An additional 5 bed children's home was included within a block contract in 22/23 and plans are progressing for a DfE capital funded home utilising a WNC owned property for 4 children due to open in Q2 of 23/24. Progress has been slower on developing an additional 4 bed children's home due a suitable property not yet being identified, and an additional 2 bed home development delayed due to the interface with residential short breaks for children with disabilities.
- Re-commissioning of NCT's children's homes, fostering and independent supported accommodation frameworks is in train, for new frameworks to be in place for Apr 24. Recruitment of NCT foster carers has continued to be prioritised, also within a challenging national context, as has supporting retention of existing carers. 19 additional foster carer households were approved in 22/23, however 23 closed therefore creating a net loss of 4 households. The average utilisation rate of NCT fostering households in 22/23 was 69%, just above 68% in 21/22. The non utilised places includes those that aren't available. There was a lower proportion of vacant places that could be used in 22/23 at 4% in comparison with 9% in 21/22 showing that better use was being made of existing NCT fostering households in 22/23.

3. Service Delivery

3.1 Children and Family Support Services (CFSS/Targeted Early Help) and Youth Offending Service (YOS)

Services

- **Targeted Partnership Support in the Localities and MASH** - West and North locality arrangements for practitioners with countywide support and management
- **Targeted Strengthening Families Team** - West and North locality arrangements for practitioners with countywide support and management
- **Adolescent Services**
- **Missing & RISE (sexual exploitation)**
- **Early Help Board**
- **Youth Offending Services**
- **Data Management** – for supporting families payment by results

Context

The purpose of Early Help is a whole system approach to prevention and intervention. It is a way of working, and everybody's business. It is about working in a collaborative way to support children, young people, and families to build on their strengths, overcome challenges and make positive changes for themselves. By acting early, we can prevent problems from getting worse and help children, young people and families to find the right solutions that will support and improve their life opportunities. Additionally, a strong early help offer reduces the need for statutory intervention later on. NCT deliver targeted early help through the Children and Family Support service (CFSS) as part of the partnership offer.

The 2022 ILACS inspection found that:

- *‘Children in need of help and protection receive much better support than they did at the time of the inspection in 2019’.*
- *‘Leaders have developed and implemented an early help offer’.*
- *‘Early help has been strengthened and children are identified early when they need help. While there is sometimes a short delay before intervention, children and families benefit from an increasing number of services which, for many, help to improve their lives’.*

A new partnership Early Help Improvement Strategy and Action Plan is launching in Q2 2023 to support progress in this area. NCT is also supporting the West and North unitary councils to write their own Early Help strategies and action plans, and linking NCT work with other strategies, such as the SEND Strategies.

Through partnership working, data has shown an increased use of early help assessments. NCT have also improved the early help model of reporting around family and closure summaries.

Northamptonshire Youth Offending Service (NYOS) is hosted by NCT. NYOS works with the North and West Northamptonshire Councils and partners such as Health, Police, Education, Community Safety Partnership, and other key stakeholders to deliver the best outcomes for children, young people, and our community. In general, data shows an improvement in Northamptonshire’s youth offending, in comparison to the increase which is being seen nationally and regionally.

The YJSIP (Youth Justice Sector Improvement Partnership) peer review in January 2023, reported:

- The service is ‘impressive,’ it is innovative, creative and child focused
- YOS practitioners and managers were not only committed, but they also went above and beyond with the young people and the relationships built are fantastic
- The improvements in the past three years are clearly evident.
- The partnership is becoming more robust with supportive, child centred relationships

3.2 Children’s Social Care Services - Children’s Social Care Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub, Assessment services and Safeguarding

Services

- **The front door** - Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) – Countywide
- **Assessment** – West and North locality arrangements for social work and family support workers (FSW) with countywide support and management
- **Safeguarding** – West and North locality arrangements for social work and family support workers (FSW) with countywide support and management
- **Emergency Duty Team** (EDT)– Countywide; with proposal that adults EDT services will be transferred to WNC/NNC

Context

Partnership working is a basic but key requirement and legal duty across all areas of safeguarding services. Working Together 2018 is the statutory guidance that outlines the requirements to safeguard children and it makes it clear that everyone who works with children has a responsibility to keep them safe and no one agency can do this alone. The guidance sets out key roles for individual organisations and agencies to deliver effective arrangements for safeguarding. It is essential that these arrangements are strongly led and promoted at a local level, specifically by local area leaders, including Local Authority/Trust executives and Lead Members of Children’s Services, the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner, Integrated Care Board (ICB) and through the commitment of the Chief Officers in all organisations and agencies. Partnership working has improved since the implementation of NCT but continues to be an area for ongoing development.

The purpose of the Safeguarding services is to manage the ‘front door’ for statutory social work (MASH) and to support and protect children who meet the threshold for statutory social work e.g. children in need; children subject to child protection plans; children subject to private proceedings;

children subject to Public Law Outline (PLO) pre-proceedings; and initiation of care proceedings if required. The Safeguarding service also supports children in care subject to S.20 voluntary care arrangements if there is an imminent plan for them to return to the care of their family.

The Emergency Duty Team (EDT) also falls within the Safeguarding service remit and the forthcoming Exploitation hub will be managed within Safeguarding. EDT currently delivers services for both children and adults. They work closely with social care teams and partner agencies across the county. Work is progressing to disaggregate the EDT service so that NCT can focus solely on their core business.

NCT is committed to developing the MASH into a service which provides children and young people with timely responses from the most appropriate agency/professional to support families to thrive and stay together wherever possible. MASH is a screening, information-sharing, and decision-making process and they do not case hold so when the decision has been made about the most appropriate outcome for a child/ren, the case is submitted to the relevant operational team to progress, signposted or is closed. Due to the continued and increasing business demands, the Safeguarding Partnership agreed to an independent review of the 'front door' to improve the service which will take place in Q2 of 2023/24.

NCT Duty and Assessment teams provide a countywide statutory social care service and complete single assessments over a 6 week period to identify and support the needs of children and families. Short term intervention is offered during the assessment period where appropriate. Children's cases then either transfer to an appropriate team e.g. Safeguarding, Children in Care or step down to Early Help services or close if no further action is required. Business needs and pressures have continued to increase which can impact on performance for example management oversight and supervision is not consistent. However, positively, timeliness of assessments remains good and above the national average. Due to national and local pressures around the recruitment and retention of 'front door' social workers, a managed service team has been in place to mitigate for vacancies and manage caseloads.

There are 15 Safeguarding teams across the service who are based in localities. Safeguarding teams protect, support and offer services to children in need, children subject of child protection plans, and children subject of private proceedings and pre-proceedings (PLO). They work with children and families with long term complex needs that sometimes necessitate legal proceedings and/or S.20 voluntary accommodation arrangements. Due to national and local pressures around the recruitment and retention of Safeguarding social workers, two managed service teams have been in place to mitigate for vacancies and manage caseloads.

The 2022 ILACS inspection found that:

- *'Referrals about children in need of help and protection are identified promptly and responded to by staff in the multi-agency safeguarding hub. However, some referrals are not transferred quickly enough to the duty and assessment teams, even when it is immediately evident that a fuller assessment is required'.*
- *'Thresholds are applied well and investigations are undertaken effectively, which result in appropriate actions to safeguard children'.*
- *'Assessments undertaken by the duty and assessment service vary in quality'*
- *'Most child protection core group and child in need meetings are held regularly and include key agencies. However too many children's plans end prematurely when agreed actions have been completed but desired outcomes have not always been achieved, particularly for children living in situations of long-term neglect'.*
- *'Work with families at the pre-proceedings stage of the Public Law Outline has been strengthened significantly since the last inspection. This work has had a positive impact and enables many children to remain at home safely, avoiding the need for court proceedings and for them to come into care to secure their safety'*

Since the inspection the multi-agency Neglect Strategy and action plan has been developed and training rolled out for practitioners.

3.3 Corporate Parenting

Services

- **Court** – Countywide
- **Children in Care including Life Story work** – West and North locality arrangements for social work and family support workers (FSW) with countywide support and management.
- **Family time (children in care’s contact with birth families) services** – West and North locality arrangements for practitioners with countywide support and management
- **Fostering** – Countywide. Due to being a Children’s Trust, the fostering service is classified as an independent fostering agency
- **Adoption** – Countywide. Due to being a Children’s Trust, the adoption service is classified as a voluntary adoption agency
- **Care leavers** – West and North locality arrangements for practitioners with countywide support and management.
- **Management of Children’s Homes** – countywide
- **Disabled Children** – countywide – providing specialist statutory social care support to children with disabilities whose needs range from children in need, child protection to children in care.

Context

The purpose of the Corporate Parenting service within NCT is to deliver high quality, effective services for every child and young person in our care and support for those in the court system. The role that Councils and Children’s Trusts play in looking after children is one of the most important things they do. They have a unique responsibility to the children they look after and their care leavers (relevant and former relevant children). A strong ethos of corporate parenting means that sense of vision and responsibility towards the children they look after and their care leavers is a priority for everyone.

Corporate parenting is an important part of the Ofsted inspection framework and the corporate parenting principles are referenced in Ofsted’s Inspecting Local Authority Children’s Services (ILACS) framework. The corporate parenting principles are about embedding a positive culture in the Local Authority towards looked-after children and care leavers and their success will depend on the extent to which Directors, Councillors, Heads of Service and front-line managers champion and promote understanding of them. Achieving this to a ‘good’ standard will require close collaboration between NCT, each Council and partner agencies and extends far beyond ensuring that corporate parenting boards effectively discharge their duties.

NCT has committed to classifying care experience as a protected characteristic to support and advocate for the children and young people in our care and who NCT have cared for.

We have an increased focus on life story work, ensuring that staff are trained to understand the importance of chronologies and genograms to children and young people, and to support them to review their life story at an appropriate time. Social workers encourage children to attend their review meetings or obtain their views and advocate for them if they do not wish to attend. Care plans are more child centred.

At the 2022 ILACS, inspectors found:

- *‘Overall quality of practice for children in care and care leavers has improved since the previous inspection, particularly regarding adoption, although considerable variability remains’.*
- *‘Most children come into care when it is necessary and appropriate for them to do so. For most children, particularly very young children, this is planned and timely’.*
- *‘Reviews for children in care are timely and minutes are sensitively written to children’*

- *'Children in care are supported to take part in a wide range of leisure and social activities. Their talents are promoted and celebrated. As a result, children have fun, make friends, develop a sense of achievement and feel proud of themselves'.*
- *'Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children are well supported and provided with help in line with their assessed needs'.*

In relation to children with disabilities, inspectors found:

- *'Practice in the disabled children's team to assess and support disabled children and their families as stronger. Social workers know their children well and use a wide variety of communication styles to gain the child's voice'.*
- *'For older disabled children in care, planning for their transition from receiving support and accommodation from children's services to being supported by adult services starts too late'.*

In relation to care leavers, inspectors found:

- *'Personal advisers take time to build relationships with care leavers. They often work persistently to address issues and advocate for young people to access services in their efforts to support them. Young people who spoke to inspectors described personal advisers as 'amazing' and 'brilliant'. Some care leavers have experienced changes in personal advisers, which has affected the quality of their relationship and support. A few care leavers have been introduced to their personal advisers very late, causing anxiety about the transition towards independence'.*
- *'Most care leavers are well supported into education, employment or training. They are supported by their personal advisers to maintain their educational placements and to do well at university'.*

3.3.1 Circle to Success

In 2022/23, the Councils agreed a significant investment (£1.3m) in the Circle to Success programme to be delivered within NCT, in partnership with Impower and Innovate. The programme began in January 2022 for 12 months and is working to achieve the following outcomes:

- Children and young people's needs are understood, and permanency is achieved within homes where they can flourish
- Children and young people who are unable to live with their parents are cared for by carers who provide a secure base through the provision of therapeutic parenting and enjoy meaningful relationships with parents and/or significant people in their lives
- Professionals working as part of the team around children work from a therapeutic care perspective and are skilled in completing evidenced based assessments to inform care planning
- Sufficiency requirements for homes for cared for children and care experienced young adults are understood and commissioning arrangements ensure that children receive care in the right setting at the right time and that value for money is achieved.

Experience of similar programmes in other areas has shown an initial period of approximately 6 months of training, testing and iterating is required before any benefits are realised, with full realisation of benefits after 2-3 years. The savings target for the Circle to Success programme for 2023/24 is £3.8m

Initial work during Q4 2022/23 included training social workers to complete Valuing Care assessments of an identified cohort of children to better understand needs and opportunities to return home or move to a placement that better met their needs; recruitment of resilience foster carers. From Q1 23/24 children will begin to receive therapeutic interventions.

3.3.2 Fostering

Fostering annual report:



3.3.3 NCT Residential Children's Homes

Home	Last Full inspection date	Grading	Monitoring visit	Comments
Thornton House URN 2608872	<u>11th January 2023</u>	Requires improvement to be good	Improved effectiveness	Opened Jan 2020 Interim inspection 9 March 2022
Phoenix House URN 2608892	<u>7th February 2023</u>	Good	20 th -21 st October 2020	Opened Feb 2020
Welford House URN 2608968	30 April 2019 October 2021 <u>15th November 2022</u>	Good Good Good	24 Feb 2021	Interim Inspection 4 March 2020
Raven House URN 2615067	April 2019 11-12 Aug 2021 <u>9th August 2022</u>	Good Good Good	22-23 Sep 2020 12 Nov 2020	The assurance visit resulted in a restriction notice from 28 September which was lifted 20 Dec 2020.
Arnold House URN 2616670	2-3 rd July 2019 17 -18 May 2022	Requires improvement to be good Good	17 June 20 22 July 20 13-14 October 20 26 Jan 21 Jun 21 <u>Nov 29th, 2022</u>	N/A

3.3.4 Adoption

NCT Adoption Annual Report:



3.4 Commissioning and Quality Assurance

Services

- **Quality Assurance (QA)** – Countywide with West and North locality focus
- **Voice of children and young people** – Countywide with West and North locality delivery
- **Commissioning including Placements for children in care**– Countywide
- **Independent reviewing officers (IROs)** – Countywide
- **Designated Officers (LADO)** – Countywide with locality leads
- **Independent visitors** – Countywide with West and North locality delivery

- **Child protection conferences** – Countywide with conferences taking place in locality areas
- **Social work academy** – Countywide
- **Policy and Inspection support** – Countywide with West and North locality focus depending on requirement e.g. Ofsted

Context

The purpose of the Quality Assurance & Commissioning services within NCT is to deliver high quality, effective and objective quality assurance and commissioning at the individual, service and strategic level, in order to improve the experiences and outcomes of the children we support and to achieve best value. The service also drives the implementation of NCT's Quality Assurance Framework, children and young people's Engagement Strategy, Commissioning Strategy, Sufficiency Strategy and Equalities Strategy. As with other areas of practice, the QA&C service must be able to respond to increases in demand and complexity for social care services.

The service makes a significant contribution to the delivery of NCT's workforce strategy by delivering and commissioning an effective continuous professional development offer and pathways into children's social work roles.

Quality Assurance & Commissioning is responsible for following functions:

- Independent Reviewing Officers and Child Protection Chairs and business support for child in care reviews and child protection conferences
- Designated Officers
- Principal Social Worker
- Quality Assurance manager and auditor
- Co-ordination and support of volunteer independent visitors for children in care
- Advocacy for children who are supported by NCT
- Leading and contributing to multi agency safeguarding quality assurance, case reviews and other partnership activity to improve outcomes for children e.g. MARAC, MADRA, NSCP sub groups
- Social Work Academy and learning and development. This includes supporting newly qualified social workers during assessed and supported year in employment (ASYE), social workers recruited from abroad and routes into social work posts (i.e. student placements, apprenticeships)
- Continuous professional development for NCT workforce
- Children and young people's engagement officers and leadership
- Inspection preparation and support, including self- assessment and regional improvement
- Leading the delivery of equality strategy and action plan
- Production and co-ordination of NCT policies and procedures
- Commissioning, including developing and undertaking joint commissioning with partners
- Brokerage of homes for children and bespoke support for children and families

Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) annual report:



IRO Annual Report
2023 fin.pdf

NCT's Sufficiency and Commissioning Strategies



Sufficiency Strategy
22_25 Final.pdf



Commissioning
Strategy.pdf

The 2022 ILACS inspection found:

- *'Active and influential groups exist for children in care and care leavers to contribute to improvements in the trust. The experiences of children, young people and families who use the services are important to leaders. An up-to-date Engagement Strategy and participation framework promote participation and the feedback is then used to inform service and strategic developments'.*
- *'Most children in care live in good-quality placements, including specialist provision that meets their needs well'.*
- *'A small number of children live in unregistered children's homes. While senior managers quality assure and monitor all these placements and are working with providers to seek registration, leaders accepted during this inspection that their oversight has not been robust enough to be assured that the welfare of every child living in these arrangements is being protected'.* Action has subsequently been taken to strengthen this oversight.
- *'Leaders understand the need to develop sufficiency of placements and are proactive in developing the right services for children and families. Forward plans, as well as responsiveness to changes in demand, are creating a much more resilient workforce and range of services to meet levels of need, such as increasing the capacity of social work and leaving care teams. Progress is being made to develop placement capacity through an ambitious sufficiency strategy'.*
- *'Staff development is highly valued and supported through the social work academy, which is helping to stabilise the workforce'.*
- *'Leaders know the service well and are realistic about the scale of the ongoing improvement journey. However, they recognise that there has been some over optimism on their part about the quality of services for some specific cohorts of children'.*
- Inspectors identified NCT's *'strengths-based quality assurance framework'* as an area of improvement since the previous inspection.

4. Summary of the Councils' Performance of its obligations in the SDC and SSA

4.1 Support services summary

A wide range of support service provision is provided to the Children's Trust by North Northamptonshire and West Northamptonshire Councils. This arrangement is set out within the Support Services Agreement (SSA) between the parties. Performance is reviewed by the Support Services Board which is chaired by NCT's Director of Finance and Resources and attended by officers from both Councils. In 2021/22, the health and safety function transferred into NCT and in November 2022, the majority of children's learning and development functions transferred into NCT. Both of these transfers were as a result of Support Services Change Control.

In March Q4 22/23, a total of 38 KPIs were reported. Of these, 34 reported a green outturn (89.5%). Three reported an amber outturn (7.9%). Two of these related to the percentage of incidents resolved within agreed performance standard thresholds in terms of response and resolution times, and one was in response to the percentage of reactive maintenance tasks completed within priority timescales. One KPI reported a red outturn (2.6%) due to loss of IT systems (at least 72 hours) occurring (reported as estimated user culminative hours). Six further KPIs have not been reported with 2 of those currently unable to be reported upon. Performance of the Support Services' KPIs are shown in Appendix 3.

The quality and detail of the performance reporting on Support Services has been excellent and has allowed NCT to hold the Councils to account for performance. Overall, services have performed strongly, and service leads have worked closely with NCT colleagues to support them on their improvement journey. The Support Services Board have reached a level of maturity where issues and risks can be worked through in a solution focused way understanding that cooperation builds stronger

performing Services. In 2023/24, the Councils, working with NCT are undertaking a cost review of all Council provided Services to refresh the work initially undertaken during the setup of the Trust.

Significantly, over the coming 4 years, the Trust is working with the West on an exciting IT refresh programme, funded by both Councils, where all individual devices will be replaced ensuring the workforce are equipped with the technology to support their roles.

Where changes are made to Support Services, the Councils will consult with NCT to understand their impact and to consider how services can be best delivered in the future.

Some services have performed strongly, and service leads have worked closely with NCT colleagues to support them on their improvement journey, for example the Complaints service has strengthened the support provided to NCT which has improved NCT's response to complaints.

4.2 Retained functions and their interface with NCT

The Councils' retained services have continued to establish and develop following the local government reorganisation and disaggregation of services that were previously delivered on a countywide basis. The Councils now have their own Directors of Children's Services, previously this was a joint post. As each Council develops its own strategies, boards and delivery groups, NCT officers are increasingly required to produce more information and attend more meetings. This is impacting on capacity.

The Councils are also working to improve the services they continue to deliver, especially around support for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). This is being led by the SEND Accountability Boards which has representation from NCT. Any future transformation of SEND services will have an impact on NCT.

The Councils have continued to deliver a satisfactory Intelligence Client Function to manage the contractual relationship between the Councils and NCT.

4.3 Property

When formed and now, NCT occupies 29 buildings across Northamptonshire with 17 in the West and 12 in the North. It was recognised that due to historic underinvestment, the quality of the buildings, NCT are delivering services from is poor and that the pace at which the Councils have acted to rectify this has been slow. This was hindered in 2021/22 by the disaggregation of the property support service delivered to NCT and the need to put in place appropriate systems and processes. This meant that NCT are often delivering services in buildings that are not fit for purpose and poses an operational risk, especially where buildings are used by children and families such as children's homes, children's centres and buildings used for family time.

Maintenance, refurbishment and equipment in property has been a standing item of concern at the monthly Operational Group. Significant progress has been made in 2022/23 with a programme of priority works agreed with each Council informed by condition surveys, however maintenance, refurbishment and equipment replacement schedules have remained slow to clarify. Timeliness of works in children's residential homes has been noted by Ofsted. Many buildings, such as the Weston Favell centre require urgent refurbishment works and equipment refresh.

This year, NCT alongside the ICF have been working together to rectify this through a number of mechanisms:

- Accommodation Strategy
- Following submission by NCT of the medium-long term accommodation requirements, work has been undertaken with the Councils to identify locations and premises more suited to locality working. Intensive work during the end of 2022/beginning 2023 has led to a set of options proposed by the Councils, this includes looking at both the existing Unitary estate and where required, the wider market.

- Plans for a programme of works and scheduled development will be developed into Autumn 2023.
- Using data from site condition surveys, NCT has been working with the Councils individually to agree a schedule of planned maintenance which will bring buildings up to standard. Funded via the Councils' Capital Works Programme, this begins to address priority works within current sites. NCT will continue to work with both Councils and the ICF to agree and deliver an accommodation strategy aligning this with the strategies of both Councils
- Monthly operational SLA meeting with North and West Property teams are now in place.

NCT continues to work with both Councils to review its future property strategy and how this aligns with the strategies of both councils in a collaborative way. A practical example of this was seen via the closure of Lodge Road and the development of the Abbey in Daventry.

Children's Homes Development – This year has seen significant development within our existing residential homes and the development of further capacity to begin to meet sufficiency requirements. Working closely with the North and West property teams, key maintenance requirements have progressed along with planned works in response to Ofsted recommendations.

In November 2021, NCT submitted bids for capital funding to the Councils for a new four bed children's home and renovations to an existing property (John Greenwood Shipman) to create a two bed children's home provision. Capital funding was approved by the councils in November 2022. Searches for a suitable property for a new four bed children's home, led by WNC, took place from February 2023. As at the end of March 2023 searches were continuing. The renovations at John Greenwood Shipman were postponed in Q4 of 22/23, due to the ongoing discussions with Council and Health Chief Executives in relation to the redesign of residential short breaks services which are delivered from John Greenwood Shipman.

Capital investment and suitable properties have been identified by the Councils and work undertaken to develop residential capacity has seen a detailed programme of works developed which delivers 10 new places and 15 new block contract places. Both of these provide examples of NCT and the Councils working together to deliver improved value and better outcomes for our looked after young people. This year also saw the successful bid to the DFE to secure £202,191 for the development of a new home in the West, where the Unitary provided a building as match funding. This is due to be opened by the end of September 2023. NCT continues to work with the Property teams in the North and West to explore opportunities for joint working to deliver better value and improved outcomes through investment and utilisation of the Unitary estate.

Supported accommodation - This year has also seen progression in plans to offer accommodation and support to care leavers. With an aim of reducing cost and improving outcomes for NCT's care leavers, a programme of in-house provision and strategic partnerships has been developed. 25 beds are planned for delivery over the next 12 months with additional properties regularly reviewed with the hope of adding to the portfolio. Reviewing new properties, whether part of existing unitary stock or on the open market, is done in close consultation with NNC & WNC Property teams. The supported element of the accommodation is designed to speed and aid the transition from care to independent living and ultimately increase the chances of the moves being successful. This includes access to University of Northampton accommodation, a partnership assisted by WNC and an HMO in Wellingborough leased from NNC is in the process of being commissioned. Further properties from both NNC & WNC are being explored and a partnership with the YMCA is also developing

4.4 Procurement for NCT data, databases, and casework records

The current children's social care case management system used by Northamptonshire Children's Trust, CareFirst (provided by OLM), has been in use since 2005 and has for some time been considered to be at the "end of life". Case management systems are a vital part of the delivery and

the improvement of Children's Social Care, providing the foundations for performance management, quality assurance and statutory reporting.

During 2019, Northamptonshire County Council awarded a contract with OLM Eclipse for the provision of a new children's and adult social care Case Management system and associated finance modules. Implementation commenced with adults, which went live ahead of the Councils' vesting day. Post-vesting day, the programme was transferred to joint responsibility between the Councils and NCT. The Eclipse Implementation programme team undertook an implementation readiness review and identified significant concerns with the application of the system to Children's Social Care.

In February 2022, it was concluded that there was no way forward with the current OLM Eclipse contract and therefore a new procurement is now needed. The decision not to implement the system has knock on effects on NCT's ability to deliver savings agreed as part of the contract sum negotiations for the 2022/23 financial year as well as the ability to deliver improvement in services.

Funding has been approved by the Councils and the Councils and NCT are currently working together to procure a new system for the end of the current contract in January 2025, with a significant amount of pre-procurement work in progress and the establishment of a Programme Board chaired by WNC Chief Executive. The Councils funded staffing cost for system development which will transfer to WNC in April 2023.

The Councils have also agreed funding for a new case management system for Adoption and Fostering, with procurement due to conclude in Q2 of 2023/24 (see 4.9 below).

4.5 Transfer information from government, information regarding partnerships, policies and procedures and casework records to NCT

This has been delivered by the Councils and the Councils and NCT continue to work together in partnership to improve services delivered to children, young people and families in Northamptonshire.

4.6 Act as the Corporate Parent

Elected members and the officers are the corporate parents for Northamptonshire's children in care and have a collective responsibility across services and local authorities to safeguard and promote their life chances. North Northamptonshire Council and West Northamptonshire Council have ensured contribution from education and other retained children's services, housing services and the Council's universal services in supporting children in care. Both Councils have an offer for care leavers relating to council tax. However, both offers are different and this has been raised by the Northamptonshire care leavers group and is being discussed through the Corporate Parenting Board.

During the financial year 2022-23, the Corporate Parenting Board met five times, and remained a single entity covering the whole county. It was chaired by both councils' elected Lead Members with Cabinet responsibility for children's social care. NCT provides professional expertise and advice to the Corporate Parenting Board, in order to help the councils discharge their responsibilities.

Aside from its own annual report, during 2022-23 the Board received and scrutinised annual reports from the Independent Reviewing Officer Service, fostering and adoption services, the Virtual School, and the Integrated Care Board. Statutory health assessments remained an issue of intense scrutiny for the Board, but members were somewhat reassured by the remedial actions being undertaken.

Every Board meeting included a scorecard of selected metrics, prompting debate and challenge from Board members. This showed recovery in terms of some key health-related metrics and continuing strong performance in terms of care leavers in employment, education and training. Ad-hoc and thematic reports to the Board included a detailed presentation around the sufficiency of foster places and the challenges therein; services available for young people leaving care, including disparities in council tax exemption schemes between the two councils; an update on a national safeguarding review for children with disabilities in residential placements; and care-experienced people's contact with the criminal justice system.

Although there is more to do, the Board made sure young people's voices were heard and utilised. A care-experienced young person was recruited to the Board as a full member, and the Board liaised with the NCT's participation groups. In many cases, young people contributed to the reports and presentations which came to Board, particularly the leaving care item. Every Board included a dedicated slot for celebrating the achievements of children and young people, and a very successful celebration event took place in July 2022 with children nominated for awards in four categories.

An LGA diagnostic of Corporate Parenting was completed in 2022/23 which identified a range of strengths, areas for consideration, opportunities and risks; and suggested next steps to improve impact for children, including:

- Getting on the same page – what is corporate parenting?
- Strengthening the overall governance and impact of the CPB
- Developing the confidence to challenge effectively and be a 'critical friend'
- Understanding the effective use of data to make a difference as a corporate parent
- Building IT skills and using children and young people's media effectively listening and responding to children and young people including use of surveys
- CPB members visiting/shadowing children cared for and leaving care teams to understand the child's journey and experiences
- Making sure you use regional forums/networks for learning and support
- Visiting and learning from other CPB's and modelling how they do business
- Mutual observation and feedback from the CPB Chair from another council

4.7 Consult NCT on any corporate or property strategy

The Councils have consulted with NCT on various corporate or property strategies. NCT submitted property requirements in March 2022. Each organisation has considered where their staff will work from and how their decisions in this area impact upon each other.

Property and Support Services arrangements are a standing item at the monthly Operational Group. Although significant progress has been made, maintenance, refurbishment and equipment replacement schedules have remained slow to clarify. Timeliness of works in Children's Residential Homes has been noted by Ofsted. Many buildings, such as the Weston Favell centre require urgent refurbishment works and equipment refresh.

4.8 Support NCT with grant funding

The Councils have supported NCT with accessing any grant funding and both NCT and the Councils recognise that they should work together to maximise the funding available for services by taking advantage of any opportunities. Any in-scope grants such as the Supporting Families Grant and funding for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) have been passported to NCT as part of the contract sum. Improved performance by NCT on delivering outcomes for children and families has meant an increase in funding available as part of the Supporting Families Programme.

In 2022/23, NCT and the Councils were successful in bidding for capital funding from DfE for a new children's home, utilising a WNC owned property, due to open in September 2023.

4.9 Implement any actions resulting from a regulatory inspection

Services delivered by NCT were subject to numerous regulatory inspections in 2022/23. There were many recommendations from these inspections that have been incorporated into the improvement plan. Two key actions for the councils have been identified and are still outstanding:

- Extension to Thornton House children's home – Ofsted inspections in December 2021 and March 2022 made the recommendation under the children's homes regulations 2015 for an extension to be made to house a sleep in and wash area for staff as well as extra storage space for the young people. Capital funding was agreed in Q4 of 2022/23 and the project is due for completion in Q3 23/24.
- Implementation of a new case management system for Adoption and Fostering – Ofsted noted the current electronic recording system used by the Fostering agency does not enable good

quality tracking and does not meet the needs of the Adoption agency. Funding has now been agreed and procurement is expected to conclude in Q2 23/24.

There have also been a number of external and peer reviews undertaken during 22/23 and it is important that NCT, WNC and NNC continue to work together to address issues identified within these.

4.10 Ensure NCT is adequately insured

The provision of Insurance to NCT is governed by the Support Services Agreement and is delivered by NNC. NCT were adequately insured during the contract year.

4.11 Procure provision of appropriate ICT to enable the Emergency Duty service

This was successfully delivered by the Councils.

5. Cost of delivering services in 2022/23

5.1 Contract Sum

The provisional outturn position for 2022/23 is £150.066m against a net budget of £128.631m resulting in an overspend of £21.435m. However, an additional investment of £11.891m was agreed during 2022/23 reducing the overspend to £9.544m. In accordance with the contract split percentage this equates to:

- NNC - £4.215m
- WNC -£5.329m

This included £0.728 for managed service teams and £2.062m inflationary increase of 3.2%.

In year funding was received from NNC and WNC of £3.575m reducing the additional funding requested from the councils to £17.860m, £7.887m for NNC and £9.973m for WNC.

In accordance with the agreement made at Strategic Group in November 2022, 2022/23 additional costs relating to placements and transport pressures were funded to the year-end actual position. Risk around the forecast remains due to increasing placement demand and price both locally and nationally and the contribution from partners around joint funding arrangements.

An external review of NCT's Placements Commissioning (February 2022), found that progress had been made to strengthen arrangements relating to joint funding of packages and this was evidenced in additional funding contributions; however, there are opportunities to embed this further and re-balance the proportionate contributions from different agencies, accompanied by clearer representation and accountability at decision-making panels. The review found that decisions regarding levels of funding contributions were not informed by an agreed protocol and decisions have to be separately ratified within individual agencies outside of the Multi Agency Resource Panel (MARP). There also appeared to be no established process or protocol for agreeing additional funding contributions where the overall package cost increases.

The review identified that for all children in care, NCT/social care meet 96% of the cost of those placements, in comparison with other areas where education and health ordinarily contribute approximately 20% and 21% of cost of placements respectively.

Subsequent to the review, work was undertaken to develop a joint protocol however this had not been agreed by the end of 2022/23.

The cost of performing the services in 2022/23 can be summarised as follows:

Summary	Gross Budget excl one-off Investment	Less Income	Net budget		Exp Forecast (Incl. actuals)	Income Forecast (Incl. of actuals)	Net Forecast Outturn	Variance before agreed additional Investment	Additional Investment agreed in 22/23 contract Sum	Net Variance
	£'000	£'000	£'000		£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Staffing	46,782	-4,334	42,448		49,306	-4,334	44,972	2,524	2,524	0
Other non-Staff costs	343	0	343		343	0	343	0	0	0
Placements	60,648	-7,380	53,268		77,695	-7,602	70,093	16,825	7,743	9,082
Contracts	4,767	0	4,767		4,767	0	4,767	0	0	0
Children's Homes	3,484	0	3,484		3,762	0	3,762	278	104	174
Legal	4,700	0	4,700		5,065	0	5,065	365	0	365
Adoption	7,046	-100	6,946		7,890	-100	7,790	844	844	0
Transport	1,930	-566	1,364		2,779	-566	2,213	849	676	173
Other care	6,554	-353	6,201		6,484	-372	6,112	-89	0	-89
NCT Central - Other budget	133	0	133		133	-161	-28	-161	0	-161
Support Services / SLA	4,977	0	4,977		5,482	-505	4,977	0	0	0
Grand Total	141,364	-12,733	128,631		163,706	-13,640	150,066	21,435	11,891	9,544

The contribution rate determined by the Fund Actuary was 16.8%.

5.2 Key Issues

Staffing (£2.524m overspend)

The overspend related to the adoption of the national pay offer of £1,925 per FTE and the continuation of managed service teams due to increased demand.

Placements (£16.825m overspend)

Placements remains the biggest single risk and is incredibly volatile. NCT continues to mitigate and negotiate to secure placements at a lower cost. However, the market and availability of placements remains extremely challenging and the inflation pressures from the independent sector is in excess of budgetary provision, this trend experienced during 2021/22 has continued into 2022/23. The placements budget will continue to remain under significant pressure as it remains extremely volatile both locally and nationally.

NCT did not receive demographic growth as part of the contract sum negotiations, NCT proposed the creation of a placement reserve representing 10 -15 % of the overall placements budget, excluding inflation elements above the contract sum. This was an alternative to demographic growth as the impact of the Covid 19 pandemic became clearer. As part of the contract sum 22/23, NCT received an inflationary increase of 3.2 %. This is against the backdrop of higher than projected inflation costs, which based on the Consumer Prices Index (CPI) stood at 10.5% in the 12 months to December 2022.

As NCT has evolved significant mitigation measures to manage costs have been implemented. This was supported through the 22/23 contract discussions between Sept 2021 and Dec 2021. It was agreed to put mitigation in place and deal with pressures as they arose during 22/23. As practice in an inadequate children's social care system evolves more measures can be put in place to mitigate demand. In 2019/20 external placement costs were £44.5m, whereas in 2021/22 they were £44.9m. The development of the initial contract sum for the period Nov 2020-Mar 2022 included the delivery of £4.4m savings linked to placements. This amount was removed from the initial contract sum. A further £2.5m of placements savings was removed from the budget in 2022/23, linked to the development of two new children's homes provisions and partner contributions to placement costs. The development of the children's homes was dependent on capital funding from the councils, purchase and refurbishment of a property, and refurbishment of existing property. Councils' approval of capital funding for these projects was received in November 2022. The second element of the placement savings related to increasing the joint funding contributions to placements from partners and to commission an independent review and benchmarking analysis. This would result in the

development of a joint funding protocol. The joint funding protocol had not been agreed by the end of March 2023.

Legal (£0.365m overspend)

The legal demand pressure for the 22/23 financial year was £365k, this was due to inflation increase above the contract sum and increasing demand in legal matters. A fee increase of 4% was implemented from November 2022 and there are concerns in relation to potential for retrospective charges and late billing. The table below breaks the demand over the past four years. The key element is the increase in demand from 3,978 in 2019/20 to 4,659 in 2022/23.

Historical Invoice Splits	FY19-20	FY20-21	FY21-22	FY22-23
Time	£2,614,260	£2,906,534	£2,922,700	£3,158,928
Disbursements	£1,875,919	£1,715,047	£2,260,926	£1,906,274
Total	£4,490,179	£4,621,581	£5,183,627	£5,065,202
Average cost per billed matter	FY19-20	FY20-21	FY21-22	FY22-23
Total	£1,000.00	£1,074.00	£1,115.00	£1,105.00
Time only	£554.00	£680.00	£631.00	£693.00
Disp only	£446.00	£394.00	£484.00	£412.00
Matters Billed	3,978	4,147	4,557	4,649

Despite the increased demand the transformation workstream has had a number of successes in terms of cost mitigation and also improving the understanding of the data.

- Our 3 biggest areas of transformation focus in 22/23 were Counsel (QC & Junior), Expert fees and emails received. These 3 areas are £245k underspent compared to last year.
- Acknowledging that demand has increased there are 90 more matters billed to Dec 2022 than Dec 2021. With an average cost per matter last financial year of £1,115 that is worth £100k
- Removal of legal team attendance as standard from weekly Gateway meetings at the start of the financial year avoided c£90k.

Adoption (£0.844m overspend)

The overspend is related to the implementation on the Local Government Ombudsman's decision on the historic uplifts of allowances.

Transport (£0.849m overspend)

The overspend relates to inflationary pressures which is consistent with the pressures in both councils in the provision of home to school transport. Work is ongoing with the Councils to finalise the year end forecast position and also the development of the service for 2023/24. Work to develop an SLA is focused on improving forecasting from the system used to source transport and improved journey planning and procurement. The transport hub will continue to review each case to minimise cost and reduce demand.

Savings Programme

The full savings programme delivery of £2.99m is contained within the outturn position. Including £2.45m relating to children's homes capital projects and increased contributions from partners as agreed in the contract sum for 2022/23.

Savings Delivery – 2022/23

Area	Description	Target FY 2022/23	R	A	G Inc. Mitigations	Narrative – May 2023
Staffing	A full service review is underway around the support functions within the Trust in order to streamline operations. Support services are disaggregated across the trust leading to duplication and inefficiency. There are a number of legacy systems and processes, which are being reviewed to ensure a safe transition to the implementation of the new ways of working. The delivery of savings is dependent upon the investment in IT infrastructure, including the implementation of a new social care case management system to maximise resources and deliver efficiencies.	£0.330m	£0.013m	£0m	£0.317m	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Original savings dependent on case management system Mitigation non delivery of original savings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reconfiguration of business support Weekly Recruitment Panel's 9.6FTE Business Support vacancies held pending restructure £275k (22/23 only). Transport Hub vacancy £28k deleted PA Team post deleted - £14k (Part Year)
Placements £2.450m	The development of the placement sufficiency strategy and the development of the in house fostering capacity.	£1.250m	£1.111m	£0	£0.139m	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NCT are forecasting 30 fostering approvals with a net growth of -6 households and planned increases to children's homes capacity has not taken place resulting in non delivery of £1.250m savings NCT's Provisional Outturn reported at OG in May 2023 a pressure of £5.206m to joint funded income of which £1.200m is non delivery of expected savings. NCT have reported savings/cost avoidance of £2.312m for 22/23 through price negotiation and regular review of placements. The ICF has validated the calculations for these.
	Placements (£1.2m) – Review of Joint Funding arrangements as part of the multi-agency resource panel process	£1.200m	£1.200m	£0	£0	
	Placement mitigations through price negotiation and regular review of placements	N/A	£0	£0	£2.312m (Mitigation)	
Transport Review	This is a continuation of savings programme around the development of an efficient service, robust placement and threshold management and annual review. The processes are now in place and work will continue to deliver further efficiencies in this area.	£0.100	£0.019m	£0	£0.081m	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Forecasted demand has increased by 12%, cost per journey by 25% since 2021 Reduction in declined journeys delivered £81k savings It is likely that this will continue felt with circa £122.5k savings yet to be defined
Legal Services Review	Undertake a review of the use of Legal services and a gateway approval process. 2022/23	£0.110m	£0m	£0	£0.232m	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shift from using Counsel - £17k Rationalization of meeting attendance - £90k Reduction of cost per matter - £125k Overperformance of savings delivery by £0.122m
		£2.990m	£2.343m	£0m	£0.769m (savings) + £2.312m (mitigation) = £3.081m	

Income Summary 2022/23

- Joint Funding invoiced: £6,135,000
- Grants £14,076,000. Grant funding is generally paid to the Councils and is passported to NCT as contract income and contract variation income.
- Other income £1,480,000. This includes contract variations, investment income, carry forward reserves, recovery of payments, income to support Newly Qualified Social Workers in their assessed and supported year in employment.
- Capital - NCT does not hold capital funding. Children's homes projects and foster carers are funded by council capital funding.

6. A summary of any Changes to the SDC

The following changes were agreed through the change control process:

- **Support Services agreement** – *in light of the disaggregation of previously countywide learning and development services, it was agreed to transfer the L&D children's team and functions to NCT. The remaining L&D SLA with North Northamptonshire Council covers access to non-children's services specific training, e-learning, L&D business systems consultancy and e-learning development and apprenticeships.*
- **Strategic Group** – *Inclusion of additional members*

7. Service demand in 2022/23 and expected demand 2023-25

7.1 2022/23 Demand

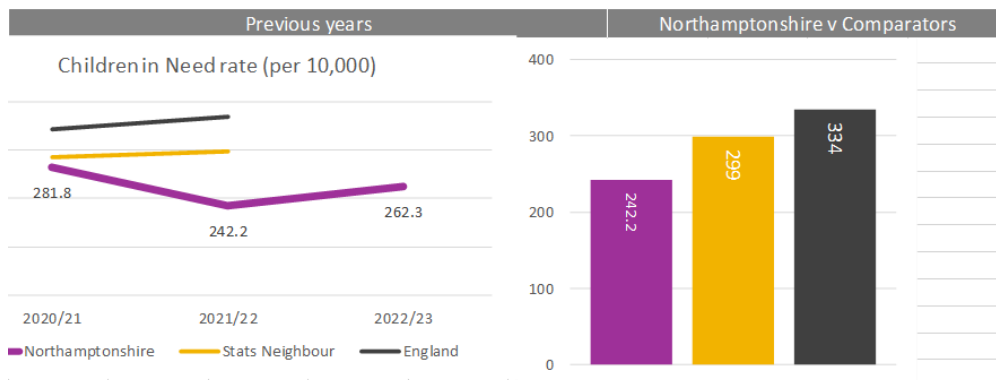
2022/23 saw an increase in demand for NCT services including:

- Number of families allocated to Children and Family Support Services (101 more in 22/23 than in 21/22)
- Number of referrals to MASH (3,231 more in 22/23 than in 21/22)
- Number of assessments (592 more in 22/23 than in 21/22)
- Number of s.47 investigations (803 more in 22/23 than in 21/22)

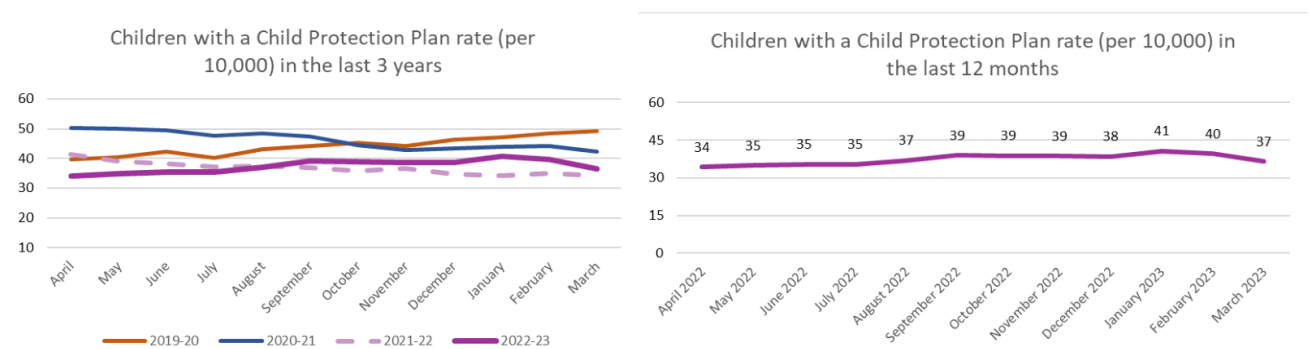
This is likely due to the rising cost of living, the continuing impact of the Covid 19 pandemic and impact of universal services not operating as normal during the pandemic, underdeveloped early help partnership offer, and an increase in the complexity of needs of children and risks of exploitation. The

rate of children in need, children on a child protection plan and children in care all increased in 22/23 in comparison with 21/22.

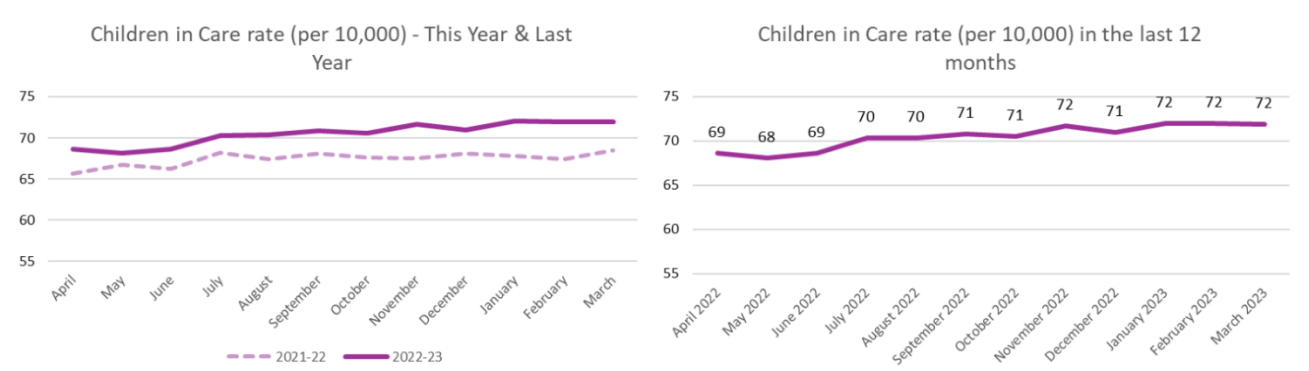
The rate of children in need was 262.3 per 10,000 at end of March 23, an increase from 242.2 in 21/22. This equates to 295 additional children. The rate was below both national and statistical neighbour rates.



The rate of children on a child protection plan was 36.5 per 10,000 at end of March 23, an increase from 34.1 in 21/23. This equates to 34 additional children. The rate was below the England national average and above our statistical neighbour rates.



The rate of children in care was 71.9 per 10,000 at end of March 23, an increase from 68.5 in 21/23. This equates to 46 additional children. The rate was above England and statistical neighbours.



7.2 Predicted Demand for 2023/24

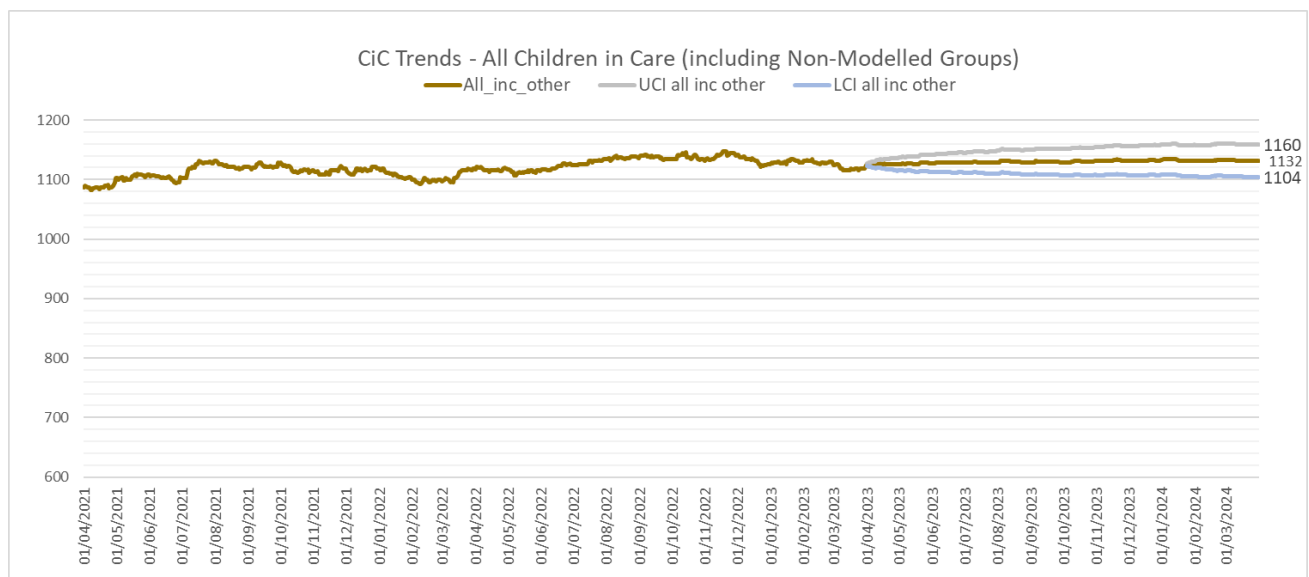
The current and forecast numbers of children in care and the expected demand for placements are included in the document below. The care population (excluding Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC)) has increased 1% from 1118 at the end of March 2022 to 1224 at the end of March 2023.

The current and forecast numbers of children in care and the expected demand for placements are included in the document below.



LAC Modelling
Apr23 draft v0.6 - 1Y

Trend- All Children in Care, Excluding UASC



An increase of 1% up to 1132 is forecast to March 2024. We are forecasting an increase of children in care in the 1-4 years and 16-18 years age groups in this period.

Care Leavers

As at March 2023, there were 891 care leavers aged 16 and above. Our projections tell us that this population is likely to grow to 1080 by March 2024, however, since March 2022 the population of care leavers has decreased by 49 young people (from 940). As per the table below, the number of 16 and 17 year-olds has increased and the number of young people aged 21+ has decreased. We can still expect the number of care leavers to increase in the next couple of years due to the number of young people currently in care aged 15-17 years-old.

Leaving Care Cohort by Age	Total (March 2022)	Total (March 2023)
16	258 (14 of whom are relevant so no longer in care)	293 (9 of whom are relevant so no longer in care)
17		
18	146	152

19	140	136
20	165	155
21	100	72
22	55	36
23	47	28
24	29	16
25	0	3
Total	940	891

During 2022/23 as the Councils and the ICB further developed, there has been an increase in localised strategy development and delivery. Whilst there are many benefits to the new organisational structures and ways of working, this has an impact on NCT's capacity because there are now North and West based strategic, operational and task and finish groups that NCT is requested to participate in to deliver partnership strategies. North and West based strategies and partnership delivery groups that NCT participate in include:

- Local Area Partnerships
- Community Safety
- SEND
- Early Help
- Family Hubs
- Corporate Parenting Boards
- Housing

8. Actual or anticipated changes in legislation and their effects

8.1 Stable Homes, Built on Love: Government response to reports on Children's Social Care

In February 2023, the government announced its implementation strategy in response to the publications of Josh MacAlister's Independent Review of Children's Social Care 2022, The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel's recommendations following the tragic deaths of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and Star Hobson, and the publication on Children's Social Care by the Competition and Markets Authority 2022.

The government set out its vision for reform of children's social care, based on of six pillars, underpinned by a £200 million investment over the next two years to address urgent issues facing children and families.

The six pillars are:

1. Family Help provides the right support at the right time so that children can thrive with their families
2. A decisive multi-agency child protection system
3. Unlocking the potential of family networks
4. Putting love, relationships and a stable home at the heart of being a child in care
5. A valued, supported and highly skilled social worker for every child who needs one
6. A system that continuously learns and improves, and makes better use of evidence and data

The government has consulted on the proposals, seeking views on its responses to various recommendations, including support and protection for children and families, support for kinship carers and wider family networks, reforms to the experience of being in care, including corporate parenting, support for the workforce and delivery and system reform.

Each pillar maps to the outcomes and enablers within the proposed Children's Social Care National Framework and Dashboard, published alongside the strategy, which was also subject to consultation.

A third consultation was published on proposals for the child and family social worker workforce. The proposals included a set of national rules on engagement of agency social work resource, including price caps on what local authorities may pay for an agency worker, post-qualified experience needed for an agency assignment, use of project teams, references, notice periods and movement between agency and substantive roles, collection and sharing of pay and agency data and adherence of procurement routes with the national rules.

The consultation feedback is being analysed by the government and a response is anticipated.

8.2 Unregulated and unregistered placements

Since September 2021, it has been unlawful for any looked after child under the age of 16 years to be housed in a placement setting which is unregulated or unregistered with Ofsted. The rationale for this legislation is recognised and supported. However, there are national placement sufficiency challenges which mean these legislative changes places additional pressures on localities.

The vast majority of our children in care live in homes that are suitable for their needs. During 22/23 there has continued to be a small number of young people in unregistered placements in this context of national challenge in placement sufficiency. The number of children in unregistered provision has reduced since the ILACS inspection in October 2022. For these children we have in place senior manager oversight, consideration of risk and robust support plans, consultation with all parties, legal advice, discussion with the providers about their status and encouraging registration, and communication with Ofsted. Regular reporting on unregistered placements is in place to DCSs, Operational Group and Social Care Improvement Board.

Ofsted are taking enforcement action, which may mean some CQC registered care providers and providers of independent supported accommodation cease operating. Until there is sufficient registered provision available locally/nationally that can meet the needs of children, we are likely to continue seeing increasing costs as local authorities compete for places. Work continues to deliver our sufficiency strategy to increase access to local, suitable homes for children that can meet their needs, including working with the councils to identify potential properties for new children's homes.

8.3 National standards for providers of supported accommodation

From 28th April 2023, under the Supported Accommodation (England) Regulations 2023, supported accommodation providers in England will be able to register with Ofsted. It will be illegal for a supported accommodation provider to operate if they have not submitted a complete application which has been accepted by 28 October 2023. Providers with evidence of a live, accepted application can still accommodate young people aged 16 and 17 until their registration comes through.

NCT's commissioning team has been and will continue to support providers through registration, including signposting and sharing of national guidance. The general feedback from providers on NCT's framework is that they will be registering and close monitoring will take place to ensure this happens within the above timescales.

There is likely to be a financial impact for local authorities as registration will cost providers between £4,500- £5,500 (according to size). Providers will then be required to pay an annual fee. This is still under consultation and will be published in 2024; the initial proposal was between £2,700 and £3,000. Providers are also likely to require changes in their staffing to support the registration requirements which would increase costs to commissioners.

8.4 Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services

In January 2023, 'the experiences and progress of care leavers' was incorporated into the Inspecting Local Authority Children's Services framework for ILACS standard and short inspections.

In March 2023, Ofsted confirmed that they will be undertaking two separate inspections of NCT, one for North Northamptonshire and one for West Northamptonshire. The inspections will take place at

the same time, with two lead inspectors, two inspection teams and will produce two separate reports. This will have resource implications for NCT to manage two inspections at the same time.

8.5 SEND and Alternative Provision improvement plan: Right Support, Right Place, Right Time (March 2023)

The SEND and Alternative Provision Improvement Plan sets out how the government plans to work alongside children, young people and their families, and those who work across every part of the SEND and alternative provision system, to deliver improvements for every child and young person with SEND and in alternative provision.

The proposals aim to:

- Fulfil children’s potential so that children and young people with SEND or attending alternative provision enjoy their childhood, achieve good outcomes and are well prepared for adulthood and employment;
- Build parents’ trust through an easily navigable system across health, education and care, which restores confidence that their children will get the right support, in the right place, at the right time;
- Provide financial sustainability so that local leaders can make best use of record investment in the high needs budget to meet the needs and improved outcomes for children and young people, while ensuring local authorities remain on a stable financial footing.

The implementation will be led by the councils with NCT being a key partner.

8.6 Family Hubs

The councils are leading on the development of Family Hubs, with NCT as a key partner.

The Family Hub and Start for Life Programme is now being rolled out across North Northamptonshire. Key areas for support include mental health during pregnancy and beyond, parenting, infant feeding and home learning to promote early language and literacy development.

8.7 Integrated Care Systems

Integrated Care Systems are now in their infancy. The ambition is to create greater integration of health and care services, improve population health, reduce inequalities, support productivity and sustainability of services and help the NHS support social and economic development. More care in people’s homes and the community will be provided and will be led by the needs of the local area within a broad national framework. The CYP Transformation Programme, as part of the ICS in Northants is focusing on system improvements and priorities for children, with the NNC Chief Executive as the sponsor.

9. The strategic priorities and outcomes for the Services

The Strategic Priorities for the Services are set out [in Northamptonshire Children’s Trust’s Business Plan](#) for 2023/24-2026/27. This Plan was approved by NCT’s Board and by the councils through the [Children’s Trust Joint Committee on 15th February 2023](#).

This sets out NCT’s vision to place “Children, Young People and Families at the heart of all we do – in every action we take and every action we make.” To fulfil this vision NCT have identified the following priorities:

- Effective leadership
- Recruit, retain and develop an awesome workforce
- Strong relationship-based practice
- Insightful quality assurance and learning
- Healthy partnerships
- Robust and effective resource management

These priorities have been developed to enable NCT to achieve their identified outcomes for children, and young people:

- Live safe, be safe
- Fulfil potential
- Develop resilience
- Enjoy good health and wellbeing

Our progress against the priorities set out in the Business Plan are tracked through the Improvement Plan linked below, which is reviewed monthly and reported to Operational Group and the Social Care Improvement Board.



NORTHAMPTONSHIRE CHILDREN.pdf

10. Any social, demographic or other relevant factors which may impact on the services

10.1 Impact of Covid-19, the cost of living crisis and its impact on children & families

Post-pandemic, there are higher levels of need amongst children and families and children's social care and partner organisations are carrying a greater level of risk. This is typical of the national picture³ with an increase of children in care (see figures in Section 7) and complexity of children's needs, which is putting pressure on the availability of placements, within a market which does not meet the needs of children (as identified in the Independent Review of Children's Social Care⁴ and the Competition and Market's market study of children's social care⁵). Families continue to present with complex, multi-layered needs which are more acute. The rising cost of living has also had an impact on the volume of re-referrals (see ADCS safeguarding pressures report at footnote 3), as well as influencing social workers to work for agencies as take home pay rates are more attractive.⁶ There is also increasing demand and waiting lists for partnership services, including ADHD and ASD assessments and domestic abuse support.

10.2 Asylum seekers from Afghanistan

In the period 2022/23 there were 57 Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children from Afghanistan receiving a service from Northamptonshire Children's Trust: 28 care leavers and 29 children in care.

10.3 Timeliness of initial and review health assessments for children in care

The timeliness of initial and review health assessments for children in care has been unsatisfactorily below target for some time. As at the end of March 2023, 55% of children in care had an initial health assessment within 28 days of becoming looked after, and 66% of children in care had an up to date health review. These are undertaken by the children in care health team commissioned by the NHS. This could mean that that the health needs of some of our children may not be understood or supported in a timely way. NCT have reviewed and improved our processes within NCT and continue to work with health colleagues to take action to address the issue and the impact is being monitored at board level.

³ see ADCS [Safeguarding Pressures Phase 8 Executive Summary FINAL Dec 2022](#))

⁴ [Independent review of children's social care - final report \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

⁵ [Final report - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

⁶ [Children's social work workforce, Reporting year 2022 – Explore education statistics – GOV.UK \(explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk\)](#) shows agency workers increase 13% from 21 to end of 22. Regional and local intelligence tells us it is agency pay, backed up by the controls the government have consulted on.

10.4 Impact of historical poor social care practice and previously under-developed early help offer

Prior to NCT being in place, children's social care in Northamptonshire was found to be inadequate by Ofsted. Serious case reviews and child safeguarding practice reviews have also identified previous inadequacies⁷. There is a historically underdeveloped early help offer from children's services and the partnership. The impact of this previous poor practice mean that children and families did not necessarily receive the right support at the right time, and in some instances, this continues to have an impact on children's outcomes now, as identified in quality assurance activity and inspections. It also meant agencies were more likely to refer to children's social care when a child was not at risk of significant harm because they did not feel there was sufficient early help available. This also created a poor reputation for Northamptonshire which can influence our partnership working, ability to secure placements and attract social workers. While improvements are being felt, it will take some time to change the reputation and fully develop the early help offer across our system.

10.5 West and North Northamptonshire school place planning and SEND forecasts

10.5.1 North Northamptonshire

From 2011 to the Census in March 2021, the overall population of children and young people aged 0-19 grew by 9%, or 6,800 people, to approximately 85,500 people in total. The profile of the population got slightly older. The number of children aged 4 or under fell by 4%, to around 20,000, whereas the number at school age (aged 5 to 15) increased by 7,500 or 18% to 50,000. The number of young people aged 16 to 19 stayed the same at 15,000. There was growth of 9% in the number of households with couples with dependent children (to 30,600), but growth of 20% in the number of households with grown-up children (to 9,500), and 17% growth in the number of lone parent households (to 16,300).

These figures are taken from the Census because the ONS has only published estimates for mid-year 2021, the Census was only shortly before that, but comparing Census figures allows us to see trends over the last ten years as well.

Primary

The demand for primary school places in North Northamptonshire is broadly reflective of national trends. The increase in the demand for places experienced since 2010, is forecast to plateau and decrease in the period ending 2023/28, despite ongoing local large scale housing developments. NNC are forecasting overall falling rolls across primary schools in the majority of planning areas with some localised spikes in demand. As a consequence, all the planned new schools which are proposed as a result of Housing Developments are being reviewed to ensure that any new provision meets an identified need and does not create unnecessary surplus capacity. NNC are working with schools to address forecast surplus capacity issues by proactively reducing published admission numbers and reutilising unused space to meet SEND or other needs.

Secondary

The larger cohorts of students that are moving through the primary phase of education continue to move into the secondary phase in North Northamptonshire. The total number of students expected to attend a Northamptonshire secondary provision is forecast to increase slightly, by 129, from 2023 to 2029 (1%), but this masks variations between planning areas in terms of total change and the profile of that change over the forecasting period.

Certain planning areas are experiencing pressure on specific year groups which is impacting on the availability of places for in year applications which have increased significantly over the last 12

⁷ [Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews - Northamptonshire Safeguarding Children Board \(northamptonshirescb.org.uk\)](http://northamptonshirescb.org.uk)

months. NNC have negotiated a number of bulge classes within Secondary Schools to contribute to meeting the in year pressures. Weldon Village School which will grow to be 8 FE opens its doors Sept 2023 and as it fills will relieve pressure across the Corby area. Hanwood Park Secondary School is in development and planned to open in Sept 2026, this will provide much needed places across Kettering. Further temporary expansions will be required to meet pressure in this area in the meantime.

SEND

The forecasts suggest that numbers of children with SEND, special schools, SEND units, resourced provision and independent special schools will grow over the forecasting period. This is in line with previous trends showing 10% growth each year for the past 3 years. However, pressure on alternative provision will stabilise as capacity is increased through a range of new provision.

As a result of a sufficiency review undertaken by NNC, a new approach to SEND early help funding has been introduced into mainstream schools alongside SENIF plus for the early years sector, increasing investment in Early Help by over £2.5 million. The implementation of the funding is part of the locality wide SEND offer to schools.

The findings from the review also highlighted the need to develop more unit provision across each of the four local areas in North Northants. To date 32 additional places have been secured in existing or new SEND units. Further work is ongoing to further develop unit provision, with the aim of increasing unit provision by up to 100 further places.

10.5.2 West Northamptonshire

The demand of the school places in West Northamptonshire is broadly reflective of national trends. Reception intake numbers peaked in 2017/18 - there were 4,080 children on roll in reception in January 2007, according to census data, compared to 5,075 children on roll in January 2017. This represented an increase of 995 new starters and can be linked to consistent increases in live births between the period 2003-2012. Since this time, birth rates have either dropped slightly or have plateaued. As of January 2023, there were 137 fewer reception children on roll compared to January 2017.

Of the three main drivers of the increase in the demand for primary school places that occurred over the previous decade: a rising birth-rate, high levels of inward-migration and large-scale housing development, only the latter still appears to be a major factor in West Northamptonshire. Primary projections forecasts indicate that there will be a decrease in the total number of pupils attending a primary school over the next 5 years, by around 3%, should current trends continue.

The latest birth rate data (taken from GP registration data) shows a 2% increase in births in 2022 compared to the previous year) and could suggest a change in the recent pattern and if that continues and the surge in house building across West Northants continues the reduction in primary school place provision would start to increase again in the coming years.

SEND

West Northants continue to see increase in demand for assessment and a significant increase in approved EHCPs. The forecasts suggest that SEND Numbers for special schools and SEND units will continue to grow. As with other areas the growth trend is showing 10%.

As a result, in 23/24 there will be a review of their structure and additional resources to enable statutory duties to be met, to ensure demand is managed and most of all ensure children's needs are met.

Partnership working with SEND is pivotal and this is an area which continues to be developed and strengthened. The new co-produced SEND and Alternative Provision Strategy helps to identify and

agree the priorities for the local area partnership for 2023-26. The OFSTED/CQC SEND Inspection is expected during 23/24 and inspection readiness will be key.

In WNC, there are plans to open more than 600 specialist SEND education places in the next 3 years and further work is ongoing around further provision to ensure needs of children with SEND are met.

11. The results of any audits or surveys in 2022-23

11.1 Internal audit

Audits undertaken in 2022/23 covered strategic and operational reviews for the Trust, and the summary includes audits of support services provided to the Trust. We can provide assurance that the Trust has established adequate, appropriate, and effective controls which help ensure that risks are being managed and objectives achieved.

The role of internal audit is to provide an opinion to the Trust, through the Finance, Resources and Audit Committee, on the adequacy and effectiveness of the internal control system to ensure the achievement of the organisation’s objectives in the areas reviewed. The annual report from internal audit provides an overall opinion on the adequacy and effectiveness of the organisation’s risk management, control, and governance processes, within the scope of work undertaken by Internal Audit. The basis for forming our opinion is as follows:

- An assessment of the range of individual opinions arising from risk-based audit assignments contained within internal audit plans that have been reported throughout the year.
- This assessment has taken account of the relative materiality of these areas and management’s response to agreed actions.
- Management investigation and response to issues raised from fraud investigations.

The annual audit and statement of assurance for FY22/23 was discussed at NCT FR&A committee in August ‘23 where the Chief Internal Auditor concluded that they could give satisfactory assurance that a sound system of internal control was in place at the Trust. The FR&A committee agreed they would accept the audit opinion once they received further assurances on the opinion given. The FRA subsequently met again in September ’23 and received an update and further assurances on the position from the incoming Interim Chief Internal Auditor and the trust’s Director of Resources. Based on this update the FR&A committee are now satisfied with the professional opinion and assurance level given by the previous Chief Internal Auditor for the financial year 22/23.

Internal audit has provided satisfactory assurance that there is a sound system of internal control, designed to meet the Trust’s objectives, and that controls are being applied consistently.

It is recognised that the level of audit coverage, including the number of risk-based audits specific to the Trust, is important for assurance purposes and steps are in place to further increase the number of audits delivered in 2023/24.

List of Audits

Progress of internal audit review of 2022/23 (as at September 2023)

Audit	Audit Status	Assurance Rating		
		Control Environment	Compliance	Org Impact
2021/22 – Plan; 2022/23 Assurance				

Audit	Audit Status	Assurance Rating		
		Control Environment	Compliance	Org Impact
Services - Foster Care and Special Guardianship Payments	Final Report	Good	Good	Minor
Services - Placement Contract Management	Final Report	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Moderate
WNC - IT Systems Security - Carefirst System	Final Report	Limited	Satisfactory	Moderate
Key Financials - Payroll	Final Report	Good	Substantial	Minor
WNC - Services - Social Care Transport	Final Report	Satisfactory	Limited	Major
2022/23 – Plan and Assurance				
Overarching Safeguarding Arrangements	Final Report	Good	Good	Minor
Corporate Parenting - Leaving Care s24	Final Report	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Minor
Corporate Governance Framework (incl Ofsted Improvement Plan Monitoring)	Draft Report	Good	Good	Minor
Social Work Workforce	Final Report	N/A – Briefing Note Report - no ratings issued.		
Fostering Service (In-house Independent Fostering Agency)	Draft Report	N/A – Interim Report issued – no ratings issued further work planned for 2023/24.		
Sustainability – corporate parent role		Removed		
MTFP and budget management		Removed		
ICT – network infrastructure security		Removed		
ICT – privileged access control		Removed		
WNC Service Audits				
IT Disaster recovery	Complete	Limited	Limited	Moderate
IT Cyber security	Complete	Limited	Limited	Major
Payroll Transaction Testing	Complete	Good	Good	Minor

11.2 Self Evaluation

The self-evaluation for 2022 was reviewed by the ADCS regional improvement and innovation alliance in summer 2022, by Ofsted during the full ILACS in October 2022 and the social care annual conversation in 2023. A refresh of the annual self-evaluation will be completed for October 2023.

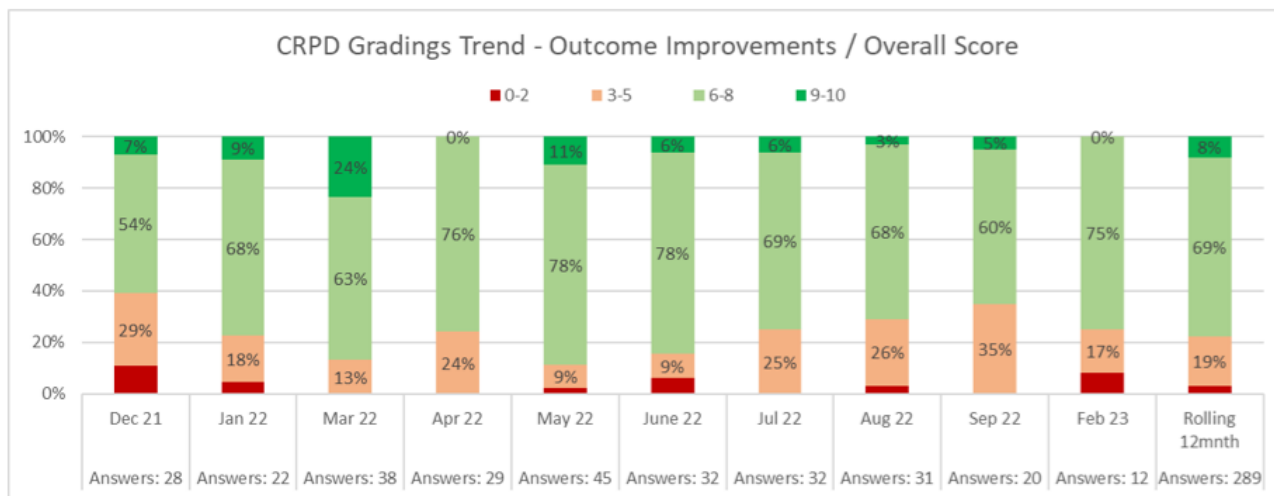


Full SEF ILACS 2022
final.pdf

11.3 Quality assurance of our practice with children and families

As part of our quality assurance framework, we undertake regular audits of children's cases. These are completed as a reflective discussion with the child's practitioner focused on the impact made for the child. These are known as 'collaborative reflective practice discussions' (CRPDs) and the results are reviewed at our monthly Quality Assurance Board, chaired by the Chief Executive. The graph below shows the overall experience of the child and impact of our work with them from our audited cases on a scale of 0 –10 (where 10 means the child is safe and happy, enjoys good health and wellbeing, and their outcomes show they are resilient and fulfilling their potential, and 0 means the child is not safe and healthy, has low resilience, and are not fulfilling their potential). 77% of CRPDs undertaken over 12 months up to the end of March 2023 were scaled at 6 and above out of ten for

overall outcomes. Other quality assurance activity undertaken by NCT includes thematic audits, Practice Weeks, practice observations and participation in peer and multi agency practice reviews.



11.4 Equalities surveys

NCT carried out its annual Equalities Survey in September 2022 to gauge the response of our workforce to new measures introduced to support more equitable and inclusive approaches to working. Feedback is also sought from our Equalities Forum on a six-weekly basis. Results include:

- On a scale of 0-10, where 0 is unsupported and 10 is fully supported for diversity and inclusion needs, the average ranking for 7.54.
- 68% feel that equality, diversity and inclusion has become more of a priority since we became NCT.
- 37% of respondents identified as belonging to an underrepresented or disadvantaged group.
- 63% work directly with children, young people and families.
- 45% of respondents have a role which involves managing others.
- 51% say we're at Cultural Pre-Competence and 34% say we're at Cultural Competence on the Cultural Competency scale.

11.5 Leadership Development Programme

All line managers in NCT have participated in the 9 month NCT Leadership Development programme in 2021/22. Review sessions have taken place in 2022/23 to reflect on the journey of the child through our system, our practice models and processes and leadership styles. NCT has also supported 30 colleagues to participate in nationally funded Pathways programmes for social care leadership, and 5 colleagues to participate in the Staff College's Black and Asian Leadership Initiative and Women in Leadership programmes.

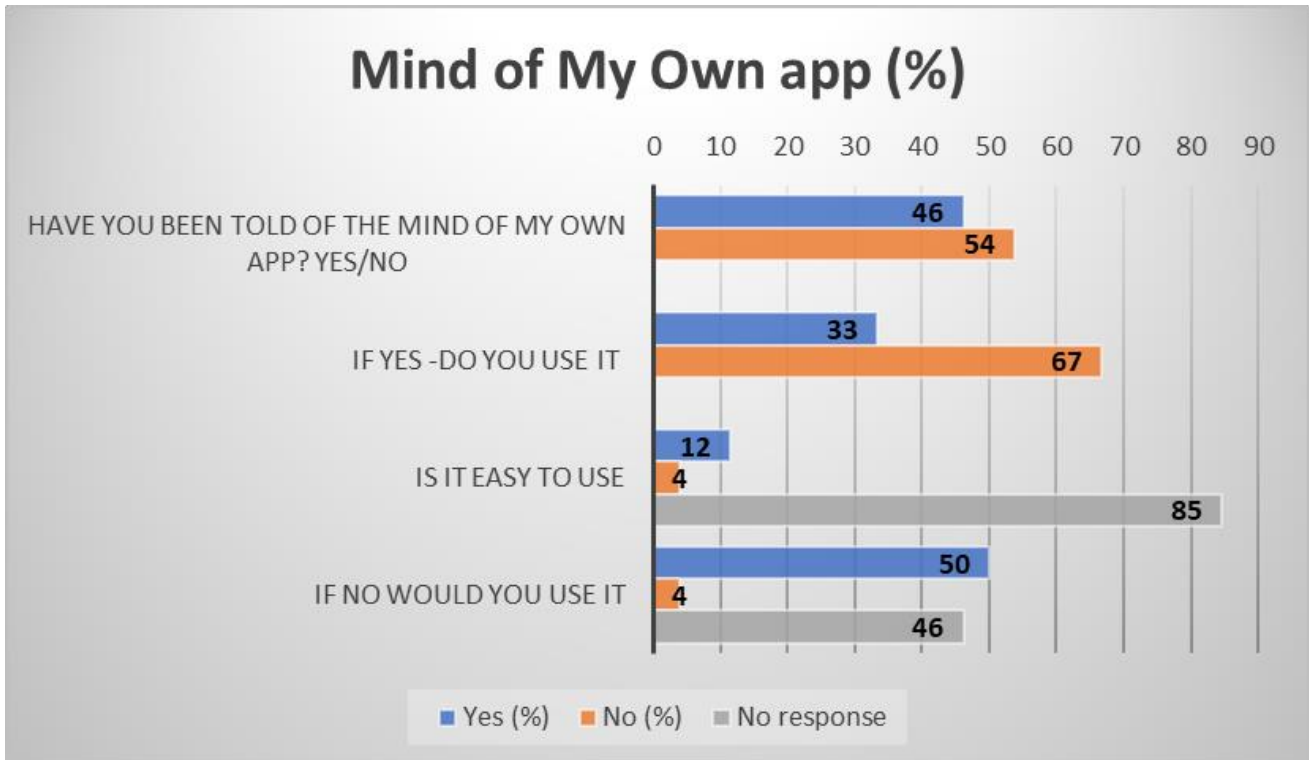
11.6 Surveys of children and young people

Children in care reviews

IROs have made effective use of a range of approaches to engage with young people, using various IT platforms. During the reporting period Apr 2022 to Mar 2023 there was a 15% increase to 54% of children and young people attending their review compared to the previous year. Overall, 82% of children and young people were able to either attend or share their views with the IRO prior to, or at their review enabling the young person's voice to be more clearly heard and giving them the opportunity to actively partake in the decision-making about their life. All IROs have a one-page profile and children and young people have fed back that they find these profiles beneficial as they help to make the first meeting more informal. IROs update and send their one-page profiles to children and young people prior to their first review and new IROs are required to complete their profile upon appointment.

Mind of My Own

26 young people responded to our survey on Care Plans in May 2022. The following chart shows their views on the Mind of My Own app.



Usage of the MoMO app declined in the early half of 2023. A working group has been established to relaunch the app, and an increase in usage – particularly by children – is being seen. Some of the promotional activities have included promotional leaflets and flyers distributed at the Children in Care awards, promotion by the Participation team and a new ‘train the trainer’ scheme to encourage use among colleagues.

Young people receiving support from Youth Offending Service

During 22/23, 81 young people provided their views in a questionnaire, a 17% increase on the previous year. Case workers received an average score of 9.22 on a scale from 1-10 – up from 9.1 the previous year. 93% said they found their case worker ‘very supportive’, and 91% said their case manager ‘totally’ did what they said they would – up from 76% last year.

The gender breakdown of the feedback was 84% male respondents and 16% female respondents. The ethnicity breakdown was 1.3% Asian, 5.1% Black, 10.3% mixed ethnicity and 83.3% white respondents.

11.6 External and peer reviews

The following reviews were undertaken in 2022/23:

- YOS Peer Review
- Exploitation thematic Peer Review
- Peer Review of NCT’s commissioning
- DfE Advisor review of assurance arrangements between the NCT, WNC and NNC
- DfE Advisor review of NCT’s quality assurance and performance management
- LGA review of Corporate Parenting
- LGA second Insight report into Northamptonshire Children’s Trust arrangements

The findings and recommendations of these reviews will need to be considered. NCT will provide a realignment report to inform the Contract Sum discussions in 2023/24. The report will set out what will be required to support services on West and North locality basis, to support two inspections and to deliver good quality children's services.

11.7 Significant Complaints, Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews (CSPRS) and Serious Incidents

No complaints were received during 22/23 that met the significant complaints threshold. 7 serious incidents occurred in 2022/ 23 and reported to the national panel. One CSPR was published between 01.04.22-31.03.23: Ref102 Child Ba, published 8 March 2023.

[Child Ba - Child Safeguarding Practice Review - Northamptonshire Safeguarding Children Board \(northamptonshirescb.org.uk\)](https://northamptonshirescb.org.uk)

12. The outcomes of any Rectification Plans

As per Schedule 6 (Performance Framework) of the Service Delivery Contract, NCT must produce a Rectification Plan where Performance Failure has not been resolved at the Formal Stage of the Escalation process. There were no Rectification Plans requested during the 2022-23 contract year.

13. High level review of general funding available for Councils

NCT received grant funding of £14,076,000 in 2022/23. Grant funding is generally paid to the Councils and is passported to NCT as contract income and contract variation income.

North Northamptonshire was awarded £4m Family Hub programme funding for 2022-25.

14. Risk register

The NCT Risk register risks are categorised in 3 categories, each of which a Director is responsible for, Corporate, Social Care and Finance and Operations. The Register is updated quarterly by risk owners, and then a covering report highlighting key changes and issues for discussion, along with the register is reviewed at PPQ Committee and NCT Board.



NCT Strategic Risk Register - April 2023

15. The outcome of any regulatory inspections

Ofsted Visits of Children's Social Care April 22 – March 23

Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services, October 2022

North Northamptonshire [50200024 \(ofsted.gov.uk\)](https://www.ofsted.gov.uk/inspections/50200024)

West Northamptonshire [50200026 \(ofsted.gov.uk\)](https://www.ofsted.gov.uk/inspections/50200026)

Judgment: *Requires Improvement to be Good*

A full inspection of Children's Social Care took place during 3rd-14th October 2022. The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families, the experiences and progress of children who need help and protection and the experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers were all graded as Requires Improvement to be Good resulting in the overall effectiveness for both Councils being judged as Requires Improvement to be Good, this was a welcomed improvement from the previous grading in 2019 of Inadequate.

Ofsted saw significant improvements in our Children's Social Care Services over the last 2 years. Inspectors observed the significant shift in culture the Trust has made to one that is now of high support and kindness. As an organisation we put children and young people at the heart of all we do and again Ofsted noted. Ofsted also rightly found areas that we can improve on which is captured in our Improvement Plan, see Section 9.

Independent Fostering Agency Inspection – February 2023

[50211704 \(ofsted.gov.uk\)](https://www.ofsted.gov.uk/inspections/50211704)

Judgement: Inadequate

On becoming a Trust, we had to register our fostering service as an independent fostering agency (IFA). Our IFA had its first inspection in October 2021 with the outcome Requires Improvement to be Good. [50174779 \(ofsted.gov.uk\)](https://www.ofsted.gov.uk/inspections/50174779)

The second Inspection took place 6-10 February 2023 with the outcome of Inadequate. While this wasn't the outcome we anticipated, we fully accepted the findings and recommendations of the report.

A service improvement plan is in place with agreed team objectives, targets, and timescales for completion. We have worked with our foster carers, children, young people and partners to develop this plan to improve the service so that it is the best it can be to meet the needs of our children and young people.

Children's Home Inspections

Home	Last Full inspection date	Grading	Monitoring visit	Comments
Thornton House URN 2608872	11th January 2023	Requires improvement to be good	Improved effectiveness	Opened Jan 2020 Interim inspection 9 March 2022
Phoenix House URN 2608892	7th February 2023	Good	20th-21st October 2020	Opened Feb 2020
Welford House URN 2608968	30 April 2019 October 2021 15th November 2022	Good Good Good	24 Feb 2021	Interim Inspection 4 March 2020
Raven House URN 2615067	April 2019 July 2021 11-12 Aug 2021 9th August 2022	Good Good Good Good	22-23 Sep 2020 - 12 Nov 2020 -	The assurance visit resulted in a restriction notice from 28 September which was lifted 20 Dec 2020.
Arnold House URN 2616670	2-3rd July 2019 17 -18 May 2022	Requires improvement to be good Good	17 June 20 22 July 20 13-14 October 20 26 Jan 21 Jun 21 Nov 29th, 2022	N/A

16. Any proposed changes to the SDC

The following will be considered as part of the annual review in 2023/24:

- Development of contract sum 2024/25
- Review of assurance procedures and KPIs to be undertaken between NCT, NNC and WNC during annual review period
- Review of SLAs within the Support Services Agreement, including:
 - re-costing by the Councils as the current SLAs are based on an uplift on the original costs identified prior to the inception of NCT
 - a service level agreement for the supply of transport following disaggregation of the countywide transport support service

17.Strategic Direction

Looking ahead to 2023/24, NCT's primary focus continues to improving experiences and outcomes for children and families who need help; whether that is targeted early help, youth offending or statutory social care support. NCT wants children to be able to remain within the care of their families when this is safe and in the best interests of the child. When a child is not able to remain in the care of their families, NCT want children to receive good quality care that meets their needs. NCT wants all children to thrive and be able to live safe, be safe; fulfil their potential; develop resilience and enjoy good health and wellbeing.

Since the inception of NCT, children's services have improved from 'Inadequate' to 'Requires Improvement to be Good'. This has been achieved in the context of the establishment of NCT, WNC and NNC as new organisations; a global pandemic; a continued national shortage of social workers; a national crisis in children's placements market; cost of living and inflation increases and increasing demand and complexity of need (See Appendix 5). NCT's priority is to keep improving and go on to deliver good and outstanding services for children. NCT's Improvement Plan and Independent Fostering Agency's Improvement Plan will continue to guide progress, along with external scrutiny though Ofsted focused visits and inspections of children's homes and NCT's independent fostering agency in 2023/24.

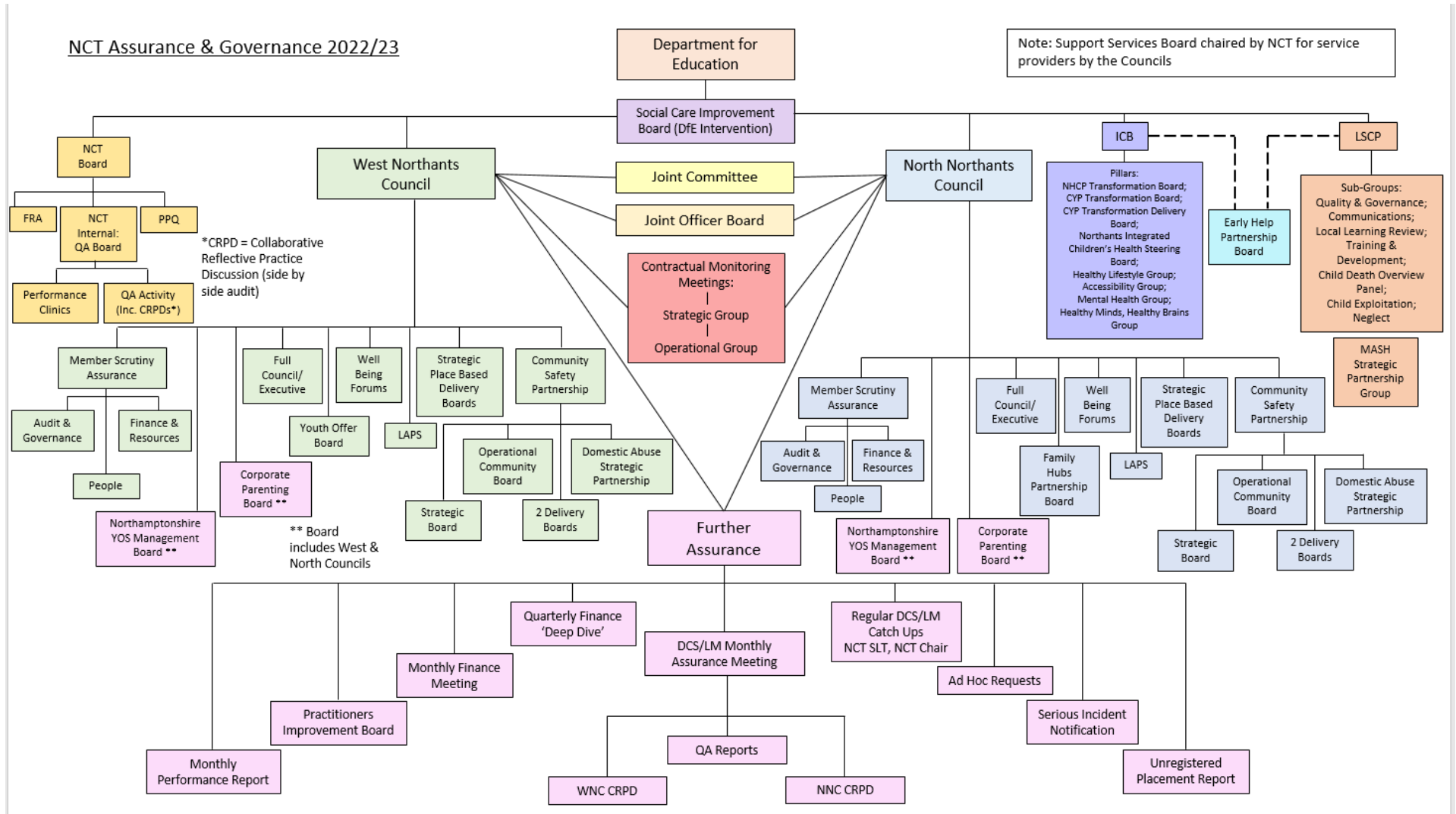
The most significant challenges for 2023/24 are likely to be managing demand, including reducing referrals to children's social care when families do not require a statutory intervention; and increasing costs of delivering services, including the cost of placements that can meet the needs of children. Key to addressing demand will be implementing changes to the 'front door' following a peer review to be completed in Q2 of 2023/24. Key to ensuring that children are cared for in placements that can best meet their needs and provide the best value for money is the continuation of the Circle to Success programme in 2023/24.

The financial challenges faced for children's services and the rest of the public sector are likely to increase during 2023/24. Whilst the government is proposing changes intended to improve the national workforce and placements situation, these will take some time to have impact. NCT, alongside the Councils and other statutory partners, will continue to seek to make the best use of resources and achieve value for money in the challenging national and local financial context. This includes delivering savings, managing budgets effectively and highlighting where budgets are out of step with demand.

The external reviews completed in 2022/23, particularly the DfE Advisor's review of assurance arrangements between the NCT, WNC and NNC; DfE Advisor's review of NCT's quality assurance and performance management and the LGA's second Insight report into Northamptonshire Children's Trust arrangements, have provided helpful reflection and recommendations for effective delivery of children's services in the Northamptonshire context. NCT will work with the Councils to agree and implement actions arising from these reviews.

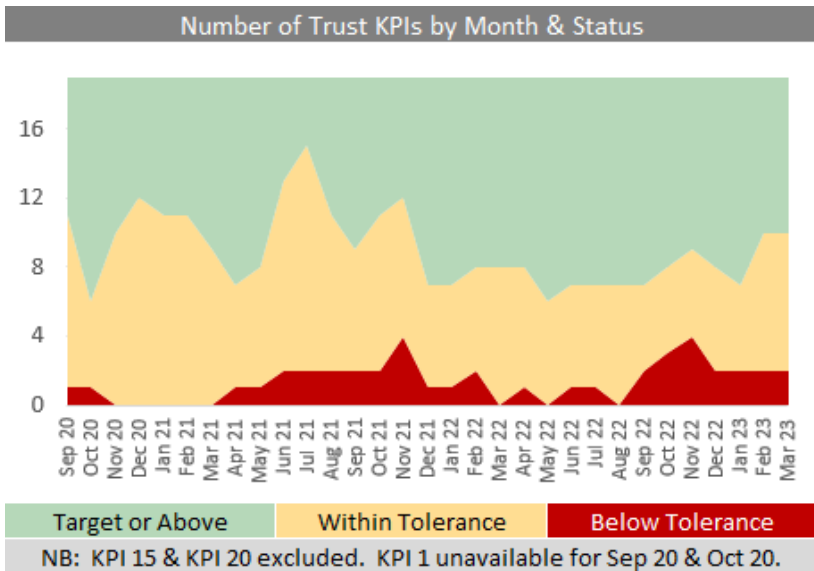
Above all else, NCT will continue to keep children, young people and families at the heart of all we do – in every action we take and every decision we make. NCT will live out the commitment our children asked us to make to them – *What we do today affects your tomorrow, we promise to walk side by side with you.*

Appendix 1 – NCT Assurance and Governance

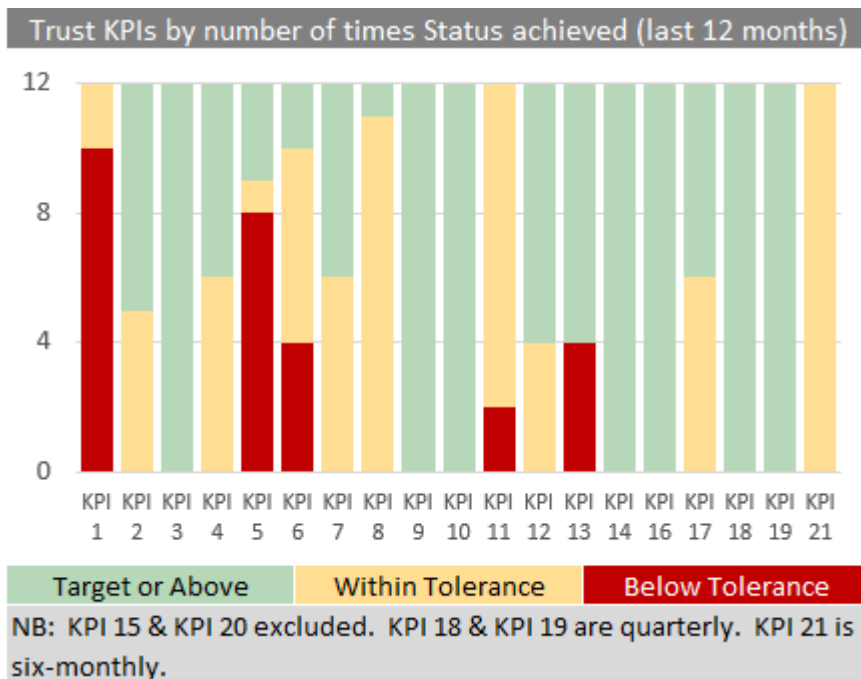


Appendix 2 – 2022/23 Performance against KPI's

Overview of KPI Performance



May 2022 was the period where NCT delivered the best performance against the KPI's where 13 KPIs were *At Target or Above*, 6 *Within Tolerance* and none *Below Tolerance*.

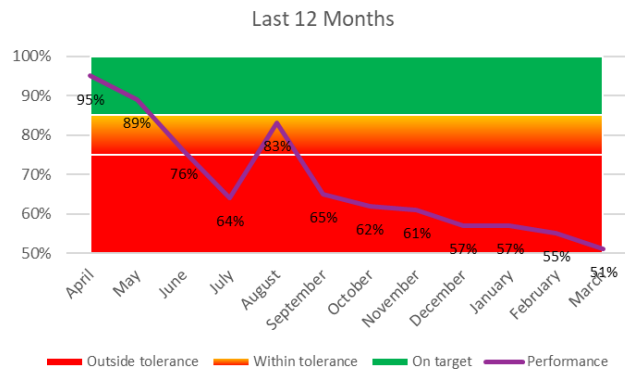
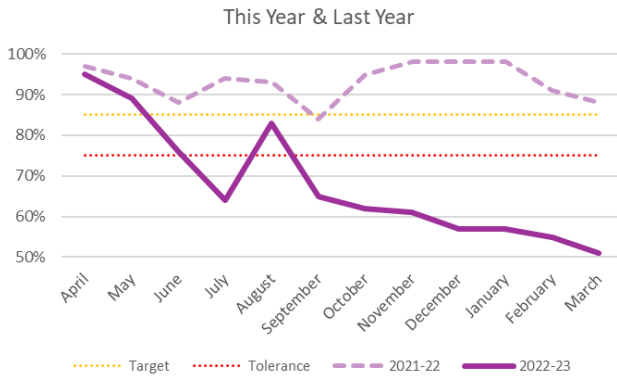


KPI's 18, 19, 20 & 21 are reported quarterly or bi-annually.

Individual KPI Performance

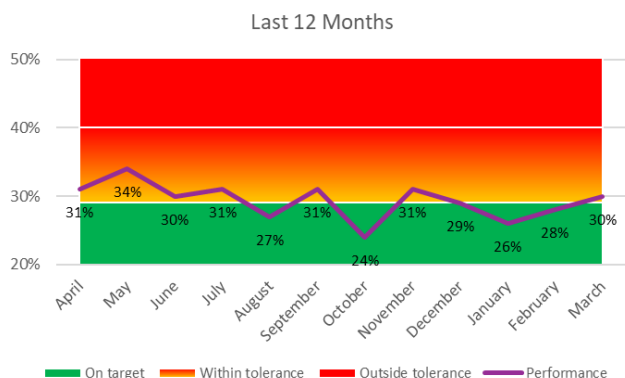
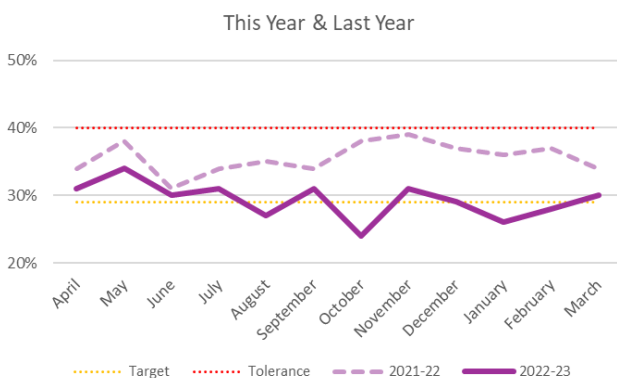
KPI 1 - % all referrals with a decision within 2 working days

2022/23 Overview

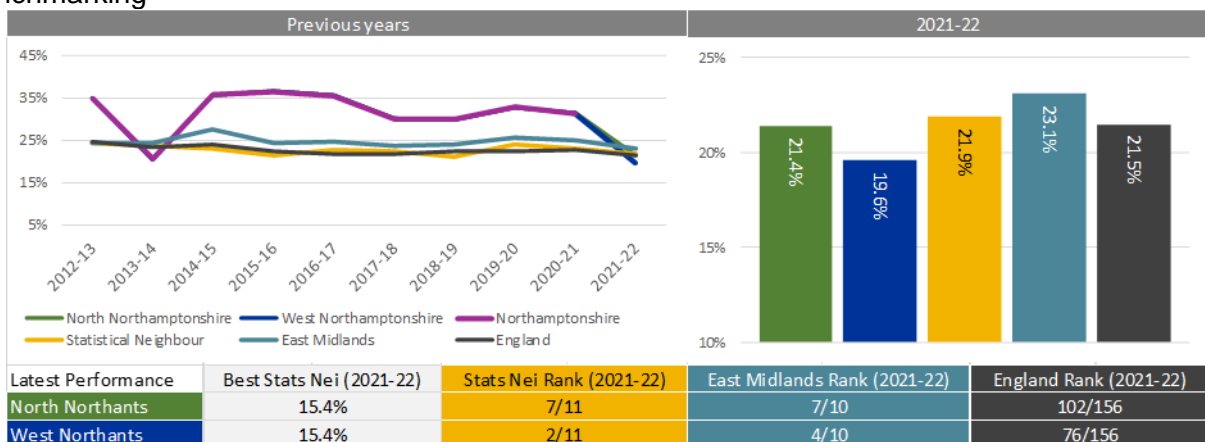


KPI 2 - % referrals with a previous referral within 12 months

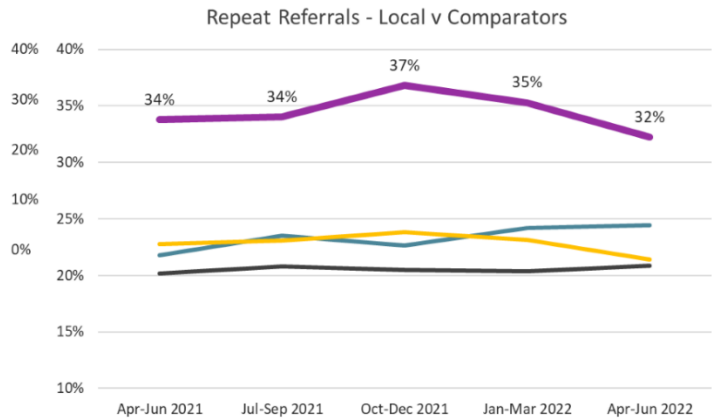
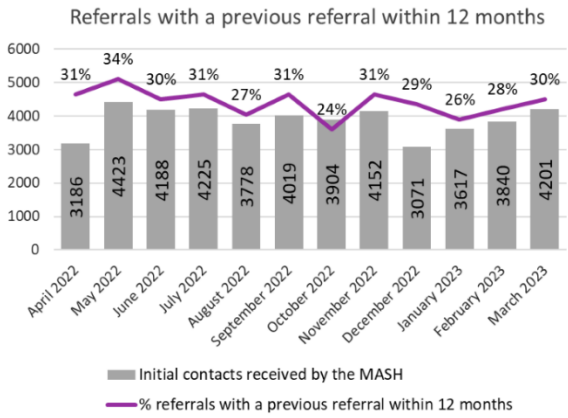
2022/23 Overview



Benchmarking

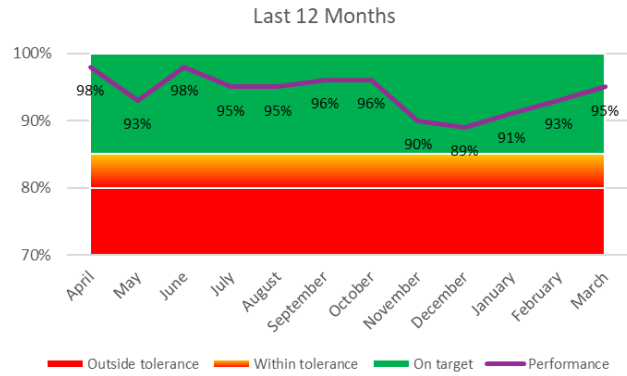
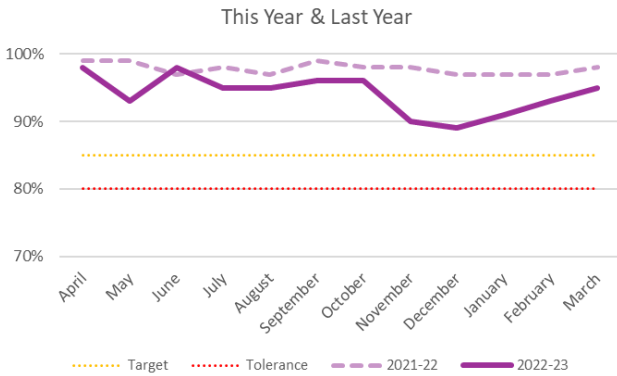


Contextual data

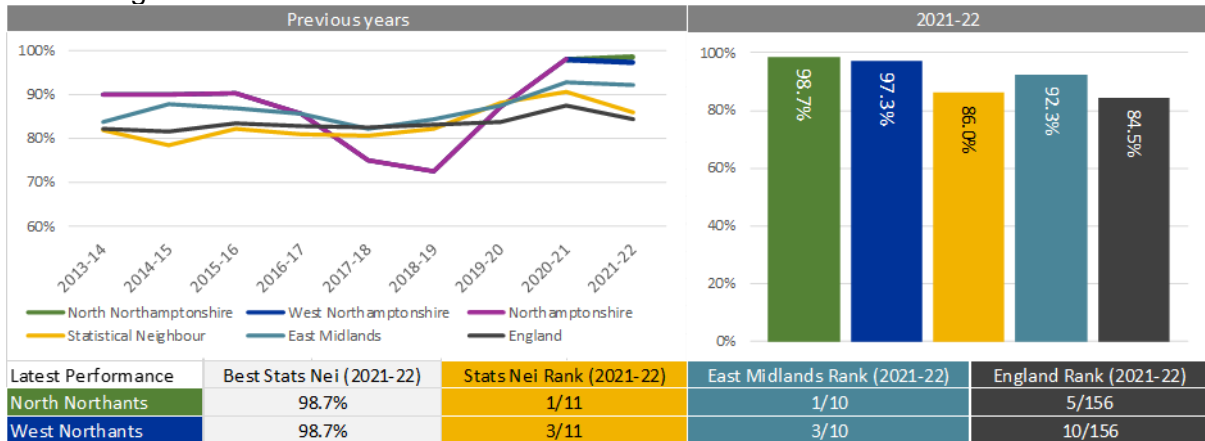


KPI 3 - % Single Assessments authorised within 45 working days

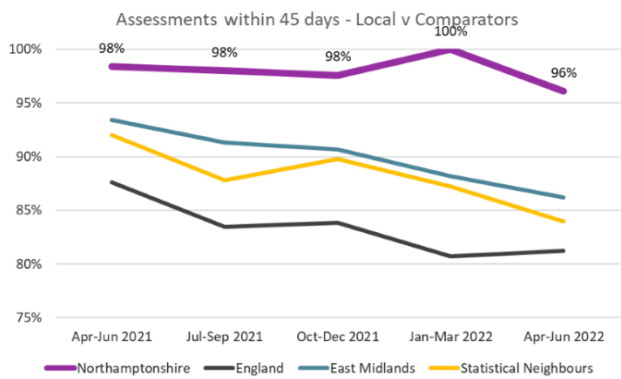
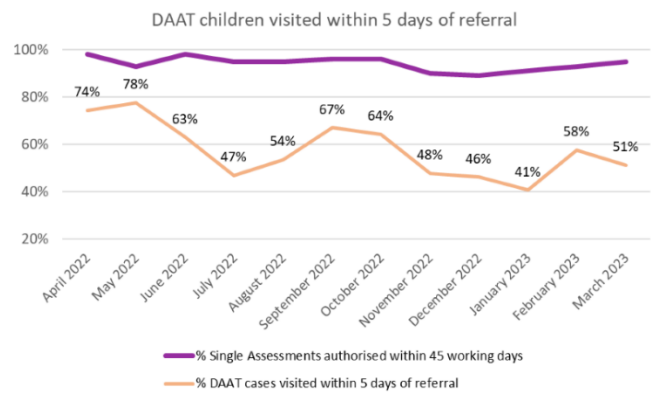
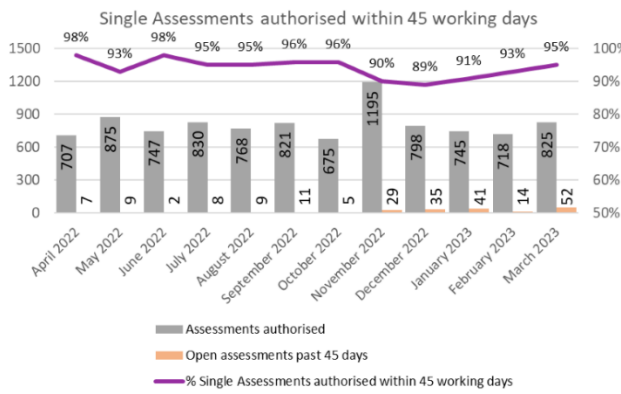
2022/23 Overview



Benchmarking

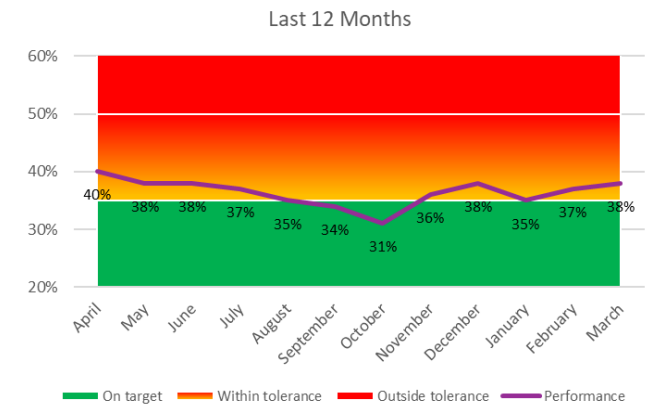
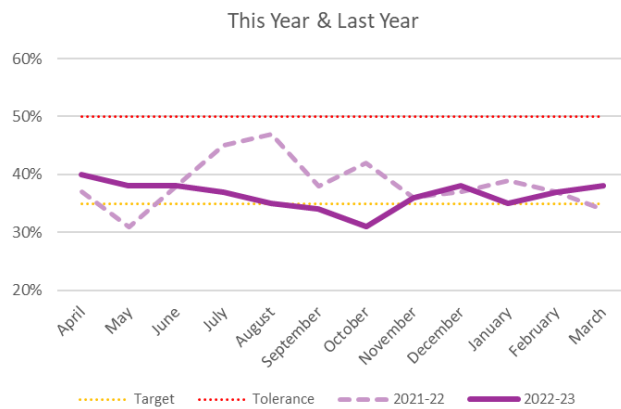


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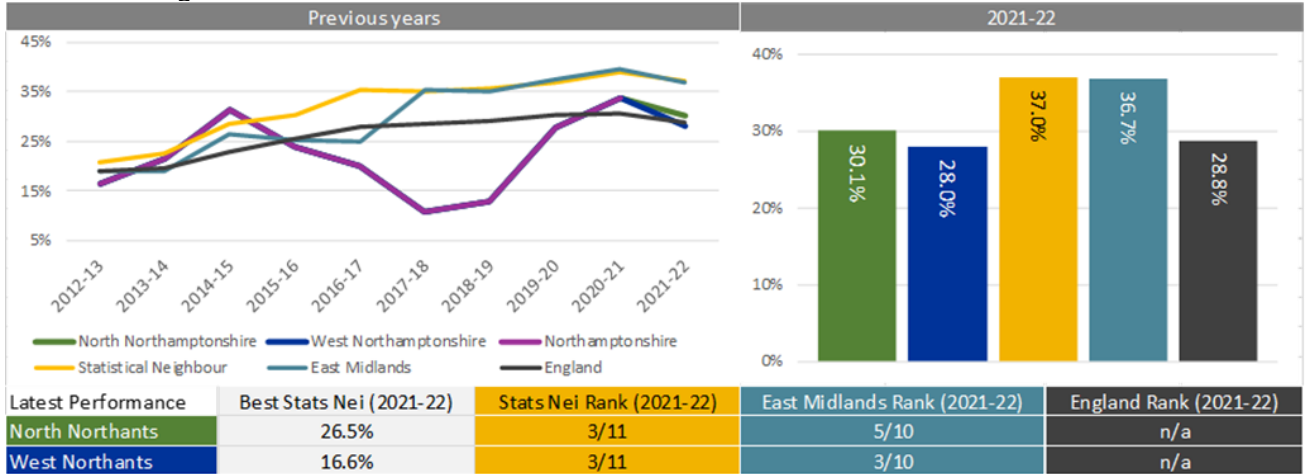


KPI 4 - % Single Assessments closing with no further action

2022/23 Overview

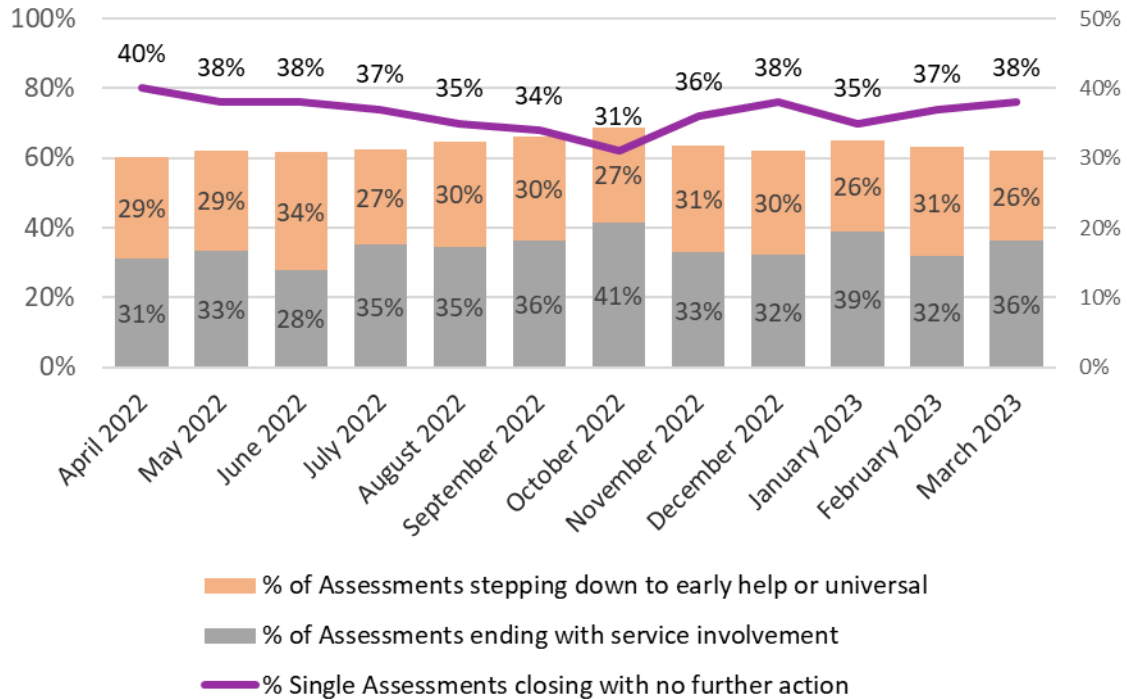


Benchmarking



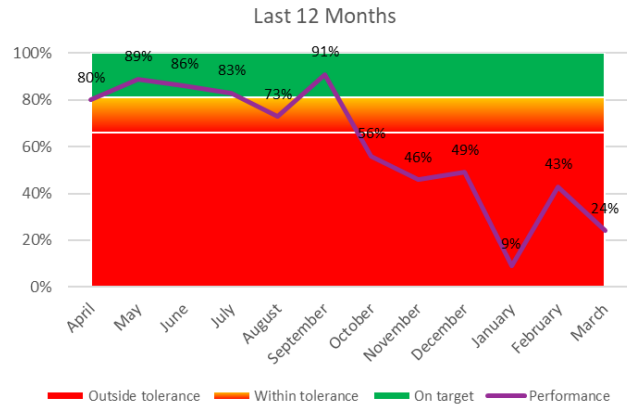
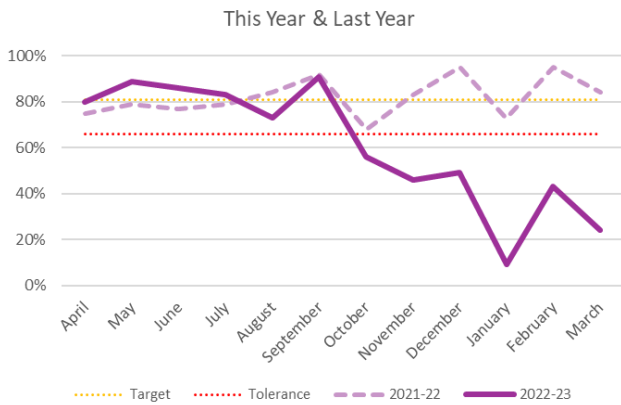
Contextual data

Single Assessments closing with no further action

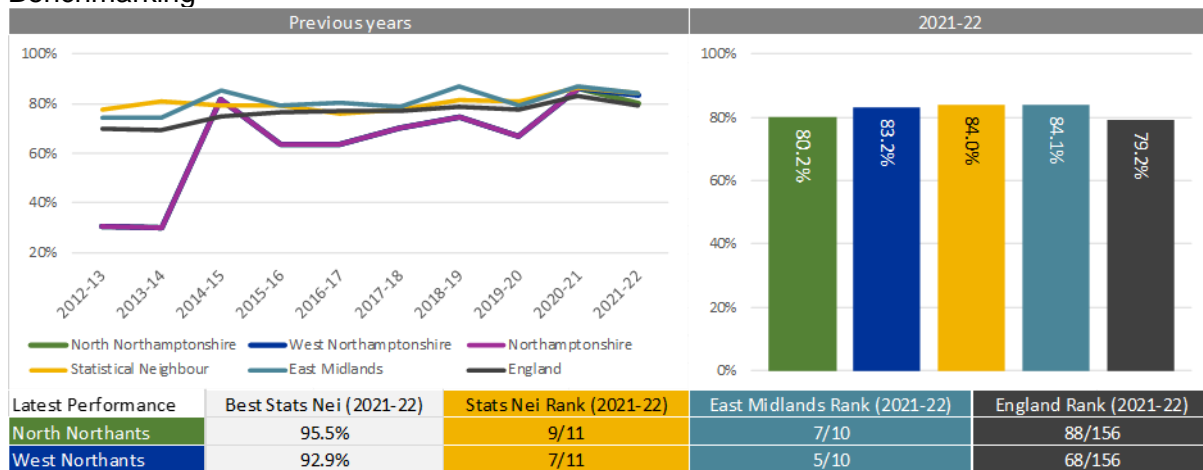


KPI 5 - % Initial Child Protection Conferences held within 15 days of a strategy discussion being initiated

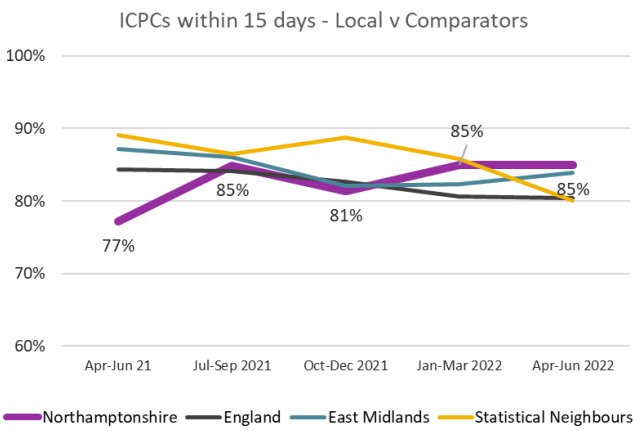
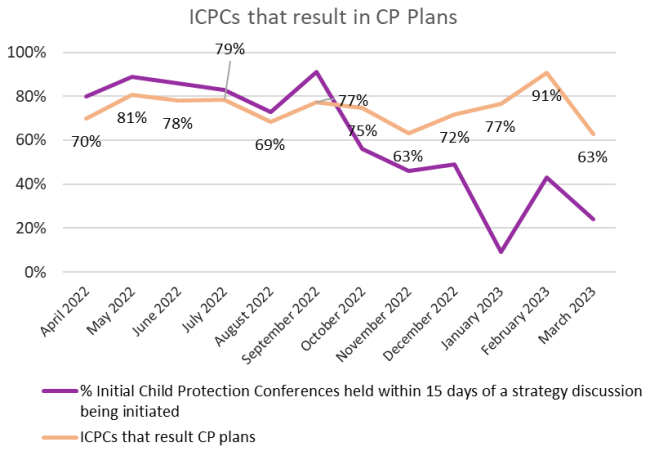
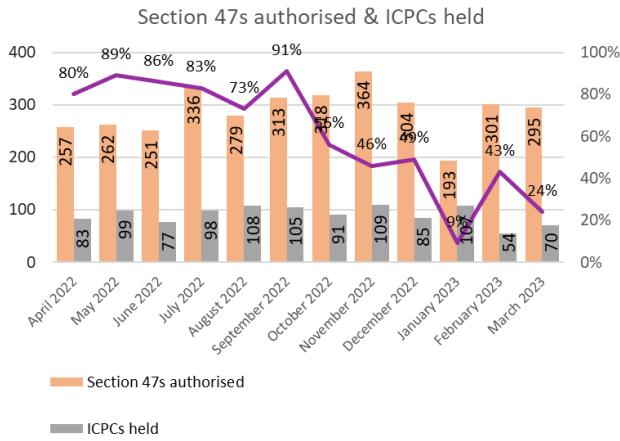
2022/23 Overview



Benchmarking

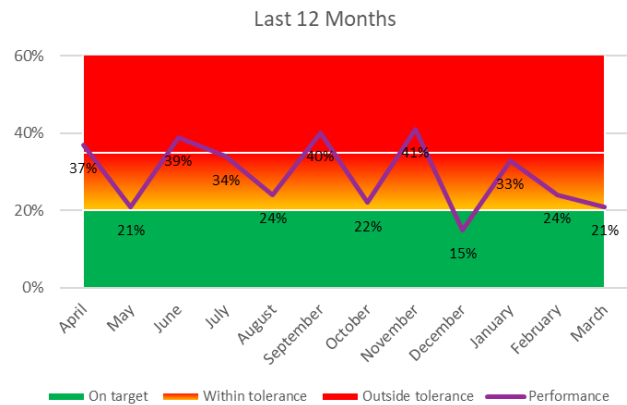
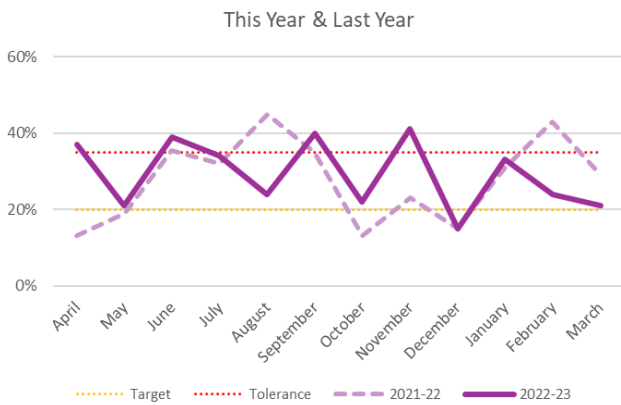


Contextual data

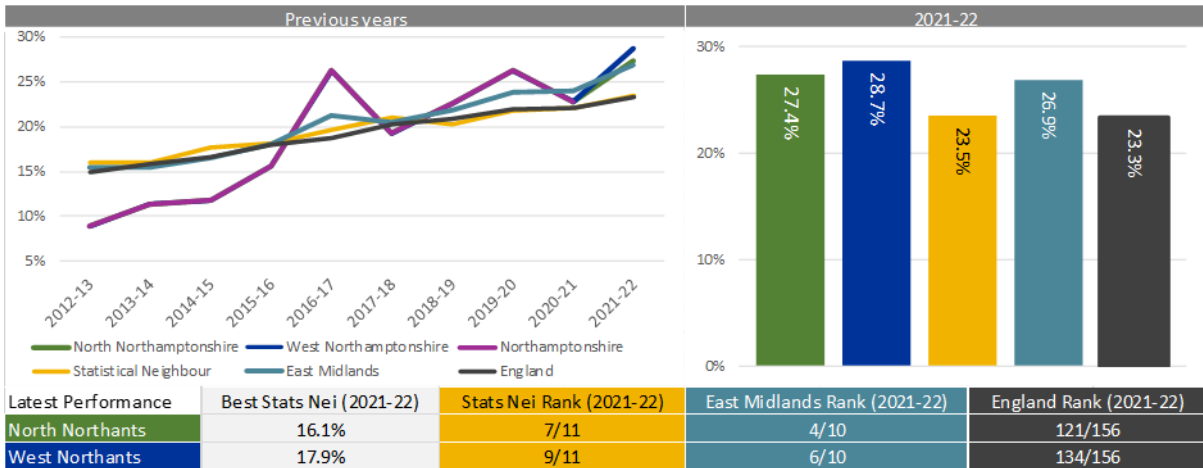


KPI 6 - % children that became the subject of a Child Protection Plan for the second or subsequent time

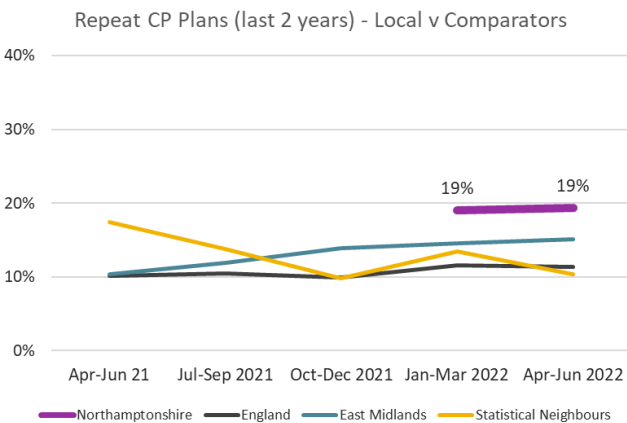
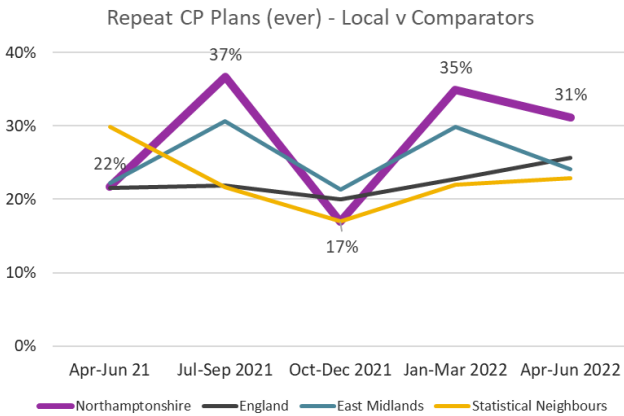
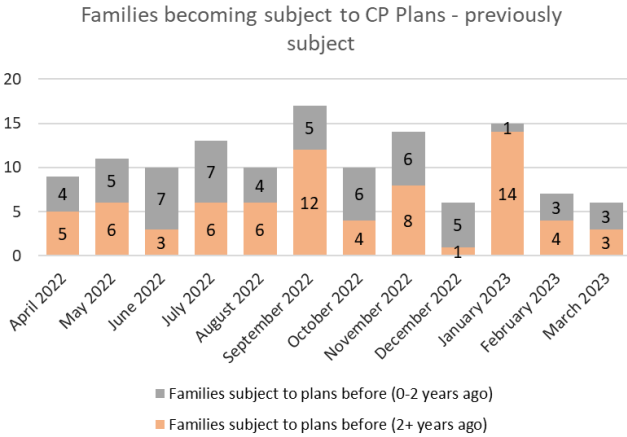
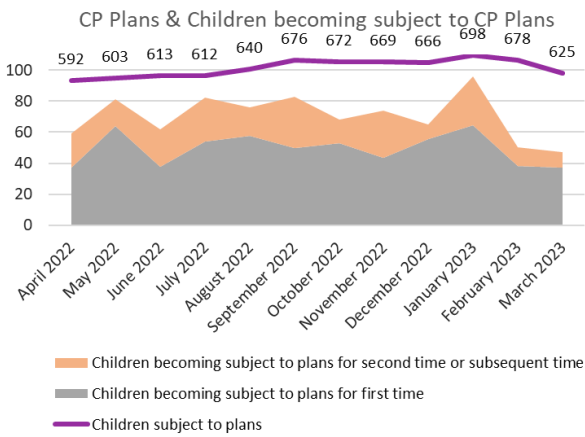
2022/23 Overview



Benchmarking

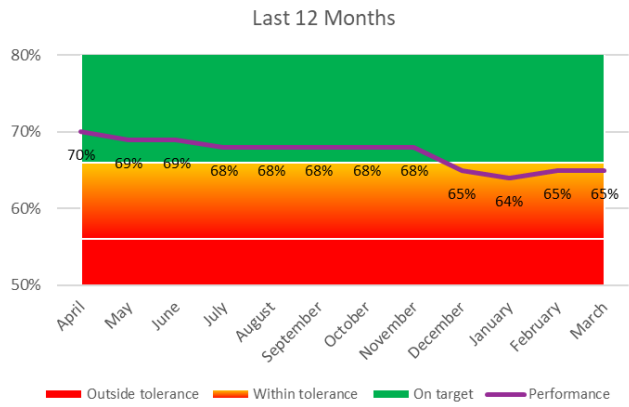
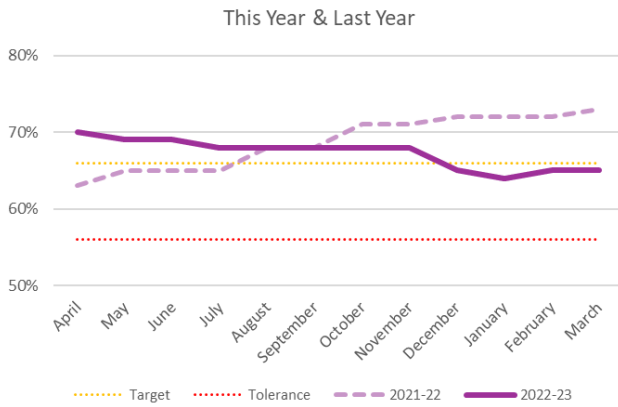


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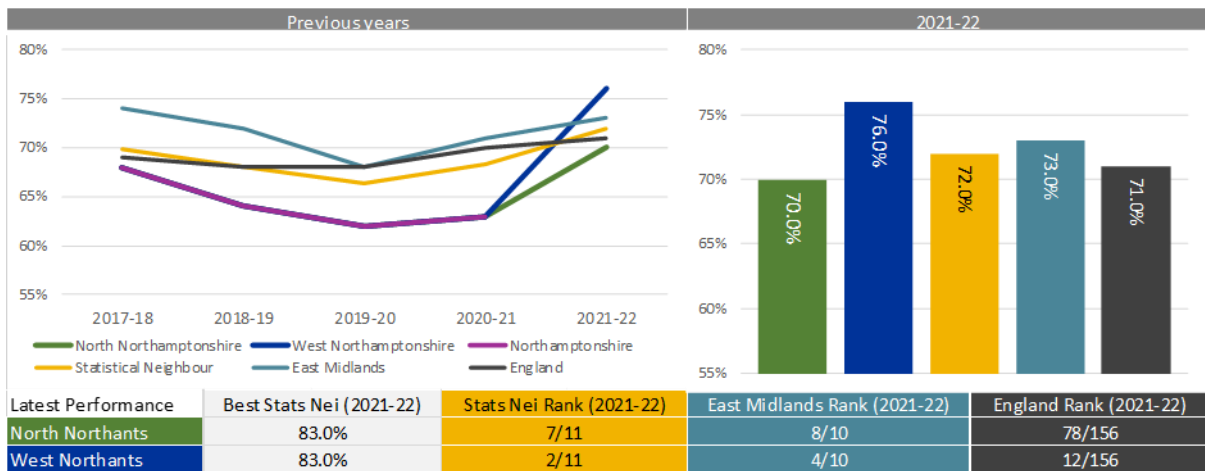


KPI 7 - % children in care 2.5 years or more who have been in the same placement for 2+ years/placed for adoption

2022/23 Overview

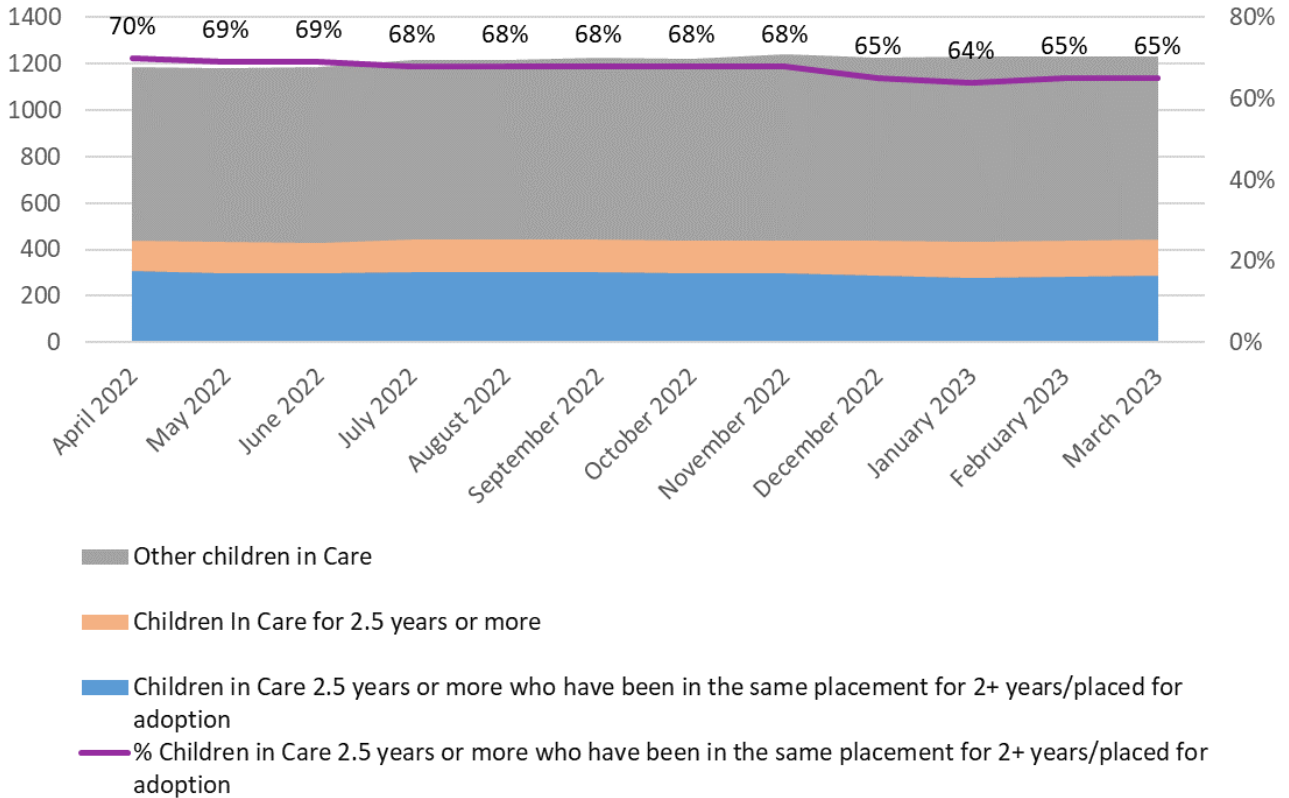


Benchmarking



Contextual data

Children in Care for 2.5 years or more who have been in the same placement for 2+ years/placed for adoption

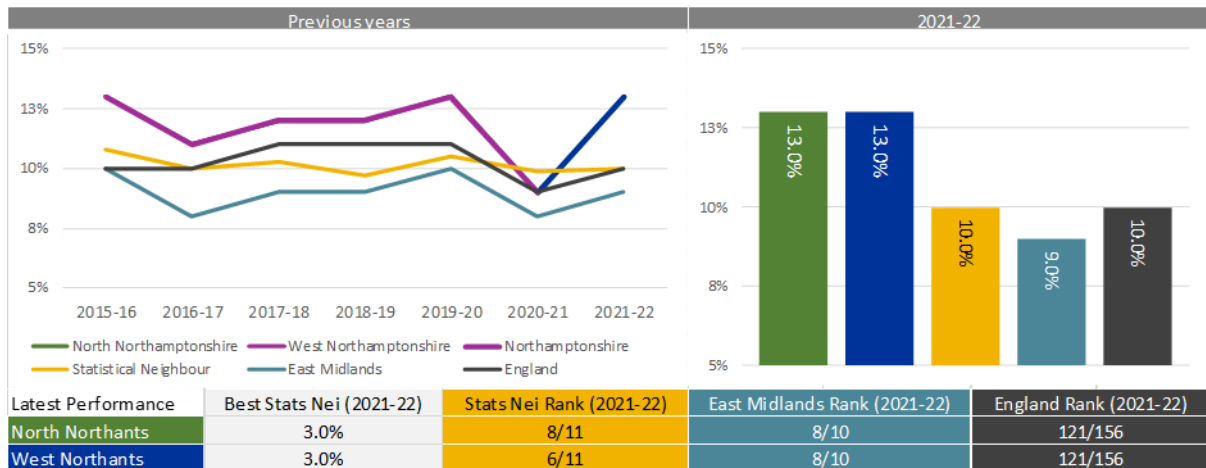


KPI 8 - % Children in Care with three or more placements in the previous 12 months

2022/23 Overview

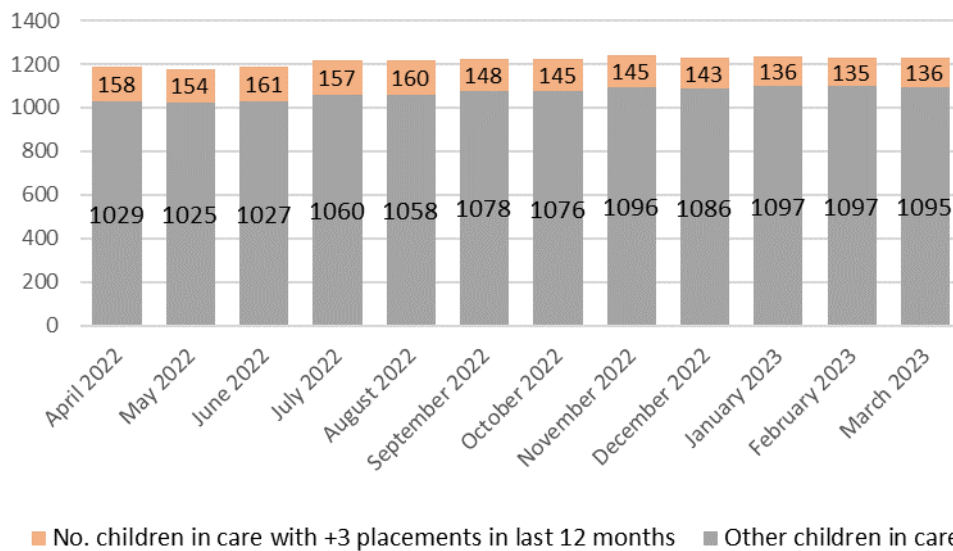


Benchmarking



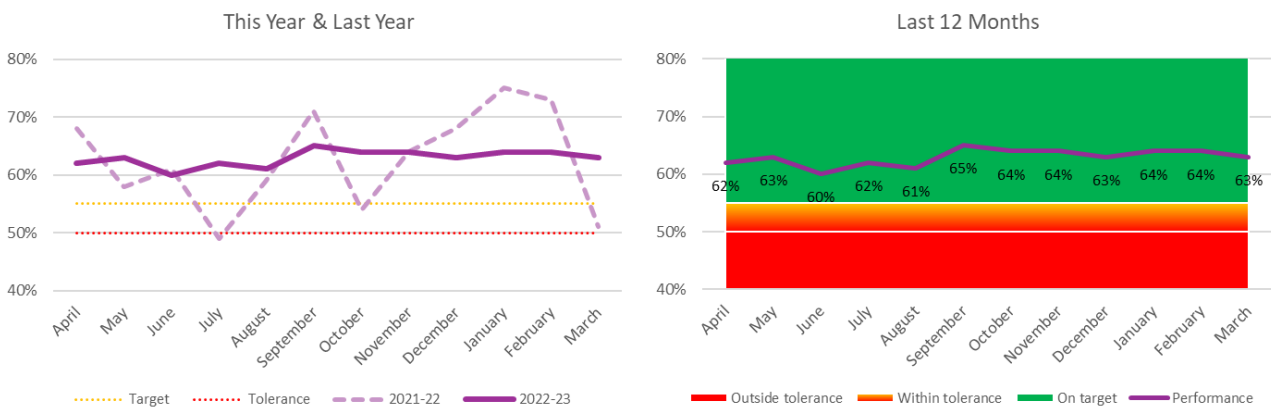
Contextual data

Children in care +3 placements in last 12 months

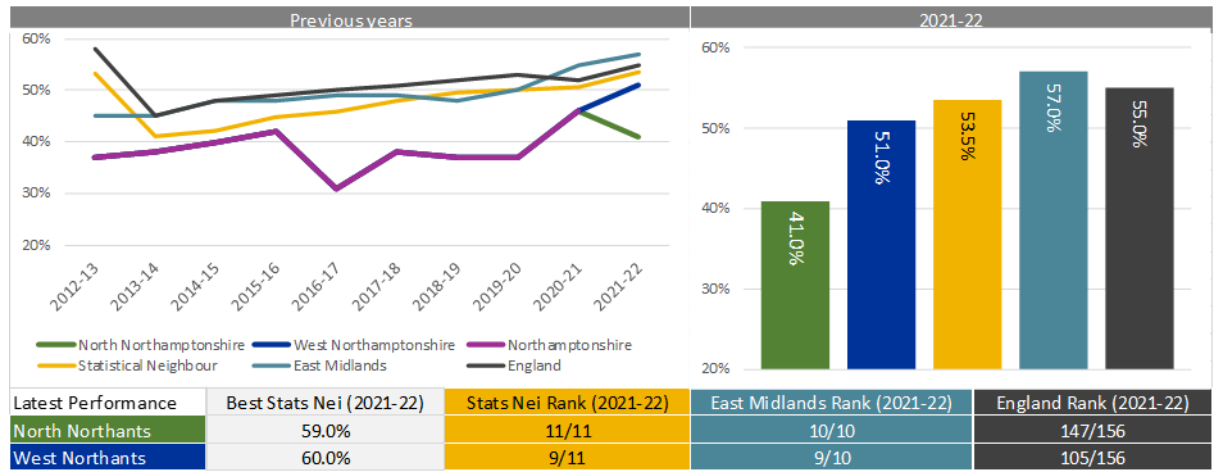


KPI 9 - % young people aged 17-21 in employment, education or training who were looked after when aged 16

2022/23 Overview

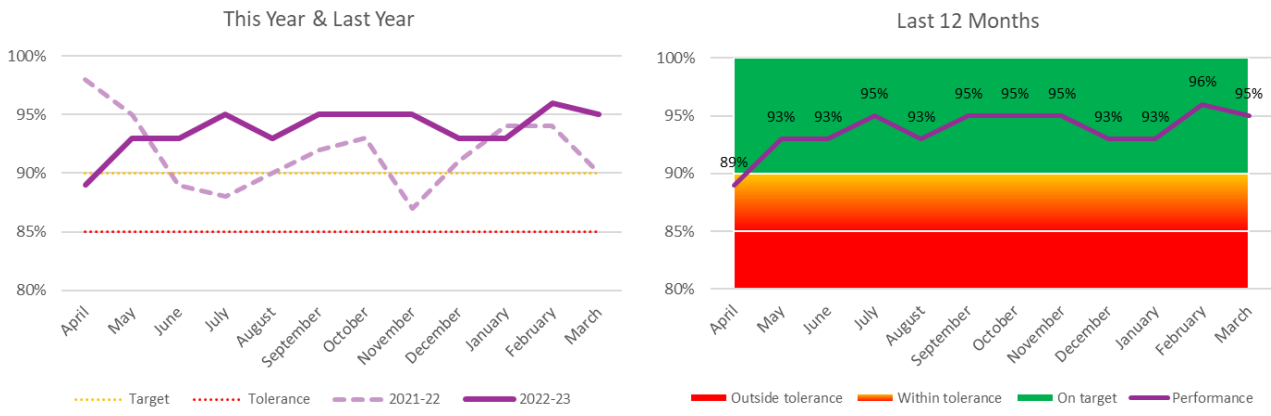


Benchmarking

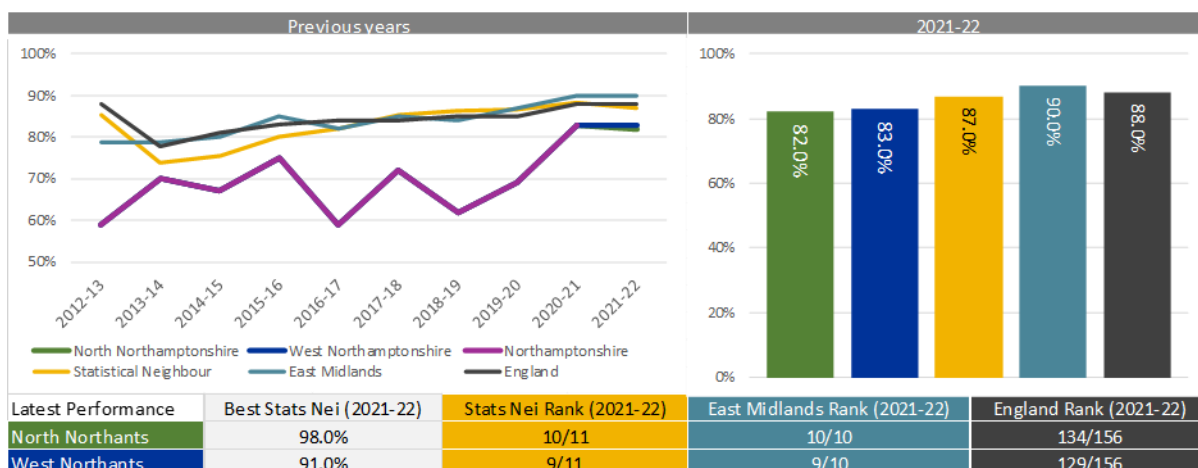


KPI 10 - % young people now aged 17-21 and living in suitable accommodation who were looked after when aged 16

2022/23 Overview

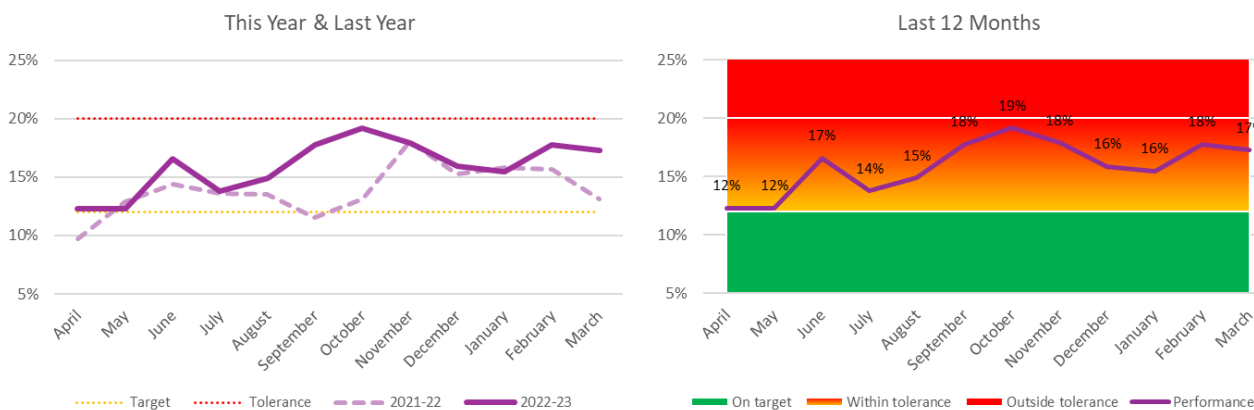


Benchmarking

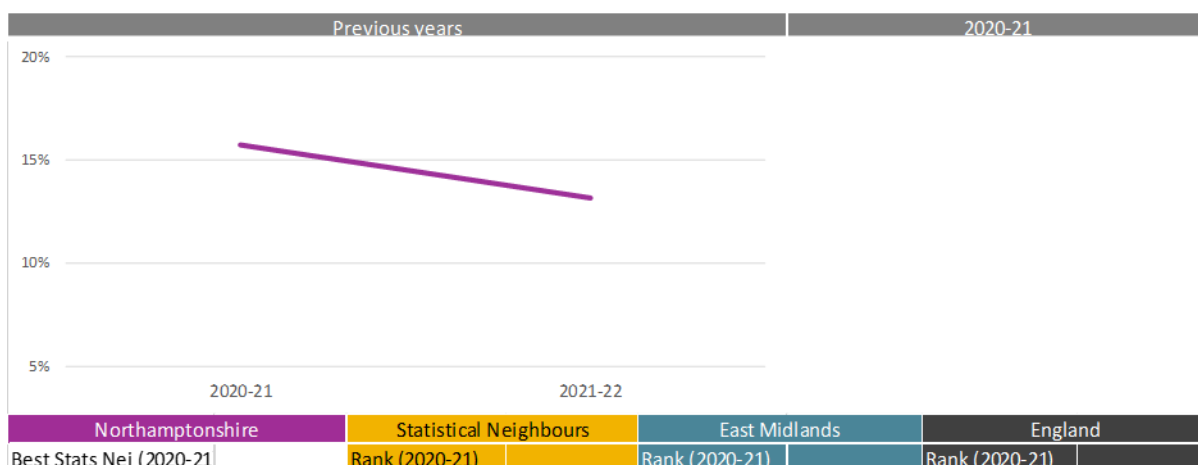


KPI 11 - % qualified social workers with caseloads above target

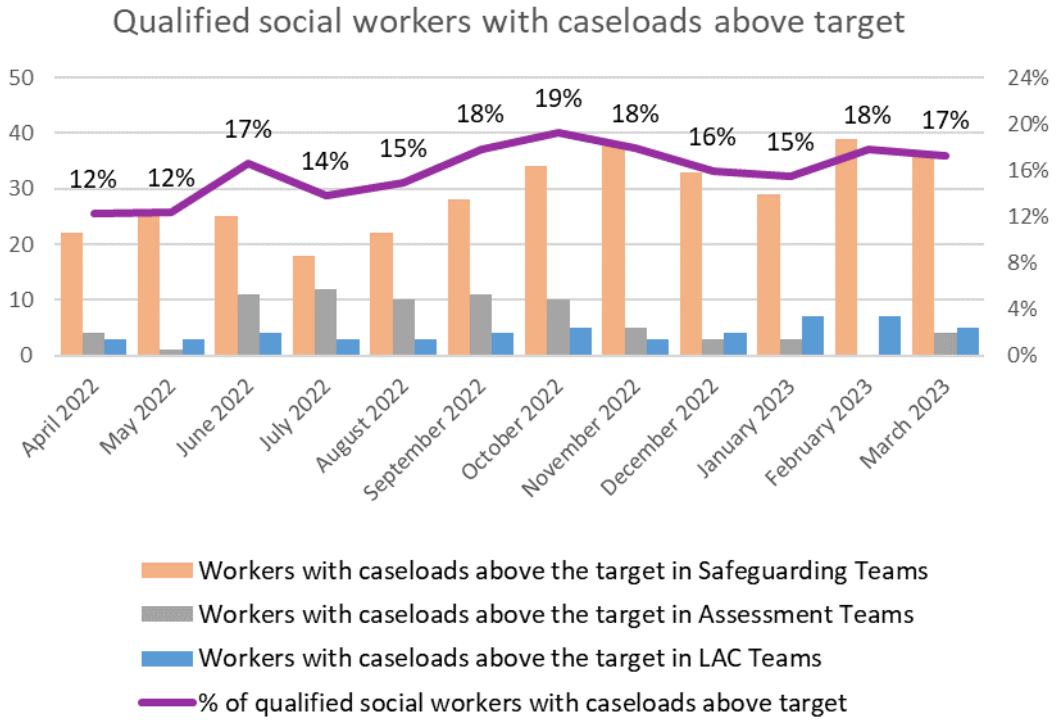
2022/23 Overview



Benchmarking

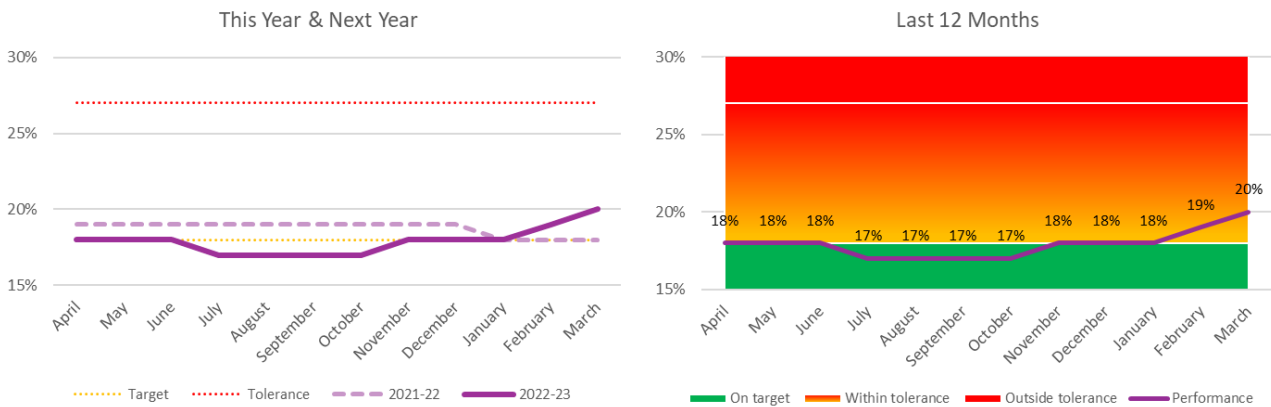


Contextual data

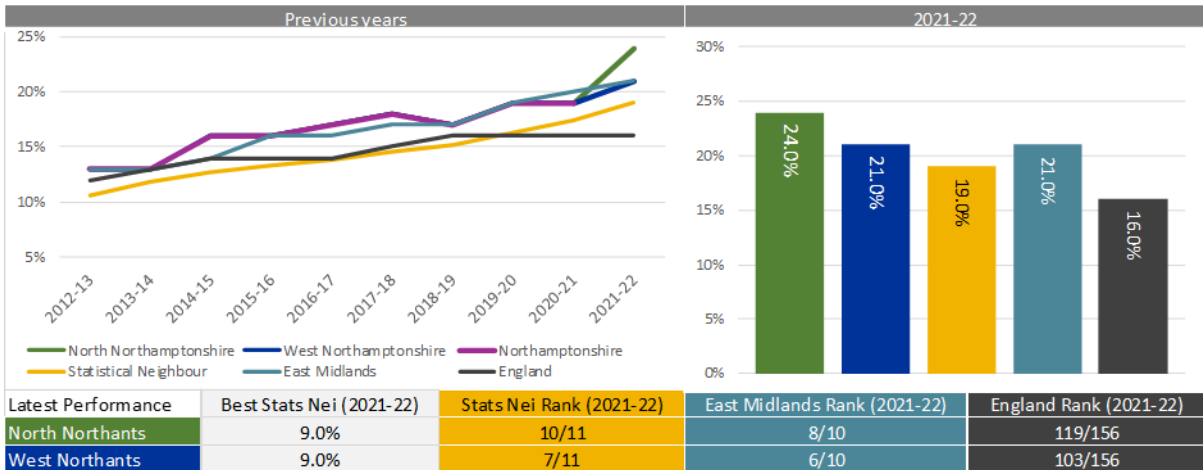


KPI 12 - % of children placed more than 20 miles from their homes, outside LA boundary

2022/23 Overview

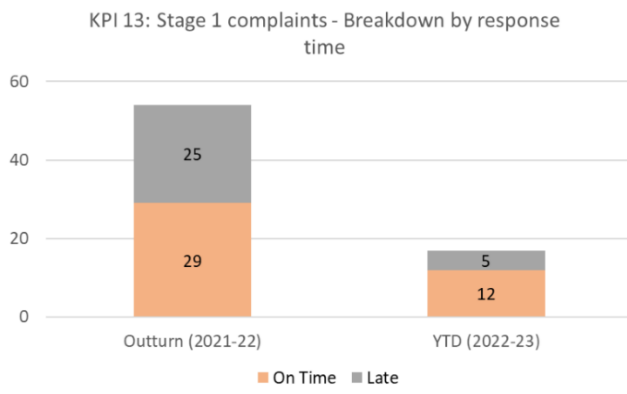
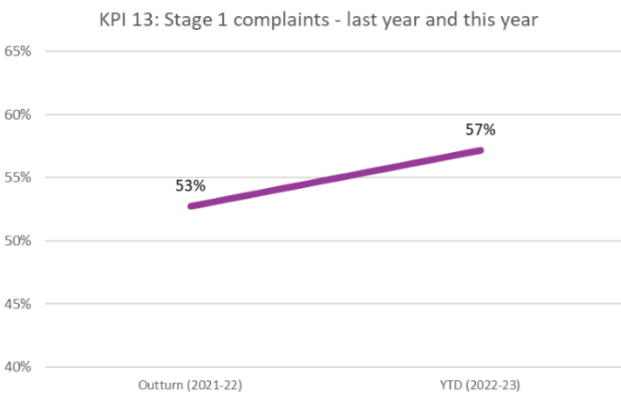
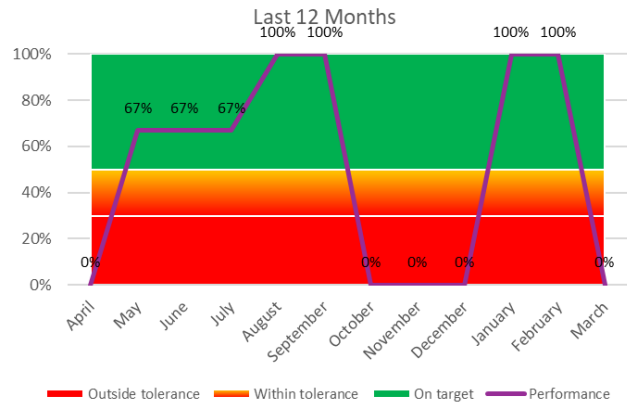
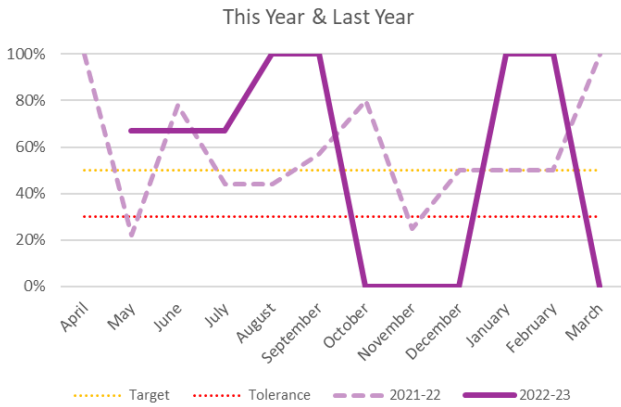


Benchmarking

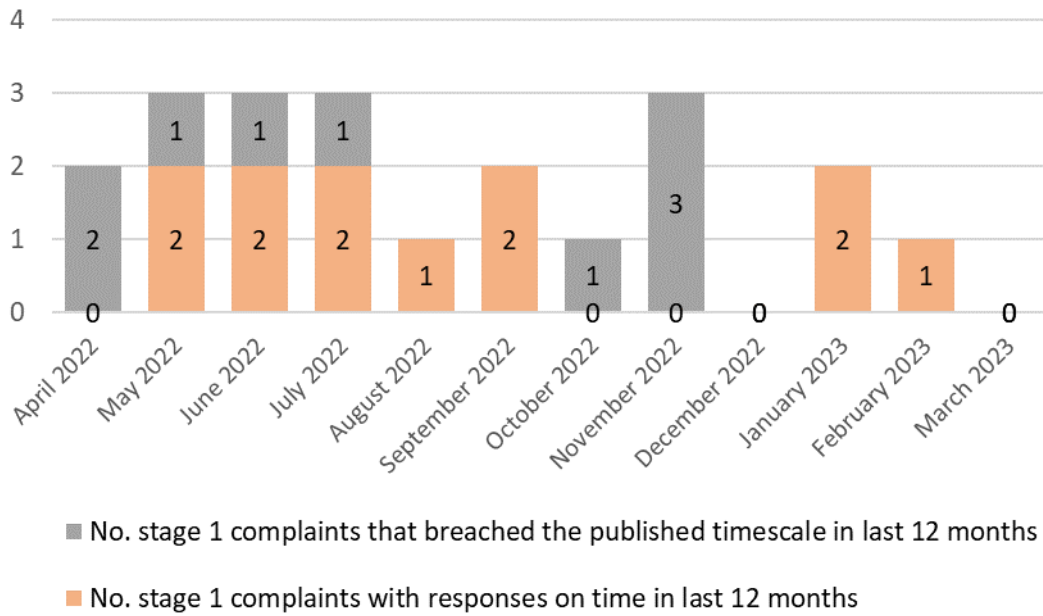


KPI 13 - % stage 1 complaints responded to within 10 working days

2022/23 Overview

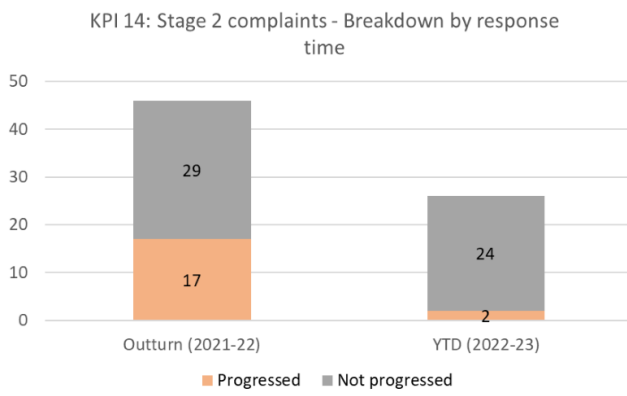
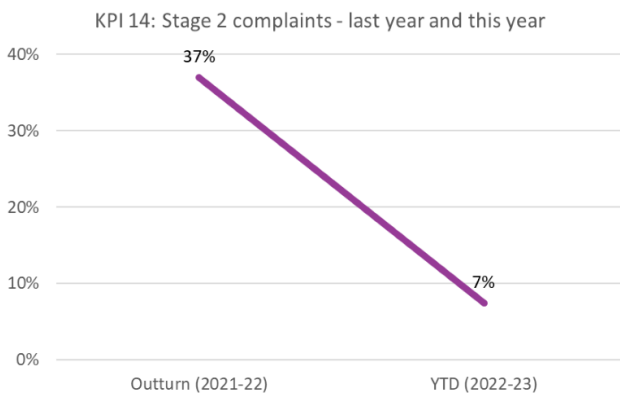
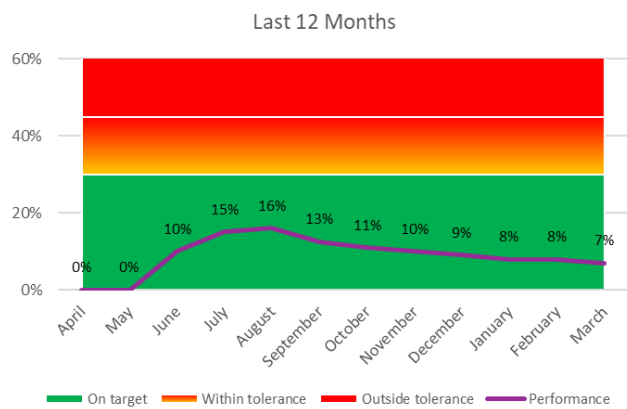
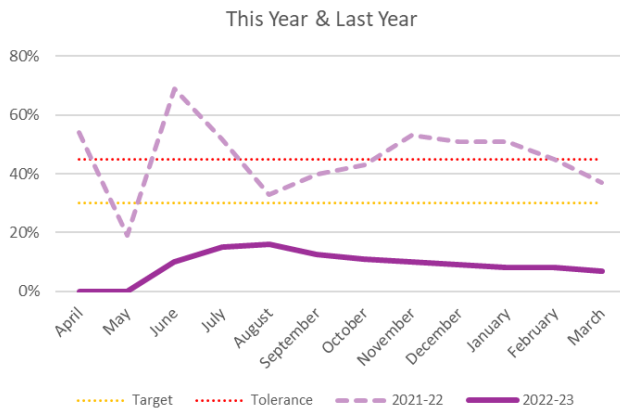


Stage 1 complaints in the last 12 months



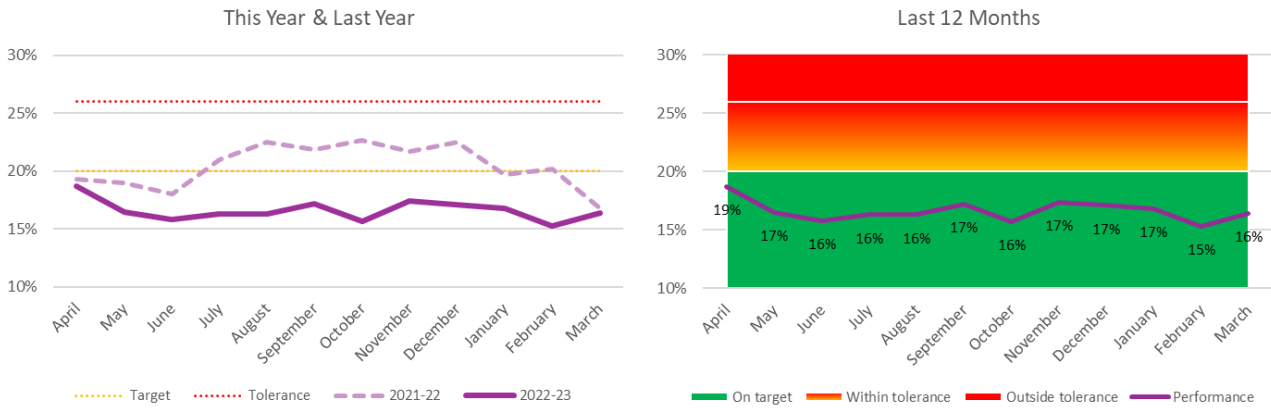
KPI 14 - Stage 2 investigations as a % of stage 1 complaints received within the year

2022/23 Overview

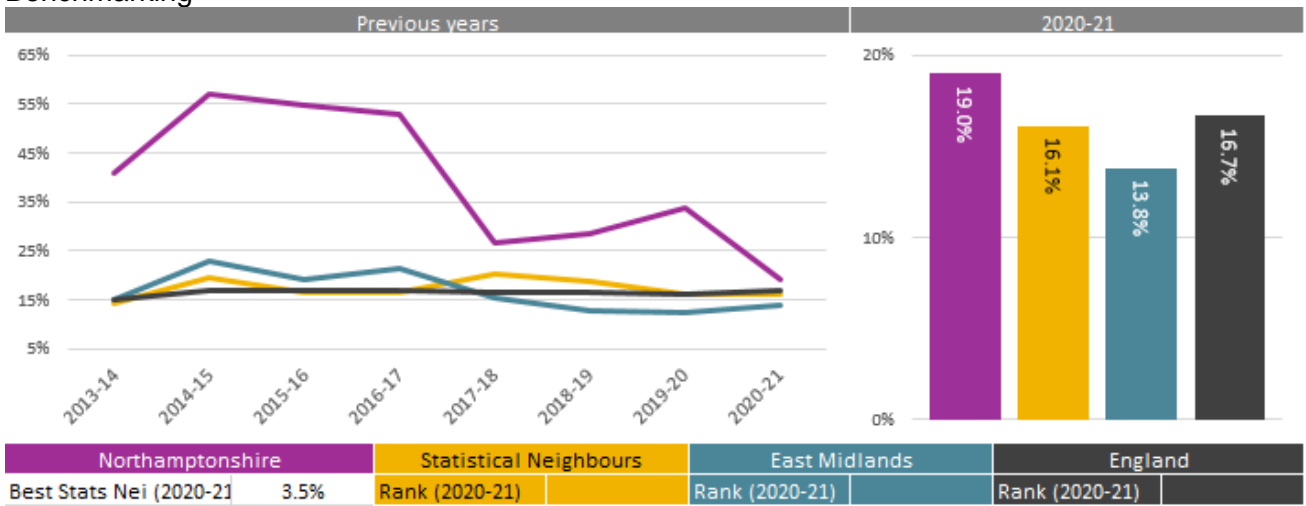


KPI 16 - % social worker vacancies

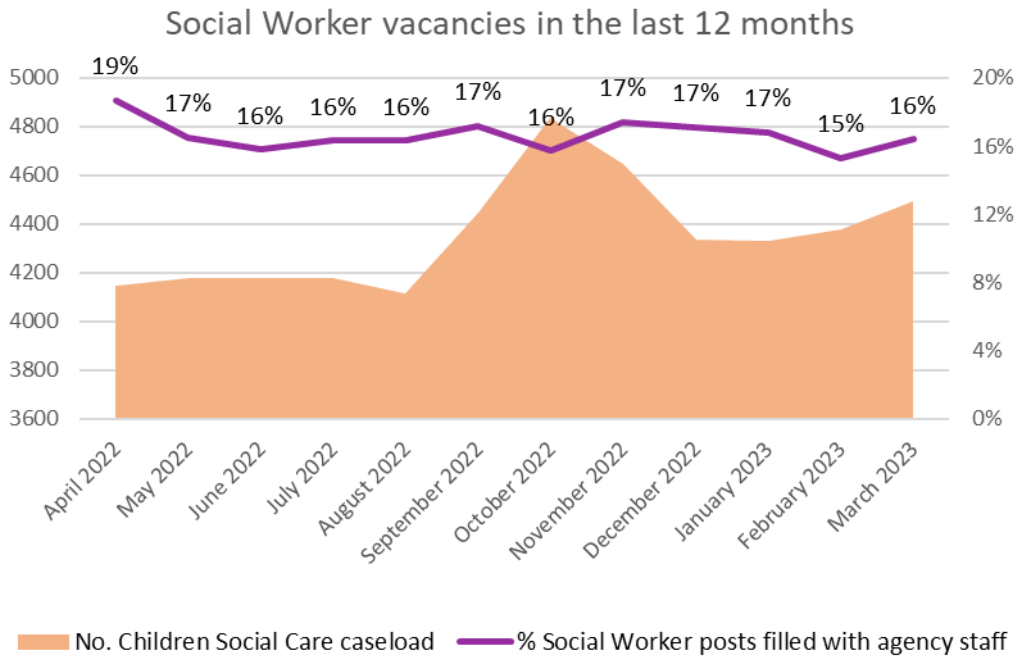
2022/23 Overview



Benchmarking

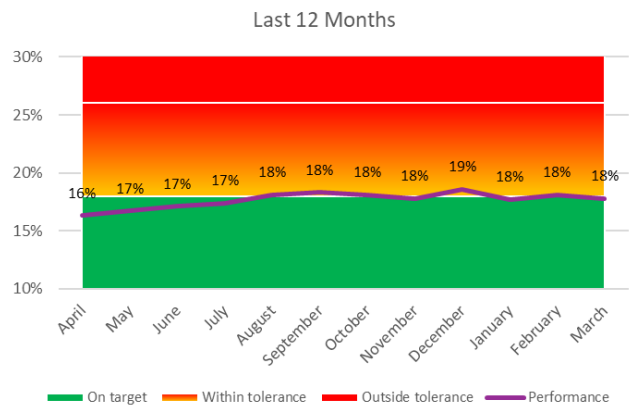
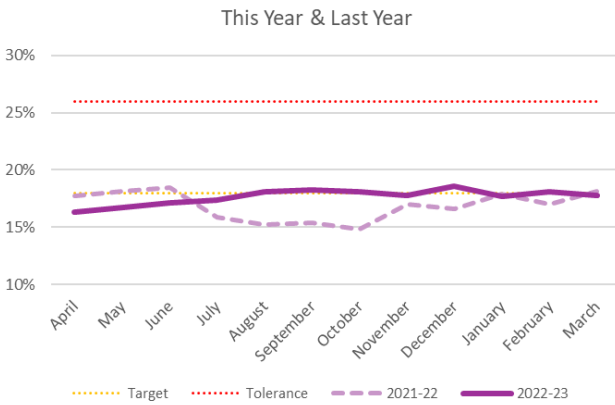


Contextual data

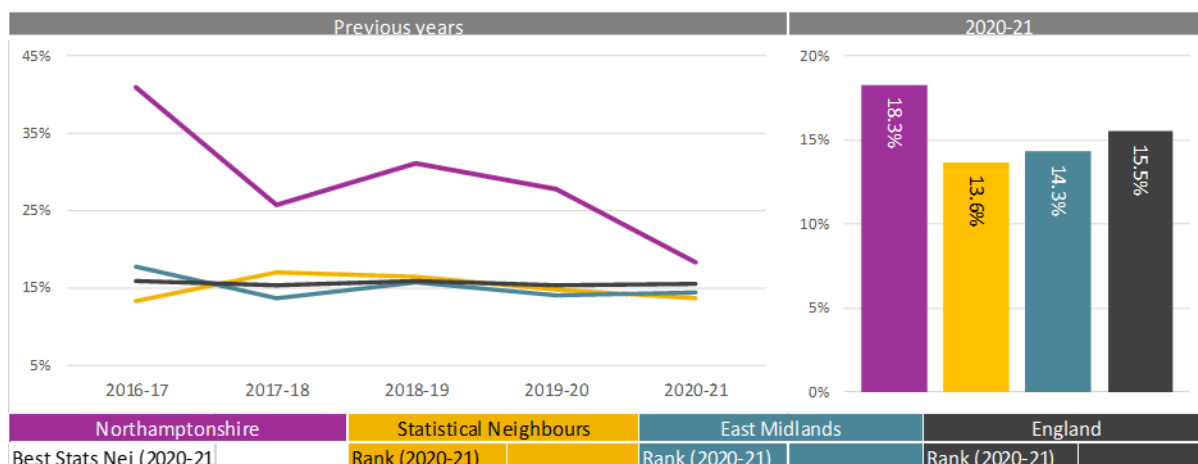


KPI 17 - % Social Worker posts filled with agency staff

2022/23 Overview

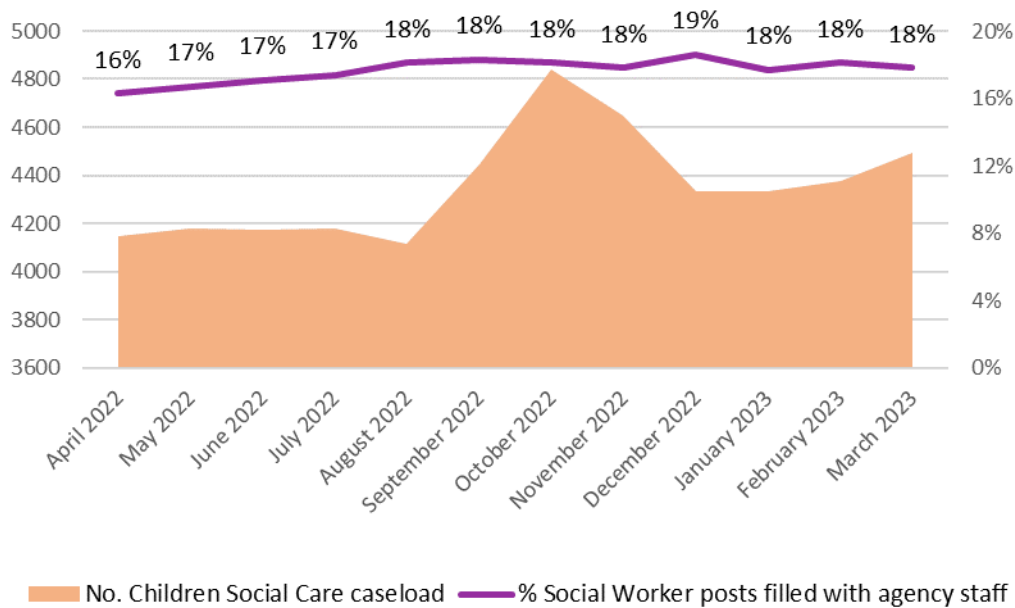


Benchmarking



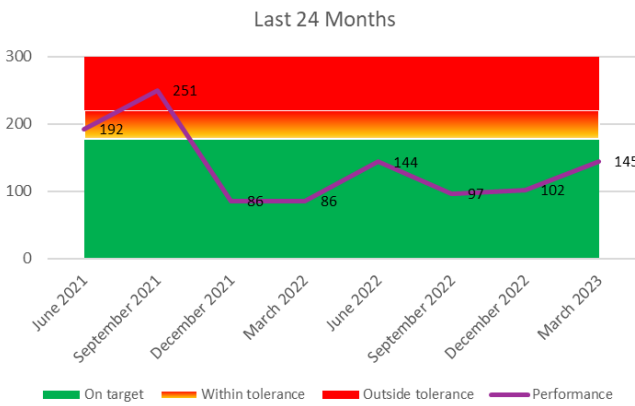
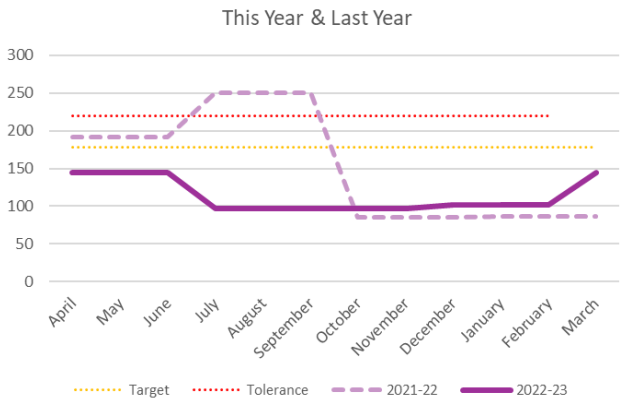
Contextual data

Social Worker vacancies filled with agency staff in the last 12 months

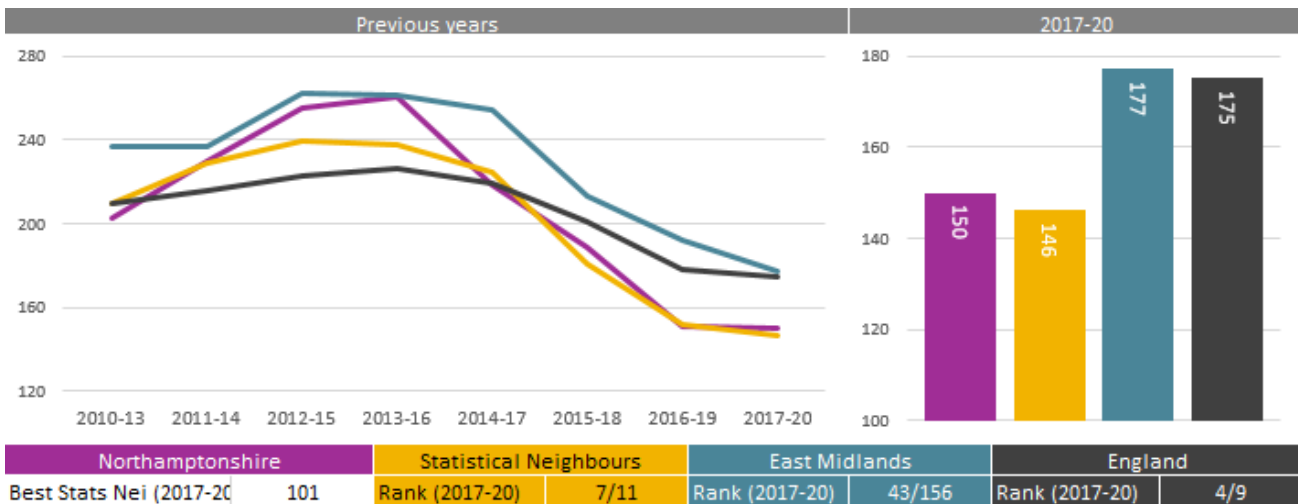


KPI 18 - Average time between the LA receiving court authority to place a child for adoption and deciding on a match

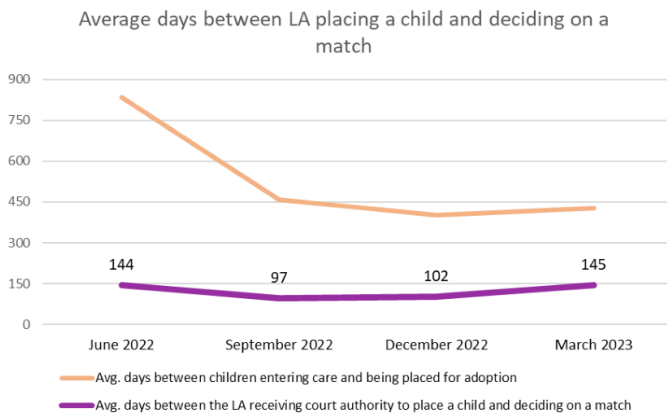
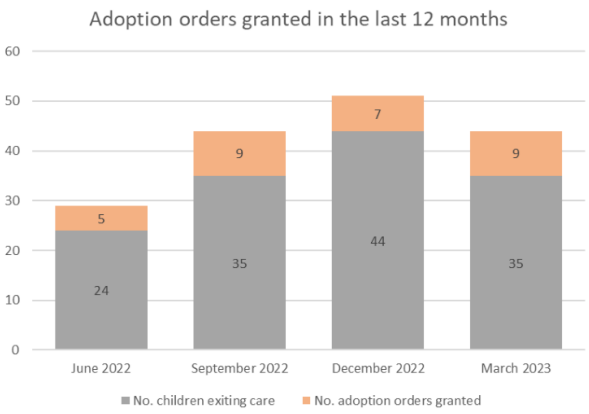
2022/23 Overview



Benchmarking

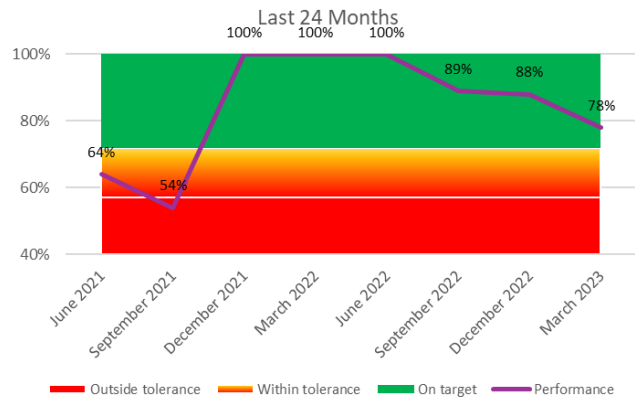
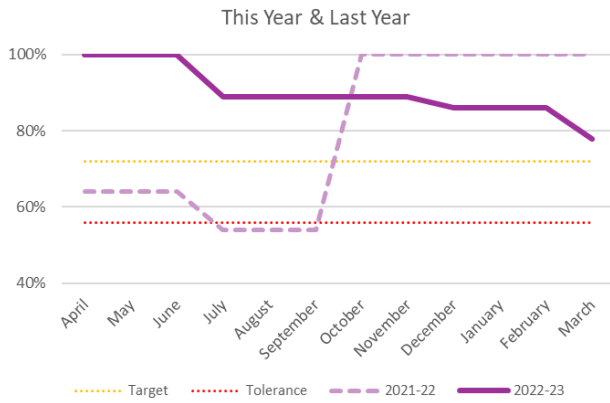


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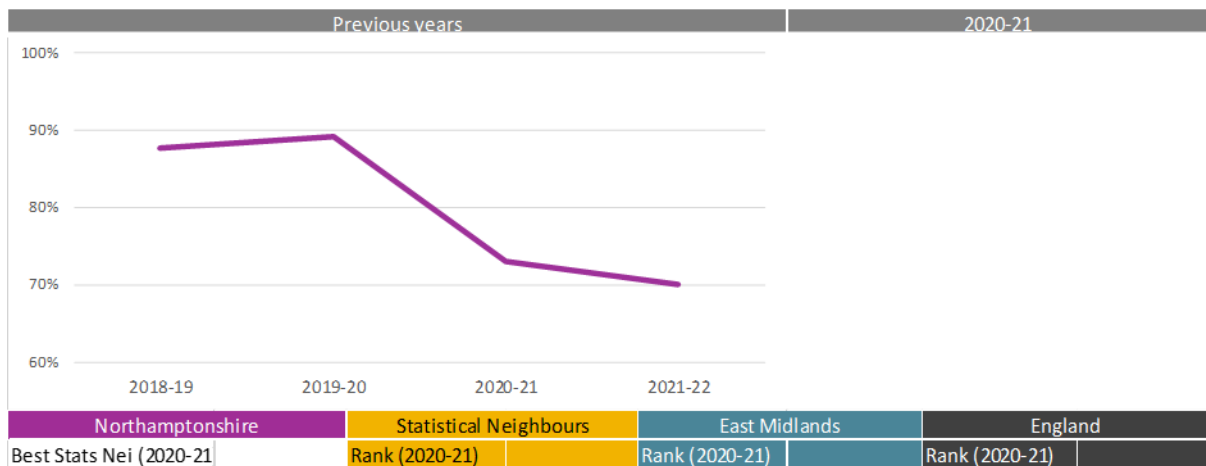


KPI 19 - % children in care placed for adoption within 12 months of an agency decision that they should be adopted

2022/23 Overview

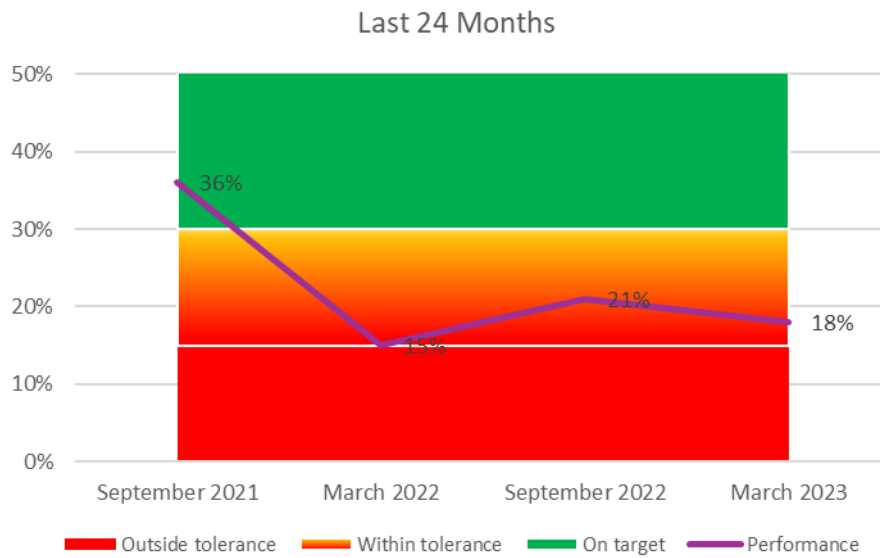


Benchmarking

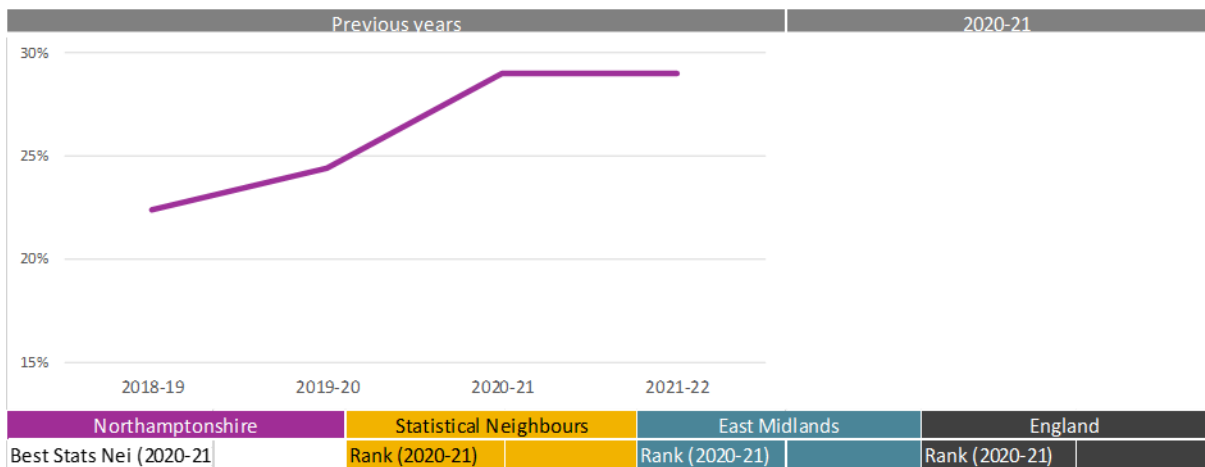


KPI 21 - % children leaving care due to permanence (Special Guardianship Order, adoption, residence order)

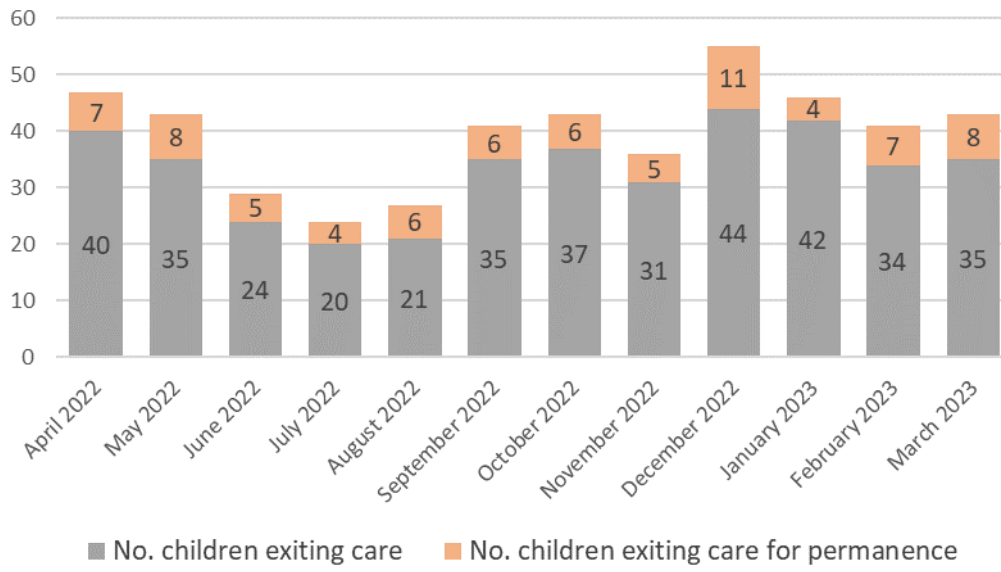
2022/23 Overview



Benchmarking



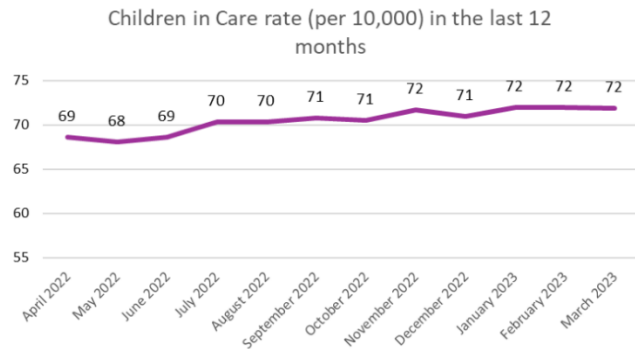
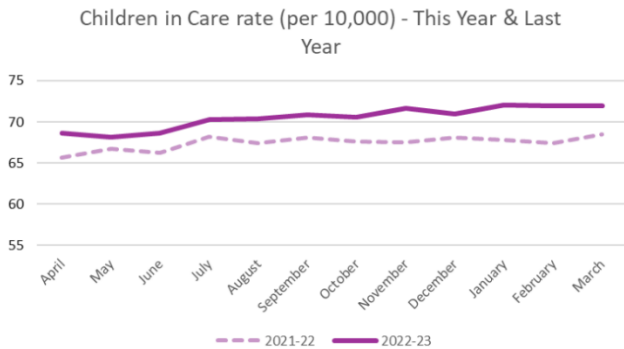
Children leaving care due to permanence



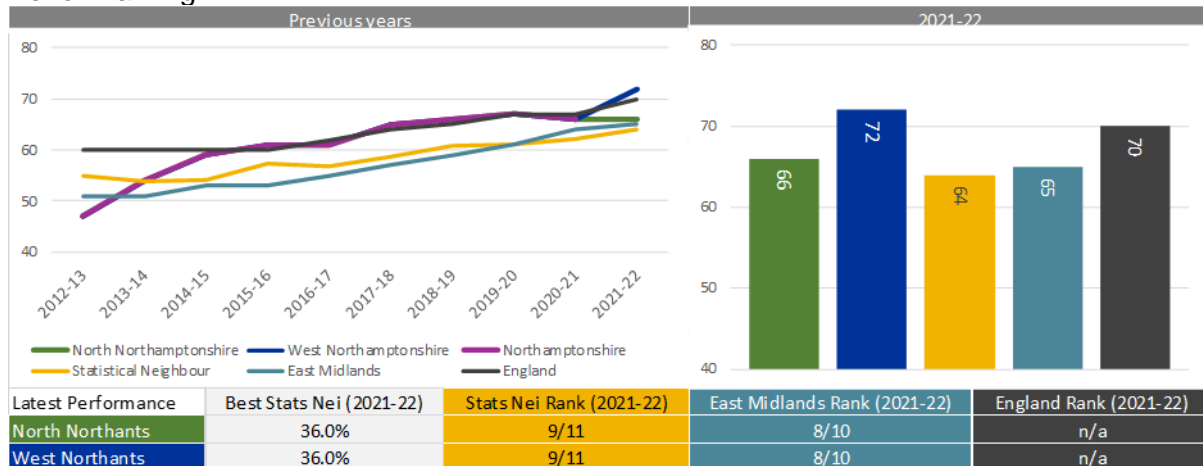
Appendix 2 – Supporting data analysis and NCT Performance Scorecard as at March 2023

Children in Care

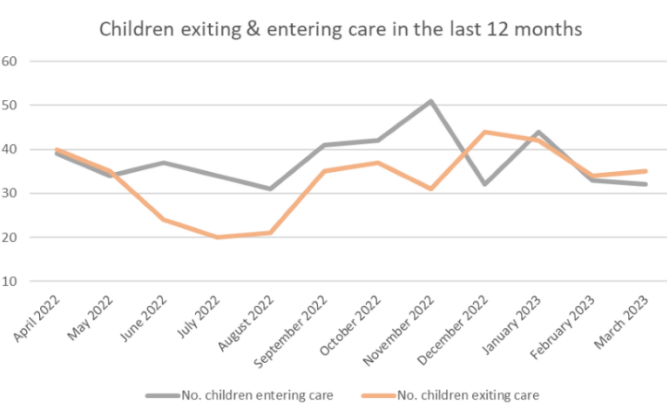
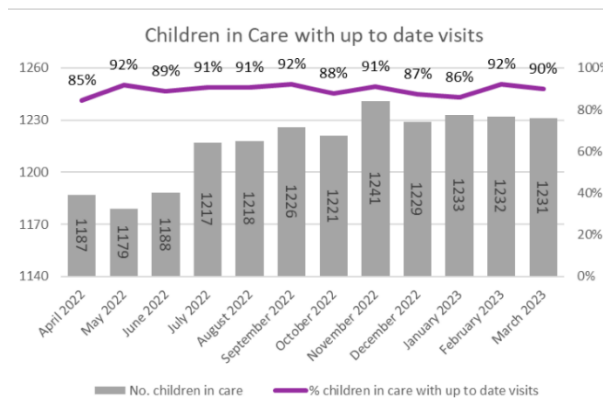
2022/23 Overview



Benchmarking

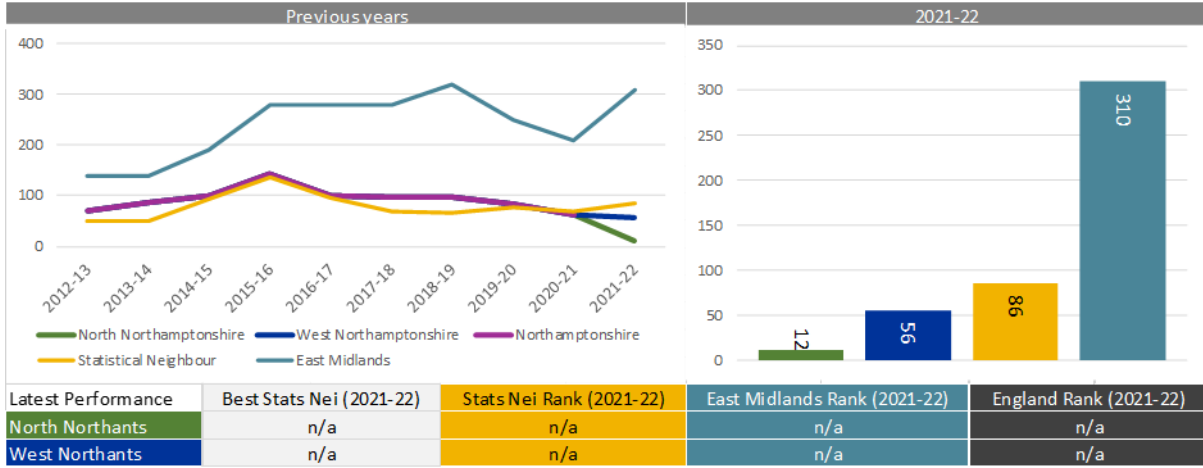


Contextual data

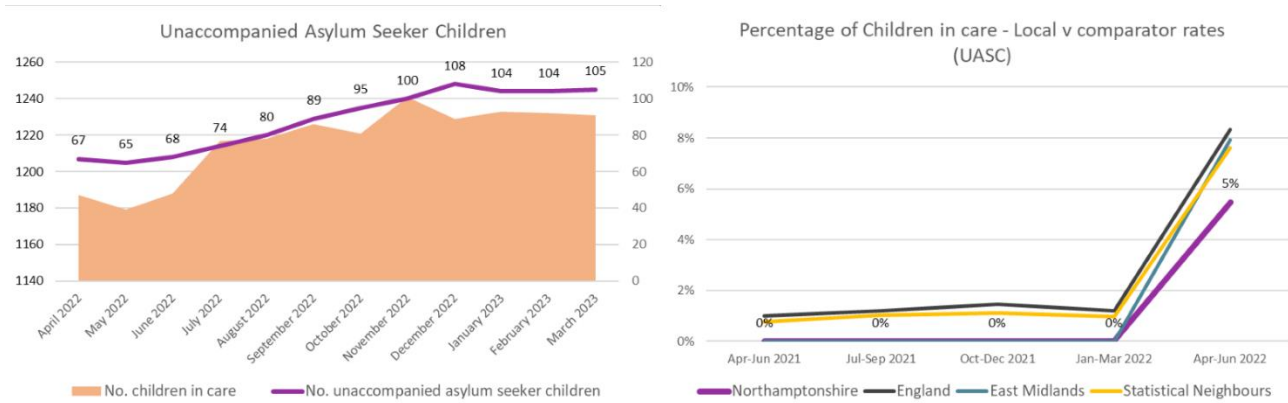


Separated Children

Benchmarking

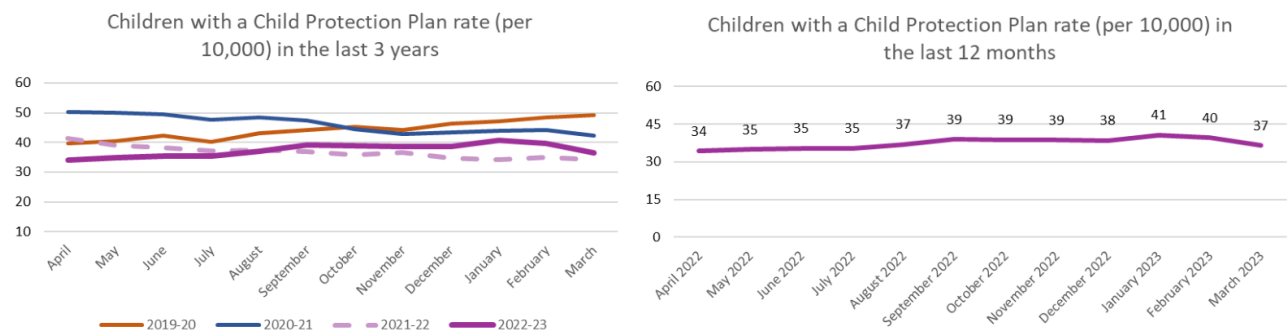


Contextual data

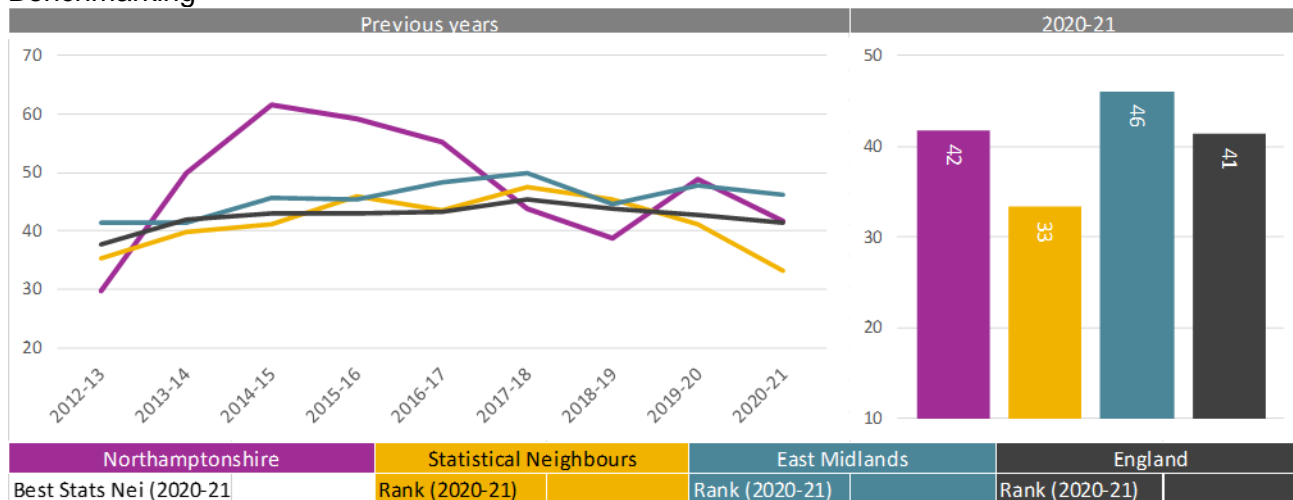


Child Protection Plans

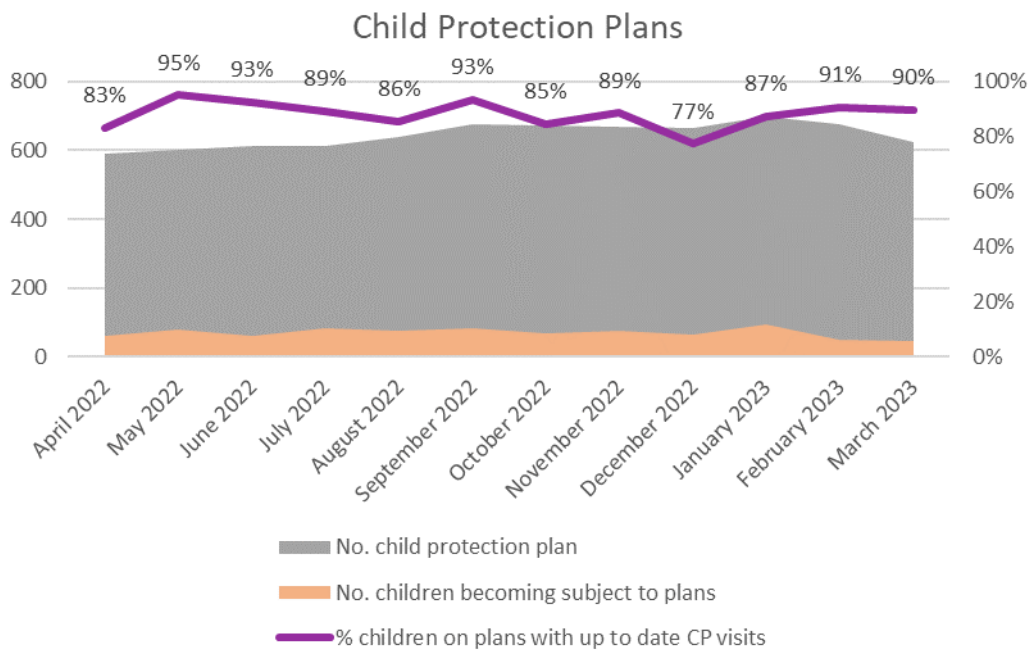
2022/23 Overview



Benchmarking

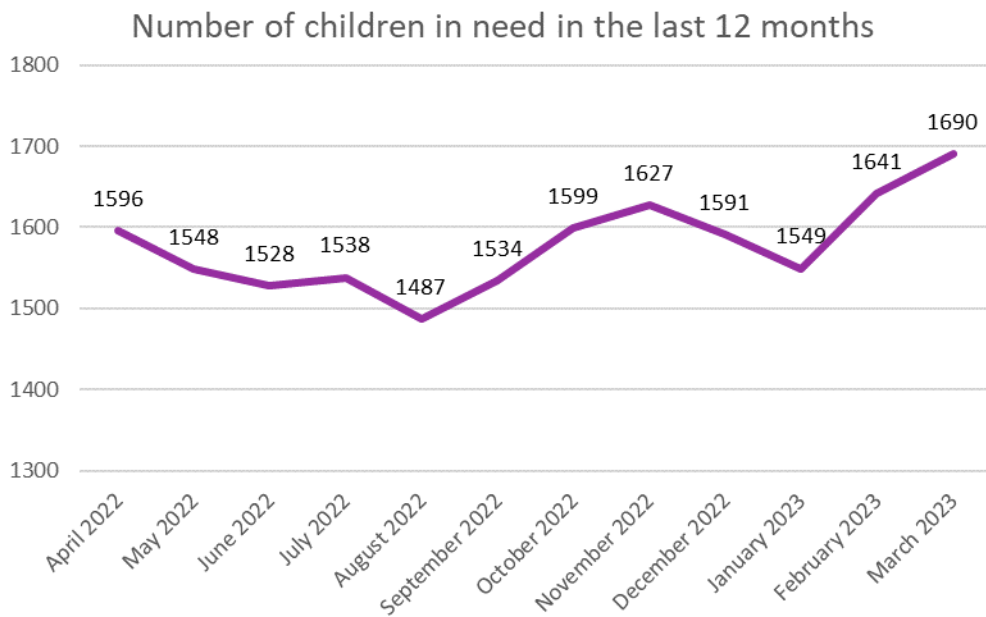


Contextual data

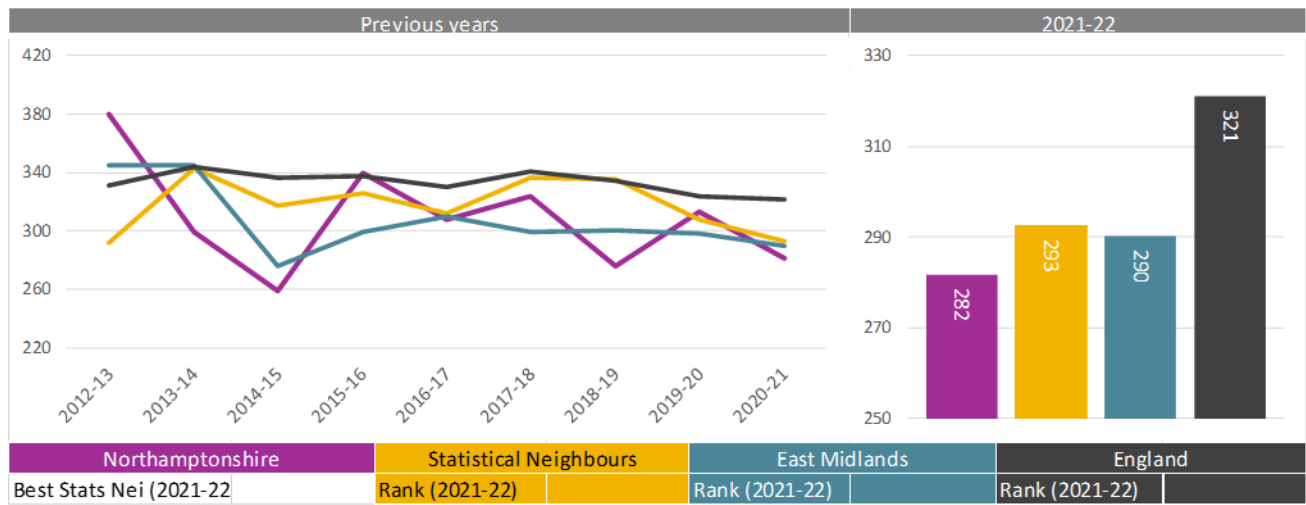


Children in Need

2022/23 Overview

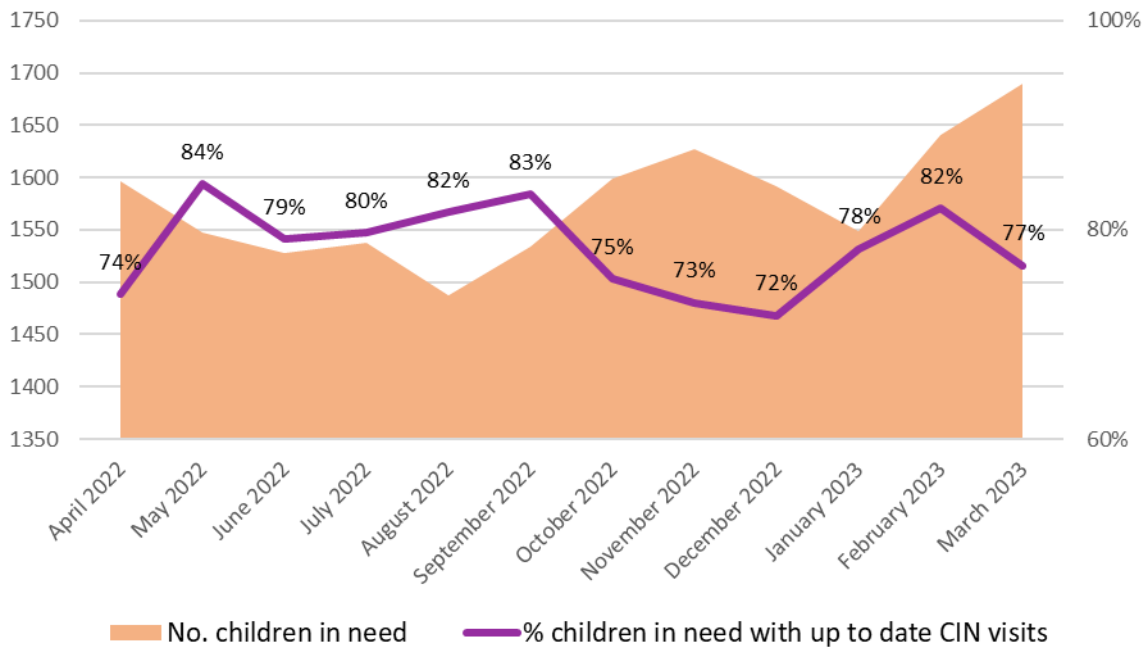


Benchmarking



Contextual data

Children In Need with up to date CIN visits



NCT Scorecard as at end March 2023



NCT Scorecard Mar
23.pdf

Appendix 4 – Support services KPIs

ID	KPI	Target	Q1 Outturn	Q2 Outturn	Q3 Outturn	Q4 Outturn	2022/23 Outturn
Web							
WEB02	% uptime of Northamptonshire Children's Trust website	99.00%	100.0%	100.0%	99.7%	99.8%	99.9%
WEB04	e-forms should have a customer rating of at least 3.5 out of 5. Any form with a lower rating will be reported back to the service for review	3.5	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00
Payroll & HR Transactions							
PHRT01	Accuracy of underpayments for all employees paid monthly (based on fully completed and accurate forms being received by the published deadlines processed by the 2nd line Payroll Control Team)	99.00%	100.0%	99.7%	99.9%	99.8%	99.8%
PHRT02	% of standard forms processed in time for the monthly payroll, where these are received fully completed by the published deadline (Starter requests, Leaver requests, Written statement of particulars)	98.00%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
PHRT03	% of starter request forms processed in time for the monthly payroll, where these are received fully completed by the published deadline (includes Agency and internal movers)	98.00%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
PHRT04	% of leaver request forms processed in time for the monthly payroll, where these are received fully completed by the published deadline (includes Agency and internal movers)	98.00%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
PHRT06	% of written statement of particulars processed within SLA	98.00%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Payroll & HR Helpdesk							
PHRHD01	% of incidents resolved within SLA (where SLA is the Helpdesk Priority / Resolution matrix)	70.00%	86.4%	83.8%	85.6%	95.4%	87.8%
PHRHD05	% of abandoned calls	<10%	7.1%	2.6%	0.0%	0.0%	2.4%
Learning & Development							
LD01	% of delegates rating that the training session was of a 'direct value to my work' was recorded as a 3 or above	95.00%	99.3%	98.8%	98.0%	100.0%	99.0%
Complaints							
New	Stage 1 complaints acknowledged and assigned by Complaints team within 48 hours of receipt	95.00%	94.4%	100.0%	97.1%	100.0%	97.9%
Customer Services							
CUS01	Proportion of customer calls answered	95.00%	94.7%	95.9%	97.4%	97.4%	96.4%
CUS02	Speed of response within 1 minute (service level)	80.00%	72.1%	79.2%	88.0%	86.2%	81.4%
CUS03	Call abandonment rate	<10%	5.0%	4.1%	2.5%	2.6%	3.5%
Procurement							
PROC01	% of procurement exercises completed to agreed target completion date	95.00%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	No Activity	100.0%

ID	KPI	Target	Q1 Outturn	Q2 Outturn	Q3 Outturn	Q4 Outturn	2022/23 Outturn
Property Services - West							
PROP01	% of reactive maintenance calls assessed within agreed priority timescales	90.00%	90.1%	95.7%	96.1%	96.7%	94.7%
PROP02	% of reactive maintenance tasks completed within priority timescales	90.00%	100.0%	95.7%	92.6%	92.8%	95.3%
PROP03	% of statutory compliance tasks completed within required timescales	100.00%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
PROP04	% of planned maintenance tasks completed within planned timescales	90.00%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Property Services - North							
PROP01	% of reactive maintenance calls assessed within agreed priority timescales	90.00%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
PROP02	% of reactive maintenance tasks completed within priority timescales	90.00%	86.8%	93.0%	83.6%	90.0%	88.4%
PROP03	% of statutory compliance tasks completed within required timescales	100.00%	87.4%	100.0%	96.0%	96.2%	97.4%
PROP04	% of planned maintenance tasks completed within planned timescales	90.00%	84.6%	94.4%	94.7%	Not Reported	90.3%
Payments & Direct Payments							
PDP01	% of weekly compliant inputting and authorising processed	90.00%	99.6%	99.9%	98.7%	99.3%	99.4%
PDP02	% of compliant Direct Payment contracts	85.00%	91.3%	92.8%	100.0%	100.0%	96.0%
PDP03	% of overpayments processed within 10 working days	85.00%	100.0%	97.4%	88.5%	97.6%	95.9%

ID	KPI	Target	Q1 Outturn	Q2 Outturn	Q3 Outturn	Q4 Outturn	2022/23 Outturn
Accounts Payable							
AP01	% of HMRC compliant commercial supplier invoices registered on ERP within 5 working days of receipt into Accounts Payable	95.00%	100.0%	99.7%	99.4%	99.9%	99.7%
AP02	% of undisputed commercial supplier invoices paid within 30 days	95.00%	98.1%	98.5%	95.4%	98.5%	97.6%
AP03	% of undisputed commercial supplier invoices paid within terms	85.00%	89.0%	87.1%	84.7%	90.9%	87.9%
AP04	% of fully completed supplier requests processed within 3 working days receipt	95.00%	99.0%	100.0%	98.7%	100.0%	99.4%
Income							
INC02	% of income allocated in 7 days	60.00%	100.0%	82.8%	95.3%	91.7%	92.4%
INC01	% of income allocated in 30 days	95.00%	100.0%	100.0%	99.1%	99.5%	99.7%
Finance Helpdesk							
FOHD01	% of all reported incidents resolved within the agreed service standard set for the helpdesk priority	70.00%	94.6%	93.0%	88.0%	87.7%	90.8%
FOHD05	% calls abandoned	<10%	12.3%	13.6%	9.5%	3.8%	9.8%
Insurance							
INS01	% of claims recorded on management system and acknowledged to claimant or department within 5 working days	90.00%	100.0%	No Activity	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
INS02	% of decisions on liability claims made and communicated to claimant in accordance with civil procedure rules (as per targets) excluding where the % of decisions on liability claims made and communicated to claimant in accordance with civil procedure rules (as per targets) excluding where the Insurance service has made a written request for evidence to the relevant service area and no reply has been received within required deadlines	95.00%	No Activity	100.0%	100.0%	No Activity	100.0%
INS03	% of cases where a full response was provided for non-complex underwriting enquiries (i.e. enquiries not requiring third party referral) within 5 working days	90.00%	No Activity	No Activity	No Activity	No Activity	No Activity
IT Services							
IT01	% Incidents Resolved within agreed performance standard thresholds in terms of response and resolution times	90.00%	92.0%	93.8%	92.0%	90.1%	92.0%
IT02	% Requests Resolved within agreed performance standard thresholds in terms of response and resolution times	90.00%	93.2%	91.6%	94.3%	89.9%	92.2%
New	% of calls abandoned	<10%	14.2%	8.0%	8.4%	3.0%	8.4%
IT04	Loss of IT systems (at least 72 hours) occurring	0 Incidents	1	3	2	2	8
Business Systems							
BS01	% of business-critical incidents raised via the Helpdesk regarding the ERP system responded to within one working day	95.00%	No Activity	No Activity	No Activity	No Activity	No Activity
BS02	% of non-critical incidents raised via the Helpdesk regarding the ERP system responded to within three working days	95.00%	97.6%	98.1%	97.1%	98.0%	97.7%
BS03	% of change requests raised via the Helpdesk regarding the ERP system considered and responded to within five working days	95.00%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Appendix 5 – National context

Increasing pressure on budgets following the pandemic

[CIPFA performance tracker, 2023](#) reports on the impact of Covid and trends in children's services spending, and found that LAs spent £11.1 billion on children's social care in 2021/22, a 41% rise in real terms compared to 2009, while the children's population grew by less than 10% over the same period.

Rising need and complexity

[County Council network report](#): reports that in 2021-22 (the year after three national lockdowns) 30 out of 36 county local authorities overspent on their budgets by £317m. In total, four in five county local authorities – or 83% – overspent on their children's services budget in 2021-22. Nationally, all 151 councils with children's services responsibility overspent by £946.5m. Faced with this spike in demand, most councils in county areas have had little choice but to overspend on their children's services budgets to protect young people. Therefore, the forecasting of pressures in children's services is extremely challenging both within NCT and across the country.

[Safeguarding Pressures Phase 8 \(2022\)](#) showed that there was an overall increase in safeguarding activity between 2019/20 and 2021/22, reflecting greater complexity of needs, despite an initial reduction in referrals linked to lockdowns in the early stages of the Covid-19 pandemic. More children who were not previously known to social care services were presenting at a later stage, with greater levels of need and higher risks, and as a result, more children were immediately becoming subjects of child protection plans or care proceedings. Between 2019/20 and 2021/22, the number of early help assessments rose by 16%, the number of children in need increased by 4%, and the number of section 47 enquiries increased by 8%

The [Independent Review of Children's Social Care, 2022](#) found that only 56% of the increase in the numbers of children in care since 2013 could be explained by population growth and an increase in the number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children arriving. It found that children are staying in care for longer, with 12% fewer children leaving care in 2021 than in 2016. It estimated that, without implementation of the proposed reforms, total spend on children's social care is likely to rise to just under £12bn in 2024/25. Full roll out of the reforms will not be seen until 2025/26 at the earliest.

[Family Justice Observatory Deprivation of Liberty \(DoL\) data, 2023](#) between July 2022 and May 2023, the national DoL court issued 1217 applications across 153 different LAs, for a total of 1142 children. 53.8% of children subjected to a DoL order in July and August 2022 were placed in at least one unregistered setting in the first six months of the order being granted. This indicates "a lack of suitable regulated provision for children experiencing risk of criminal exploitation, emotional difficulties, behaviours that were a risk to others, and self-harm risks.". Over a six-month period, over 90% did not experience any relaxation to deprivations of their liberty.

Placement market

[Competitions and Markets Authority review of the children's social care placements market, 2022](#) described the challenges facing LAs, concluding that there are significant problems in how the placements market is functioning in England. There are not enough placements of the right kind, in the right places, which means that children are not consistently getting access to care and accommodation that meets their needs. The largest private providers of placements are making materially higher profits and charging materially higher prices than would be expected from a functioning market. Some of the largest private providers are carrying very high levels of debt which creates a risk that disorderly failure of highly-leveraged firms could disrupt placements. "The UK has sleepwalked into a dysfunctional children's social care market. This has left local authorities hamstrung in their efforts to find suitable and affordable placements in children's homes or foster

care.”. The short-notice closure of the Outcomes First Group demonstrated the impact that mass exit of such providers could have.

[S251 Data Outturn, 2022](#) reported that in 2021/22, LA gross expenditure on children and young people's services was £11.9 billion. £3,672 million was spent on in-house and independent fostering and children's homes placements in 2020/21. This is an increase from £2,670 million in 2015/16, or 37.5% (not real terms). The corresponding increase in the number of children in care was 14.8%. Private residential placement costs increased the most, by 90.56%, while LA placement costs increased by 18.78%

[Children's Home Association's State of the Sector Survey 2023](#) highlighted the private sector's approach to formal procurement and tendering, with over a third not engaging with formal processes (twice as many as in 2021) and half of all providers selectively considering which tenders to bid for. 22% of all providers also reported choosing to leave a commissioned framework in the last year, all of whom experienced no negative consequences following the decision (up from 17% in 2022).

Regulatory regime for supported accommodation

[Demand and Capacity of Homes for Children in Care \(CCN, LIIA, Newton, 2023\)](#) found that between 2019 and 2022, the number of young people living in supported accommodation increased by 21.3%. While demand is growing, only 81% of existing placements are expected to register as per the new registration requirement, with almost 20% put off by cost and reputational risk, meaning a potential fall in capacity of 3,676 beds across England. This increased demand coupled with inflation and administrative burdens from the new regulations is predicted to add £368m to LA spend on supported accommodation by 2026/27

Workforce

[The Independent Review of Children's Social Care, 2022](#) estimated the additional cost of employing agency staff at approximately £26,000 per worker per year (53% of the average social worker salary), indicating a loss of over £100 million per year. DfE data (2023) shows that the agency social worker rate increased from 16% in 2021 to 18% in 2022, with 13% more agency social workers in total in 2022. Safeguarding Pressures Phase 8, (2022) reported that 44% of respondents stated that there was never or rarely sufficient social workers in the right places to effectively support children, resulting in greater risk for children and families, higher caseloads and increased waiting lists and delays.

Children's social care pressures

- Growth in child poverty/cost of living crisis - regional statistics summarising the latest data on local child poverty after housing costs ([End Child Poverty Coalition, 2023](#)). Between 2015 and 2020, it was estimated that 8.1% of children entering care was linked to rising child poverty ([NIHR, 2021](#))
- Lack of sufficiency of placements and rising costs/profitteering from private companies ([CMA, 2022](#))
- Impact of the supported accommodation reforms ([CCN, LIIA and Newton, 2023](#))
- Rising numbers of UASC through the national transfer scheme, and lack of funding for UASC care leavers ([Safeguarding Pressures Phase 8 \(2022\)](#))

Mental health pressures

- Growth in demands for mental health support ([NHS Digital, 2022](#))
- Inadequate children's mental health services including a reduction in tier 4 beds and a lack of shared accountability with health partners ([CYPMHC, 2023](#))
- High costs of unregistered placements for children with the most complex needs/increase in DoLs ([Nuffield Family Justice Observatory, 2023](#))

Workforce pressures

- Social workers – agency workforce issues highlighted in the [ADCS response to the Child and Family Social Worker Workforce consultation](#)

Source: ADCS

Appendix 6 – NCT Annual Internal Audit Report 2022/23

Internal audit: Annual report and statement of assurance 2022-23 on the following 5 pages

1. Summary of Internal Audit 2022-23

1.1 This report details the work undertaken by internal audit for Northamptonshire Children’s Trust (the Trust) and provides an overview of the effectiveness of the controls in place for the full year. Internal Audit has been provided to the Trust via a service level agreement with West Northamptonshire Council (WNC) Internal Audit Service.

1.2 2022-23 was a challenging year from an audit perspective, with a large proportion of activity relating to audits initiated as part of the 2021-22 plan outstanding, following the issue of the annual audit report for 2021-22. These were reviewed and delivered by BDO, an external provision partner. The 2022-23 plan was also reviewed, and 4 audits removed to prioritise impactful audits, leaving 5 audits which were delivered by the WNC audit team.

1.3 5 audits relating to the 2021-22 plan were issued as final reports in 2022-23; the working papers for these audits have been reviewed to ensure that sufficient 2022-23 evidence was covered, and they could be included in the 2022-23 opinion.

1.4 The 5 audits delivered as part of the 2022-23 plan were supported by 4 audits relating to WNC services provided to the Trust. The insourcing of the WNC audit team has led to delays in the delivery of audits, and the completion of the plan has been challenging, with 2 audits at draft report stage awaiting management response at the time of this report.

1.5 Appendix A details the outcome of the audits delivered, with a summary in the table below.

Audit	Audit Status	Assurance Rating		
		Control Environment	Compliance	Org Impact
2021/22 – Plan; 2022/23 Assurance				
Services - Foster Care and Special Guardianship Payments	Final Report	Good	Good	Minor
Services - Placement Contract Management	Final Report	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Moderate
WNC - IT Systems Security - Carefirst System	Final Report	Limited	Satisfactory	Moderate
Key Financials - Payroll	Final Report	Good	Substantial	Minor
WNC - Services - Social Care Transport	Final Report	Satisfactory	Limited	Major
2022/23 – Plan and Assurance				
Overarching Safeguarding Arrangements	Final Report	Good	Good	Minor
Corporate Parenting - Leaving Care s24	Final Report	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Minor
Corporate Governance Framework (incl Ofsted Improvement Plan Monitoring)	Draft Report	Good	Good	Minor
Social Work Workforce	Final Report	N/A – Briefing Note Report - no ratings issued.		
Fostering Service (In-house Independent Fostering Agency)	Draft Report	N/A – Interim Report issued – no ratings issued further work planned for 2023/24.		
Sustainability – corporate parent role	Removed			
MTFP and budget management	Removed			
ICT – network infrastructure security	Removed			
ICT – privileged access control	Removed			
WNC Service Audits				
IT Disaster recovery	Complete	Limited	Limited	Moderate
IT Cyber security	Complete	Limited	Limited	Major

Audit	Audit Status	Assurance Rating		
		Control Environment	Compliance	Org Impact
Payroll Transaction Testing	Complete	Good	Good	Minor
ERP Gold IT User Access Controls	Complete	Good	Good	Minor

2. Executive summary – Head of Audit opinion

2.1 The role of internal audit is to provide an opinion to the Trust, through the Finance, Resources and Audit Committee, on the adequacy and effectiveness of the internal control system to ensure the achievement of the organisation's objectives in the areas reviewed. The annual report from internal audit provides an overall opinion on the adequacy and effectiveness of the organisation's risk management, control, and governance processes, within the scope of work undertaken by Internal Audit. The basis for forming our opinion is as follows:

- An assessment of the range of individual opinions arising from risk-based audit assignments contained within internal audit plans that have been reported throughout the year.
- This assessment has taken account of the relative materiality of these areas and management's response to agreed actions.
- Management investigation and response to issues raised from fraud investigations.

2.2 We can provide **satisfactory assurance** that there is a sound system of internal control, designed to meet the Trust's objectives, and that controls are being applied consistently.

Assignment	Audit Status	Assurance Rating			Recommendations			Key findings / Comments
		Control Environment	Compliance	Org Impact	E	I	S	
2021/22 – Plan; 2022/23 Assurance								
Services - Foster Care and Special Guardianship Payments	Final Report	Good	Good	Minor	0	0	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New/ceased Foster Care and Special Guardianship Orders (SGO) payments, overpayments and one-off discretionary expenses had sufficient supporting evidence. • The system design could be improved by reviewing the policies and procedures. • It can further be strengthened by including who prepared the reconciliation. • Policies and procedures relating to Foster Care and SGOs have not been reviewed within a timely manner or version control is missing. • The payment run reconciliation has no information in relation to who has completed and reviewed leading to risk of lack of adequate audit trail, segregation of duties and accountability.
Services - Placement Contract Management	Final Report	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Moderate	0	5	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence of a best match form and approval in line with the Scheme of Delegation. • Evidence of invoice review against IPA's, sample checking of payments and evidence of final review and approval for payments. • No placement review and approvals panel. • No formal IPA or documentation for in-house fostering placements • Processes for best match forms not completed due to the recent back log. • Review of monthly placement management reports found there is no documented action plan detailing actions to be completed and expected completion dates
IT Systems Security - Carefirst System	Final Report	Limited	Satisfactory	Moderate	4	2	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The system is outdated and not user friendly, which creates duplication and inefficiencies. • Roles and responsibilities in relation to the system support management have not been clarified and confirmed to ensure the most effective and efficient use of resources. • Current arrangements for user access are duplicated. • Changes to user accounts are not proactively notified by the relevant managers. • Business continuity planning and back up arrangements were not documented.

Assignment	Audit Status	Assurance Rating			Recommendations			Key findings / Comments
		Control Environment	Compliance	Org Impact	E	I	S	
								<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There are limited improvements that can be made to make the system more user friendly and compatible with the modern technology. There are easy to complete online forms. Security declaration and CareFirst training are being completed and supporting evidence is in place. There are documented data entry procedures. The system is regularly backed up and backups are checked and confirmed.
2022/23 – Plan and Assurance								
Overarching Safeguarding Arrangements	Final Report	Good	Good	Minor	0	2	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Job descriptions should be reviewed and updated as required. Develop a robust system of monitoring and reporting to evidence training takes place in respect of Rapid Reviews and Children Safeguarding Practice Reviews Consider making safeguarding training mandatory for all NCT staff
Corporate Parenting – Leaving Care s24	Final Report	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Minor				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Transition to Adulthood (Leaving Care) – Financial Policy and Guidance should be revised and approved at an appropriate level. The Operational Group should be specifically tasked with investigation of the reasons for and setting up corrective action to bring Pathway Plan KPIs back in line. Management should ensure that required service improvements arising from the Collaborative Reflective Practice Discussion Review Practice Week have been or are being actioned.
Corporate Governance Framework (incl Ofsted Improvement Plan Monitoring)	Draft Report	Good	Good	Minor	0	4	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Key policies had not all been published, and some appeared to not be up to date or include adequate version control.
Social Work Workforce	Final Report	N/A – Briefing Note Report issued						<p>Strategic level review</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Workforce Development Strategy demonstrates a focus on leadership, manager support of staff and initiatives for recruitment and retention. Further review of how the workforce is using the strategy and how it is embedded required

Assignment	Audit Status	Assurance Rating			Recommendations			Key findings / Comments
		Control Environment	Compliance	Org Impact	E	I	S	
Fostering Service (In-House - Independent Fostering Agency)	Draft Report	N/A – Interim Report issued – further work planned.			0	1	0	Scope amended and agreed with management after consideration of Ofsted report. Focus on replacement content management system: development of specification and controls until new system in place. Further work planned for 2023/24.
West Northamptonshire Council provided services								
IT Disaster recovery	Complete	Limited	Limited	Moderate	0	7	0	Management action plan in place
IT Cyber security	Complete	Limited	Limited	Major	10	3	0	Management action plan in place
Payroll transaction testing	Complete	Good	Good	Minor	0	1	3	Management action plan in place
ERP Gold IT user access controls	Complete	Good	Good	Minor	0	2	0	Management action plan in place
Removed audits								
Sustainability – corporate parent role		Removed						
MTFP and budget management		Removed						Included in 2023/24 plan
ICT – network infrastructure security		Removed						
ICT – privileged access control		Removed						

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Northamptonshire Children's Trust Independent Fostering Agency

Annual Report 2022 – 2023



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1. Introduction

This is a report on the performance of the Northamptonshire Children's Trust (NCT) Independent Fostering Agency in line with the National Minimum Standards (2011) and Statutory Guidance.

It provides details of NCT's Independent Fostering Agency activity from 1st April 2022 to 31st March 2023 and sets out plans for service development until 31st March 2024.

This annual report should be read in conjunction with the Independent Fostering Agency Statement of Purpose.

The Independent Fostering Agency had its second Ofsted inspection in February 2023 and the overall judgement of our service is 'Inadequate'.

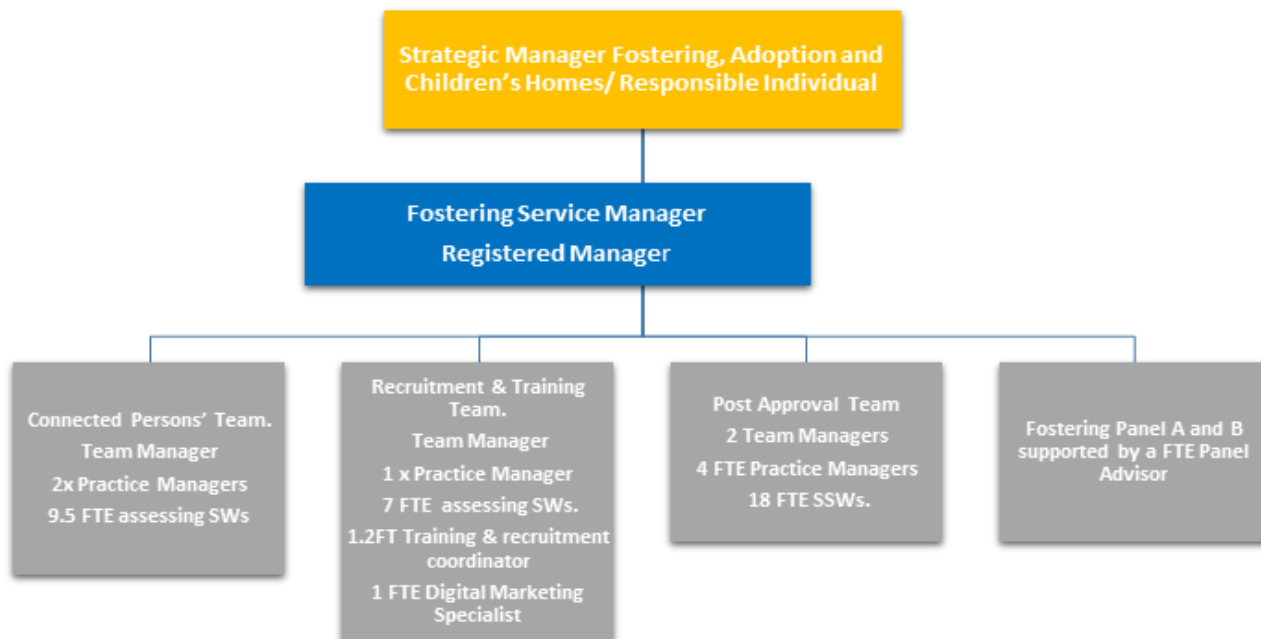
The observations and findings of the Inspectors have framed the ongoing improvement plan for the Fostering Service, where areas of practice and delivery of service needs to be focused and the following areas have been identified:

- An effective electronic recording system.
- Consistent recording and practice which clearly evidences risk and response to this.
- Children being seen by SSWs and meaningful discussion had with the child.
- Quality supervision of foster carers.
- Quality supervision of SSWs and Practice Managers.
- Safeguarding practices and knowledge of the staff working within the Fostering Service needs to be improved.

The service has produced a service improvement plan, with agreed team objectives, targets, and timescales for completion. Progress against the action plan is reported back to the senior leadership team and NCT's governance board. Following the Inadequate judgment received as a result of the full SCCIF Inspection undertaken from the 6th to the 10th February 2023, the Fostering Service remains subject to three Compliance notices issued by OFSTED, with a monitoring visit undertaken on the 11th April providing some assurance of the steps already taken by the Agency to address the arising areas of concern and deficit in practice.

The service has a clear understanding of what is required in relation to the key areas of improvement and continues to have very high ambitions to ensure foster carers receive training, support, and consistent effective supervision to enable them to offer the highest quality of care to children and that our children's voices are very clearly heard and children are regularly seen by the foster carers' supervising social workers.

3. Staffing



Additionally, a further specialist SSW post has been agreed for the Recruitment and Training Team to specifically supervise and support our cohort of Resilience foster carers. Recruitment activity to this position is ongoing.

NCT’s Independent Fostering Agency comprises of four fostering teams:

- Recruitment, Training and Assessment team
- Post Approval teams x 2
- Connected Persons’ team

The teams undertake statutory functions of assessment, approval, supervision, support, training, and development, safeguarding and review of foster carers. All fostering teams work in partnership with the Duty and Assessment, Safeguarding and Children in Care (CIC) Services to ensure children’s care plans are progressed with minimum delay and children are provided with the best possible in-house care. Supervising social workers and practice managers attend placement planning, permanency planning and placement stability meetings, CIC reviews and all other relevant statutory and non-statutory meetings for children.

The Independent Fostering Agency seeks to build positive relationships with professionals providing a ‘team around the child’ approach, ensuring partners work to best meet children’s needs. A fostering duty system operates daily to support the function of the NCT’s Placement Management Service, who are responsible for sourcing placements both internally within Northamptonshire and externally, by identifying internal foster placements and emergency carers. A duty team manager provides management oversight of placement activity. Additionally, a second duty worker supports the duty telephone response to foster carers on a daily basis. The Fostering Duty Hub are based together to provide a consistent managerial oversight.

Northamptonshire Children’s Trust Independent Fostering Agency provides a range of short term and permanent placements with foster carers who have a diverse range of skills and experience.

4. Summary of the service developments and challenges 2022/23

Key developments during 2022/2023

Whole service

- Improved our data set for managers to monitor performance in relation to statutory compliance. Reporting systems have been reviewed and an interim recording system has been introduced to ensure compliance can be effectively monitored. Redeveloped recruitment pipeline data and monthly performance meetings to drive assessment performance and recruit more foster carers.
- Review of existing policy and practice documents, practice guidance and 'HOW TO' guides written for all key practice changes or updates and to support new ways of working. These are shared with the relevant stockholders as appropriate, to include our foster carers and independent panel members when relevant.
- An incumbent registered manager remains in post to provide stability for the service and lead the necessary improvements and high aspirations for the service.
- Whole Service development days continue to be held on a quarterly basis with staff to be clear of the vision and expectations, to ensure all team members understand the importance of their role and how they can most effectively work together to achieve the continuing improvements of the service. These days provide an opportunity for review and implementation of new policy and practice as well as guest speakers to enhance the wider learning across all of the Fostering Services. Within this year, guest speaker topics have included 'The voice of the child' delivered by a care experienced adult, MBAM training delivered by our clinical psychologist, specialist 'Parent and Child' training as well as a SCCIF framework development workshop.
- Bi-monthly meetings continue to be held between the management team, panel adviser and panel chairs have been established supporting the ongoing development of the professional relationship between the panel and the agency.
- All managers have participated in Leadership and management training with positive impact on practice and culture. Focused on enabling managers to empower each other, staff, children and families and build positive culture.
- Signs of safety (SOS) training has been provided to managers and staff and this strengths-based and empowering practice model continues to be embedded, we have several SOS champions within the service to support this area of practice development. Further workshops in respect of the SOS model for foster carer's daily recordings are planned into this next financial year to further embed this practice.

Recruitment

- Streamlined forms for recruitment, through to assessment and support, including Matching, Placement planning documents, Safe care documents, Risk assessment templates have been revised and or introduced.
- The Digital Marketing Specialist role is now embedded in NCT's Communications team and supports Fostering recruitment.
- Re - shaped our front door approach and appointed a recruitment coordinator to ensure enquiries are followed up within 24 hours.
- Further developed a 'step down' pathway from Residential Care to Fostering through the Resilience scheme, which provides support to children to 'step down' from residential care and 'break the cycle' of children experiencing multiple placements moves. We now have 6 approved Resilience foster carers with 5 young people currently in place.
- Continued to develop joint and emergency viability assessments when undertaking Connected Carers Assessment, which has supported timely decision making, and has seen an increase in initial viability assessments being undertaken prior to placement of the children.

Training and support

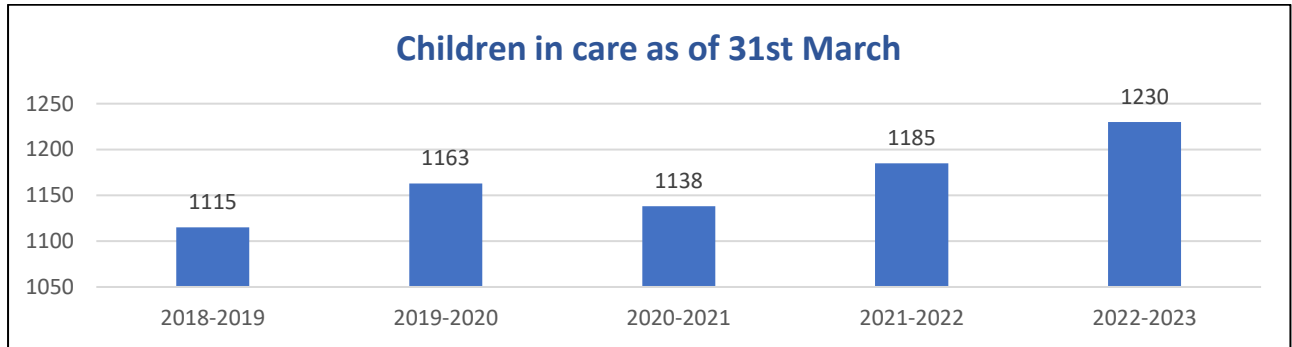
- Approaches to retention continue to be developed, including exit interviews and the use of retention meetings with foster carers who are thinking of leaving, and a clear pathway for engagement with foster carers who are 'on hold' to enable them to return to fostering in a timely manner.
- Managers' retention visits to foster carers remain an ongoing requirement of our carer retention and quality assurance framework.
- Continue to further embed the Public Health funded fostering project. The aim of this project is to develop the skills and knowledge of supervising social workers and foster carers in understanding the emotional needs of children who have experienced abuse and neglect developing therapeutic parenting techniques. It facilitates the commissioning of therapeutic interventions for children and carers, with the aim of improving mental health outcomes for children and to improve placement stability as well as specialist training social work staff working within the Fostering Service such as Dyadic Developmental Practice (DDP).
- Clinical Psychologist role is embedded, and staff are benefitting from specialist advice and guidance. Individual consultations have been offered to foster carers to support them in their fostering journey, especially in consideration of blocked care and achieving placement stability.
- Foster carers continue to have funded access to the National Association of Therapeutic Parenting. This provides foster carers with access to training, webinars and networks of support with a focus on therapeutic approaches.
- The training provided to foster carers has been reviewed; there are plans to expand on existing training opportunities, and others have been introduced or re-introduced following foster carer feedback.

Key challenges during 2022/2023

- We have a high number of beds on hold (49 beds on 31st March 2022 compared to 8 the previous year).
- Recruitment & retention of foster carers. There has been a slight increase in resignations of foster carers, and we have recruited fewer households than in the previous year. This appears, anecdotally, to be in line with the experience of other Local Authorities and Fostering Agencies. Further exploration of the current situation around recruitment and retention nationally is needed to fully understand how NCT's Fostering Agency fared in comparison to others and what we can do differently to address sufficiency issues.
- Information Systems: The data required for the fostering service to monitor progress has continued to improve during this year but remains an area of significant challenge. We cannot use the Care First recording system to accurately collect data on the various approval details or vacancies, manage payments easily and accurately or provide adequate data on carers subject to concerns or complaints. Individual children's records have been created within TEAMS but remain vulnerable to corruption and are not able to 'talk' to any of the other systems that the Fostering Service is currently using which makes managerial oversight and tracking of actions/ practice clumsy.
- Staff recruitment has been a significant challenge for the majority of this financial year, however, this is now an improving picture.
- We have a high number of children living within family and friends' arrangements, standing at 119 fostering households caring for 174 children. A task and finish group has carried out a review and a whole systems approach has been taken in relation to changing the culture and ways of working to make sure Special guardianship is encouraged where appropriate and in line with the children's needs. This remains a targeted focus of the Fostering Service. Dedicated workshops for all social work practitioners have been jointly delivered by the Fostering Service and the post order team who are responsible for SGO support.
- To continue to progress and work within all elements of the improvement plan to address the points raised within the compliance notices. This will include regular review and Quality Assurance activity, self-evaluation and reporting to both NCT's SLT and monitoring visits from OFSTED. Ongoing policy and practice review will continue to inform the Improvement plan.

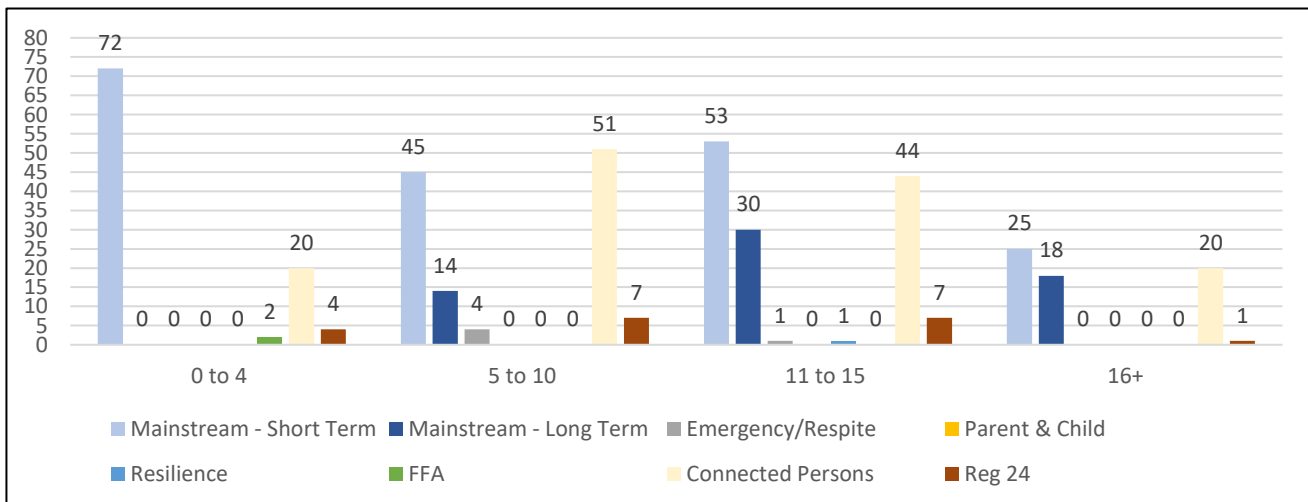
5. **The Children We Care For**

The graph below shows a snapshot of the number of children in care figures over the last 4 years. This graph shows a decrease in the year 2020 – 2021, anecdotally considered to be the in part due to the COVID pandemic conditions but a significant rise for last year and this year. Not only does the continued rise in children in care create increased sufficiency pressures, but there is also the churn in children in care population during the year which can create pressure with seasonal increase in demands for fostering placements.



Children living with in house foster carers categorised by age groups

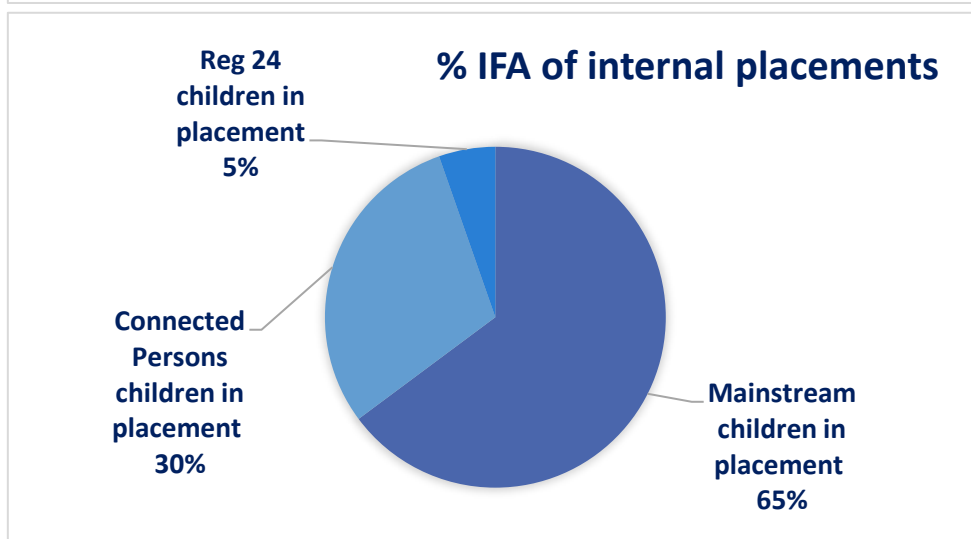
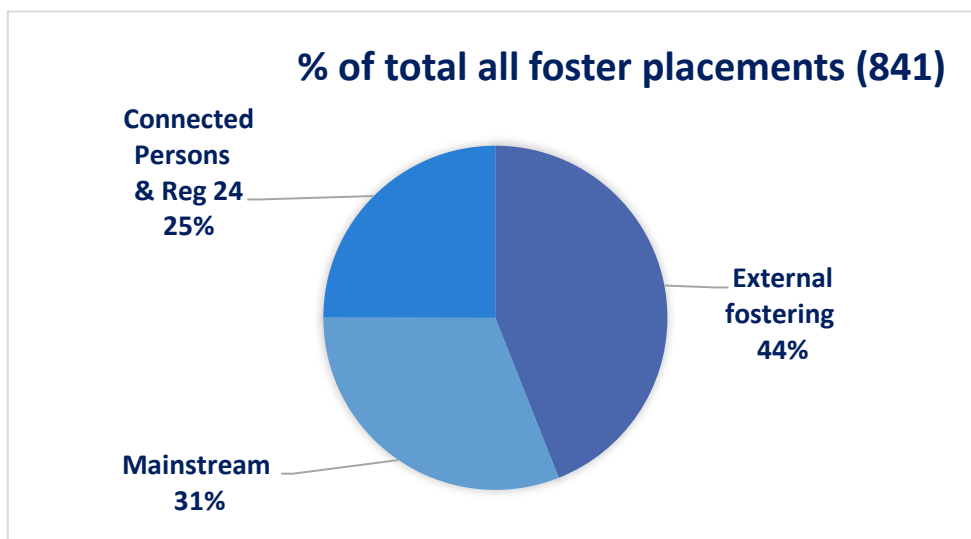
Approval	Age Groups			
	0 to 4	5 to 10	11 to 15	16+
Mainstream - Short Term	72	45	53	25
Mainstream - Long Term	0	14	30	18
Emergency/Respite	0	4	1	1
Parent & Child	0	0	0	0
Resilience	0	0	1	0
FFA	2	0	0	0
Connected Persons	20	51	44	20
Reg 24	4	7	7	1
Total	98	121	136	64



As last year, demand for placements for children aged 11+ remains high with 11–15-year-olds consistently being the largest group of children living in in-house foster homes.

Proportion of children living in internal and external foster placements

Fostering breakdown	Number of Children placed in foster care	% of LAC 1227	% of total all foster placements (841)
External fostering	370	30%	44%
Mainstream	261	21%	31%
Connected Persons & Reg 24	210	17%	25%
	841	69%	33%



Of the 841 Northamptonshire children who were living in foster care during this period, 261 children are placed with internal Mainstream foster carers (31%), 210 children placed with Connected person's carers (25%) with this figure including those children living with carers granted temporary approval under REG 24.

Whilst this is positive, there remains a significant number of children (370) living with foster carers approved by independent fostering agencies (44%).

Anecdotally these children have tended to be older in age, sibling groups or children with additional needs. Finding fostering families for these children remains a priority and recruitment and marketing activity continues to focus on recruitment of foster carers able to offer homes to these children.

6. Recruitment and Assessment of Foster Carers

On March 31st 2023, there were 209 Mainstream fostering households, Connected Persons' fostering approved households and 'Regulation 24' temporarily approved fostering households.

Current Fostering Households	Data as of 1st April 2022	Apr -22	May -22	Jun -22	Jul -22	Aug -22	Sep -22	Oct -22	Nov -22	Dec -22	Jan -23	Feb -23	Mar -23	Total
Households on hold		1	1	1	3	3	2	4	4	5	6	4	5	
Positive ADM		0	2	2	0	3	0	3	2	3	2	0	2	19
Closed Households		0	-5	-4	-2	-2	-4	0	0	-1	-3	-2	0	-23
Count of Approved Households		213	213	210	208	206	207	203	206	208	210	209	207	209

18 new foster carer households were recruited, 16 less than the previous year. Anecdotally, this remains a positive position in an ever increasingly challenging market in which to recruit foster carers across the sector.

Across this reporting period, 13 fostering households have closed, with 3 of these being through the action of the Agency and 'Termination of Approval.' 10 of these have been through the carers change in circumstances and a decision to retire or resign from fostering altogether. There have been no instances within this reporting period where foster carers have chosen to resign from NCT's Fostering Service but chosen to continue their fostering career with another fostering agency.

Our net position at year end was -4 households.

The number of approved foster carers has not kept up with demand in the sector, which has had an increase of around 3% in the number of children coming into care over the last 12 months in Northamptonshire.

Below shows the number of enquiries, approvals and de-registrations (for reporting purposes, this the term used to include all foster carer closures for resignation, retirement and at the Fostering Service's instigation) over the last three years:

Enquiries	Approvals	De-Registrations
20/21: 397	20/21: 37	20/21: 29
21/22: 252	21/22: 34	21/22: 32
22/23: 170	22/23: 18	22/23: 13

Description	Mar-21	Mar-22	Mar -23
Number of Initial Enquiries received	397	252	175
Number of Initial Visits undertaken	145	85	72
Households invited to apply following positive visit	109	50	45
% of Households invited to apply from initial enquiries received	27%	20%	63%

From 1st April 2022 to 31st March 2023, we have:

- Received a total of 175 enquiries. This resulted in 72 initial visits (41%). Of these initial visits, 45 (63%) converted to a Registration of Interest (ROI), it is at this stage that Statutory Checks commence (Stage 1)
- This is a decrease of 77 enquiries for the same period in the previous year. Discussions in regional and national fostering recruitment groups have noted a continued drop in enquiries across the sector during this time period.
- The conversion rate from enquiry to approval of in-house foster carers is 10.5%. This is slightly less than the conversation rate achieved in 2021/2022 of 13%, though above the national of approximately 9% and the East Midlands region of around 6 - 7%.

In 2022/2023, 29 households withdrew from the assessment process (25 at stage 1, 4 at stage 2). The Fostering Service seeks to progress Stage 1 and Stage 2 of assessment of applicant foster carers concurrently which will mean that applicant households can be well progressed in Stage 2 of assessment before all of their Stage 1 checks are returned and reviewed as satisfactory. This does present a risk of late closures to assessment.

The stage 1 closed for the following reasons:

- A change of circumstances or change in family dynamics/work commitments meant that fostering was no longer viable/possible for them – this included 1 household needing to take on a caring responsibility for a relative, 4 where health needs changed within the assessment timeframe and 8 where fostering no longer fitted in with their lives due to job changes or changes in other personal circumstances.
- 1 household's immediate family members were not supportive of the application to foster and withdrew due to this.
- 7 stage 1 assessments were ceased by the Fostering Service: 5 noted that those applying were not suitable for the fostering role. 2 further households had major changes in their circumstances.

Of the stage 2 closures, 2 applicants were not suitable (one of these was a resilience applicant) and this was determined through late return of Stage 1 checks, and 2 had changes in their personal/family circumstances. Within this reporting period, the process for the review of applicants at Stage 1 has been undertaken.

Unavailable beds and Occupancy rate

We have seen a slight decrease this year in our unavailable beds (see table below) from 27% to 25%. During 2021 the reporting on unavailable beds was changed to align with Ofsted codes and descriptions. This has meant that the different reasons for beds not being able to be occupied is able to be reported more accurately. Foster Carers who are either placed 'on hold' by the Fostering Service (usually due to the carer being the subject of an allegation and investigation) or foster carers who place themselves 'on hold' at their request are regularly kept under review.

As detailed below, non-available beds are also kept under review, correct as of 31st March 2023:

This ensures that ensure maximum placement sufficiency is maintained. The vast majority of the 97 beds not available as detailed below arise from a foster carer having one bedroom but having terms of approval to care for one child or two if siblings. When a single child is placed in that bedroom, reporting details a 'lost' bedroom space which, in reality, was only available if the placement had been for two siblings who are able to safely share a bedroom.

Households on hold	5
Total number of approved places including exemptions	391
Filled Places	262
Occupancy rate	67%
Non available beds	97
Non available beds rate	25%
Vacant beds	16
Vacant beds rate	4%

Our Recruitment strategy and marketing campaigns

The Digital Marketing Specialist remains in post and supports all elements of our 'mainstream' recruitment activity, including to our specialist Resilience foster carer scheme.

A variety of marketing approaches are used including digital, social media channels, radio, as well as a range of outdoor engagement to promote fostering for Northamptonshire Children's Trust. The Lead Member and chair of the Corporate Parenting Board along with staff and foster carers within the organisation remain very supportive in promoting fostering within their networks.

We have an Annual Fostering Communications and Marketing Plan that has had input from the whole of the Fostering Service and offers a breakdown of digital marketing strategies, community-based activities, printed marketing, and the budget allocated to each of these. Different types of fostering are planned to be promoted on various weeks throughout the year. The duration and amount of advertising planned for each scheme is based on the sufficiency needs identified by the Independent Fostering Agency and analysis of referrals for children's placements received into the team. *Please see the separate Marketing and Recruitment Activity report.*

The Fostering Service continues to employ the talents of a specialist Digital Marketing Recruitment Specialist to support with:

- Recruitment Campaigns
- Targeted activity across the year to raise the Fostering Service's profile to include the use of
 - Facebook
 - Twitter
 - Google Ads
 - LinkedIn
 - Social Media campaigns
 - Dedicated NCT Fostering Service webpage
 - Partnership working with other Local Authorities
 - Exploring partnerships with other local companies
 - 'Face to Face' and engagement activity locally across Northamptonshire.
 - Event planning

Brand

This year, we wanted to create a 'brand' and a uniformed look, so each type of fostering had their own tag line under the 'step up' brand.

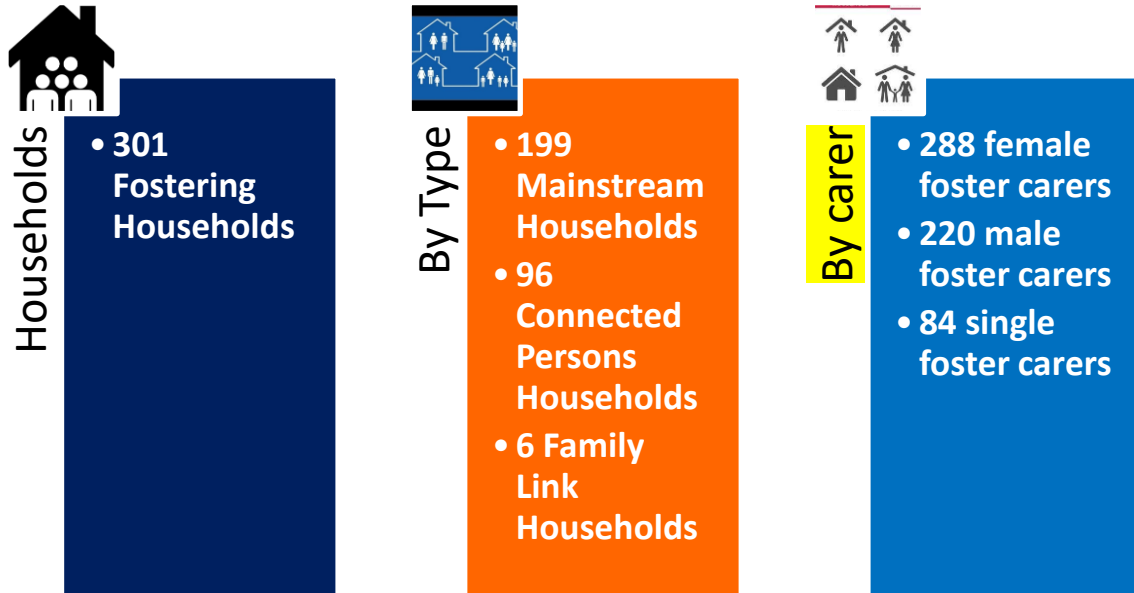
- Mainstream – Step up and make a difference
- Siblings – Help us to take steps together
- Emergency – Could you step in when I need you
- Resilience – Help us take steps into adulthood
- Parent and child – Supporting both big and little steps
- Family Link – Could you step in and support our family

2022/23 advertising examples



7. Post Approval Support and Supervision

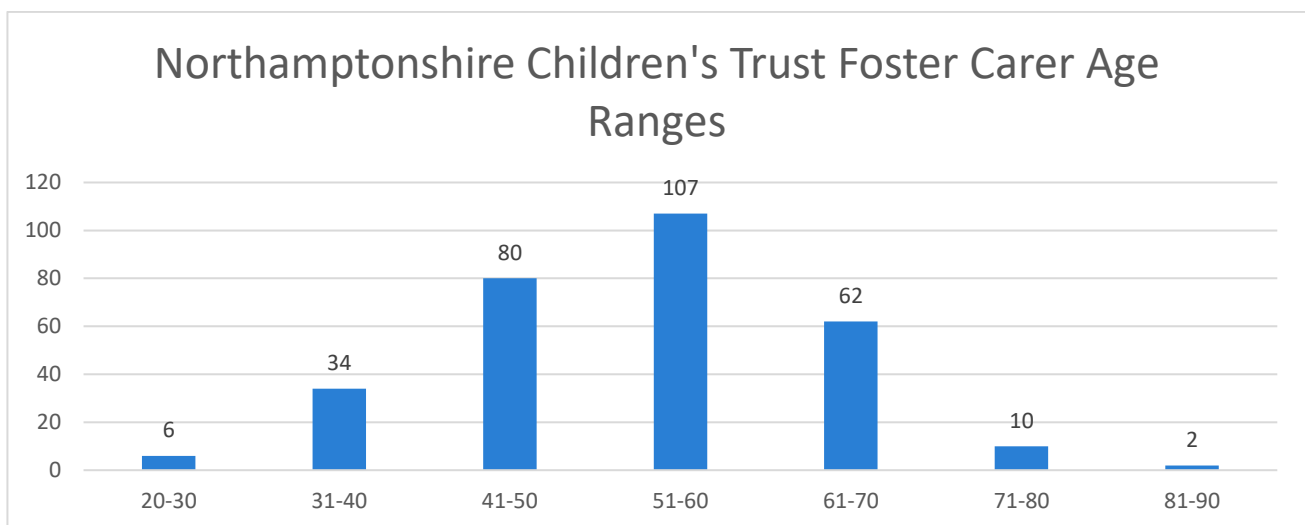
As of 31st March 2023, we had:



Single-carer households accounted for less than one third (28%) of all households.

Our foster carers come from a wide range of age groups, with our youngest carers aged between **20-30** and our oldest carers aged between **81-90**.

Most of our foster carers are aged between **51-60 (36%)**. This is slightly below national figures (**40%**).

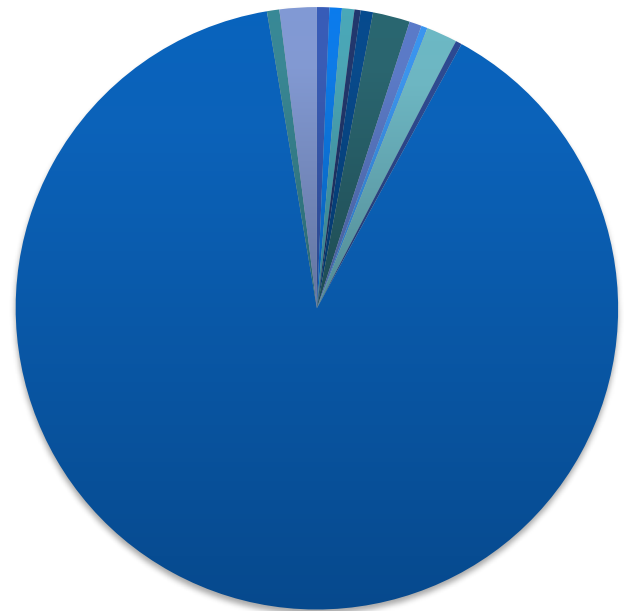


Our foster carers come from a wide range of different cultural and ethnic backgrounds including:

- Bangladeshi
- Indian
- Pakistani
- African
- African Caribbean
- Chinese
- Irish
- Black British
- White British
- Asian British
- White European

and foster carers from mixed heritage backgrounds. Most of our foster carers identified as White British.

Main Foster Carer Ethnicity



■ ABAN(2) ■ AOTH (2) ■ APKN (2) ■ BAFR (1)
 ■ BBRI (2) ■ BCRB (6) ■ BOTH (2) ■ MWAS (1)
 ■ MWBC (5) ■ OOTH (1) ■ WBRI (269) ■ WIRI (2)
 ■ WOTH (6)

On 31 March 2023, in line with previous years, most foster carers were White British (89%). This also correlates with the overall demographic of our looked after population also being White British. This means that we are predominantly able to place child in households where their cultural and heritage identity are met and where we may have placed children with foster carers of a different cultural ethnicity and heritage to themselves, we have considered what other support, such as additional training or access to specialist hair or skin care, can be put in place for both the children and their foster carers in this scenario.

There are 8 Households with same sex Foster Carers.

The average time our Foster Carers have been with us is 6 years 1 months.
The current longest serving Foster Carer has been with us for 42 years and 4 months

NCT’s Independent Fostering Service continues to ensure this is consistently achieved, and we continue to evolve better ways of monitoring compliance with policies and procedures in supervision and performance meetings and audit and dip sample activity.

We track and monitor themes and patterns arising from Fostering Panels, with specific actions arising from any consistent areas for development through our panel chair meetings.

The performance of the service is also monitored by Ofsted inspections, the Corporate Parenting Board, the Sufficiency Board, the Children's Trust Board and the senior leadership team. The Fostering Service were subject to an ILACS Inspection across the whole of NCT's Children's Services undertaken in November 2022 and then a full five day SCCIF Inspection of the Fostering Service only in February 2023.

The performance indicator system initially established in February 2022 continues to be reviewed and refined to ensure that we have management oversight on all our fostering files and is now more sophisticated in the data we can hold and correlate. This supports foster carers receiving regular supervision and that their annual reviews remain on time, unannounced visits, DBS, medicals are up to date. This also measures if the child has been seen and if their bedroom has been checked. All of the regulatory compliance functions are now supported by practice guidance and policy updates to support a congruent approach to social worker practice within the Fostering Service. This has been a significant focus of the work undertaken within this reporting period and remains so moving forward. This remains a continued area of focus of development and improvement for the Fostering Service.

A new induction programme is being introduced this year which will be reviewed with the input from a group of foster carers to ensure that our Independent Fostering Agency reflects our new carers' journey to being able to care for their first child.

Since last year we have started to co-work cases between the Recruitment Team and Post Approval Team. This ensures a smooth handover and more of a managed induction to fostering for many of our newly approved foster carers, with the recruitment workers having been involved with initial matching discussions and supporting with first placements. There has been positive feedback regarding this arrangement.

As we are currently reviewing our existing induction programme, this remains in development and will be in the form of interactive online information covering the following areas:

- Role of SSW and what to expect in supervision.
- Role of Fostering Duty.
- What to expect in the first duty phone call.
- What to expect and to request in a Placement Planning Meeting.
- Expectations of Training, Continuing Professional Development, TSD and Annual Review.
- Introduction to the NFCA.

This will not replace the co-working arrangements currently in place and remain the usual practice.

Support groups

The following support groups are established within the county and are based around localities. They are free for foster carers to attend. The Registered Manager has visited each of the support groups below between September 2022 and December 2022.

Locality/Group Name	Meeting Frequency	Description/notes
Corby Support Group	Monthly	Locality support group for the Corby and surrounding areas. Has been successfully piloted as a training hub.

Kettering Support Group	Monthly	Locality support group for the Kettering and surrounding areas
Rushden/Wellingborough area	Monthly	Covers Rushden/Wellingborough as well as Irthlingborough and wider area
Northampton Support Group	Monthly	Northampton based group
South Northamptonshire Support Group	Monthly	Covers geographic area of West Northants below Northampton
Family Link Support Group	Monthly	Support group for Family Link Short Breaks carers
Northamptonshire Foster Carers Association (NFCA)	Monthly	Established Foster Carer Association
Male Foster Carer Support Group (countywide)	Monthly	Based in Rushden, male carer support group.
Special Guardians and Kinship Support Group (Countywide)	Monthly	County wide group.
BAME foster carer support group	Quarterly	Newly established support group in March 2023.
Karing Kids (County wide)	Special events throughout the year	For birth children of foster carers
Children with Disabilities Support Group	Quarterly	Based at the Penrith Centre
Single Carer Support Group	Quarterly	Based at the Penrith Centre
Separated Children's Support Group	Quarterly	Based at the Penrith Centre
LGBTQIA+ Support Group	Quarterly	Based at the Penrith Centre
BAME Support Group	Quarterly	Based at the Penrith Centre
Foster Carer Buddy Support Group	Quarterly	Group in development to support the existing Buddy Scheme.

Other support in place

"Share the Care" E Newsletter

This goes out to all carer households every two months via email and includes corporate and carer information. There are contributions from foster carers, staff and senior leaders, and also includes positive news stories about children.

"We see J monthly for supervision but know that she is contactable in between those times if we needed her. She is responsive to any requests or concerns we may have. She makes sure that she sees our foster and own children too."

NCT Foster Carers

"We now have been allocated S and she has been amazing at getting to know both myself and J as well as the children. We look forward to working with her on our journey as foster parents."

NCT Foster Carers

"A particularly found his candid discussions with SSW. A to be useful, using her as a sounding board and having realistic expectations for the nature of placements. We have also found the recruitment team to be particularly helpful in getting us back in the loop and ready for our first annual review following a long break from fostering.

NCT Foster Carers

"Taking on K was something new for us, K came with some behaviours that could be difficult to manage at times and so we had to look at different ways to help her, make the world a calm and safe place for her, but also showing her boundaries. We took advice from doctors and our health visitor as well as our SSW who were all great helping and supporting us throughout K's time with us"

NCT Foster Carers

Whilst approval of new foster carers is a priority, we recognise that work needs to be undertaken to ensure that we are effectively using the fostering resources available within fostering households already approved.

This has included reviewing and supporting foster carers who have been 'on hold' to see whether they can return to caring for children and the introduction of a clear process for foster carers who are requesting to be put on hold with guidelines around timescales, staying in contact, support and training needs during this period and return to fostering (including need for review).

In the last month of this reporting period (March 23) two families felt able to return to fostering after being contacted and visited.

This review allowed us to get a clearer view of our actual capacity as well as supporting those carers who might struggle to continue their fostering journey.

Where appropriate, we support changing foster carers approval where they have space in their home to care for additional children, and this resulted in 3 additional beds through a permanent change of approval and 12 additional beds on variation of approval for limited time.

Public Health Project

Supported by Public Health for 2 years from October 2020-22, the Fostering Support Fund increases the support for in-house Foster Families with foster children aged 5-12. The project focuses on the development of in-house skills and commissioning therapeutic interventions for children and carers, with the aim of improving mental health outcomes for children and to improve placement stability. Since the start of the project, we have supported over 80 foster children/families/care experienced young adults with individual therapeutic interventions, with real improvements to their mental health, wellbeing and resilience.

Within this reporting period, these supervising social workers have now received the DDP Level 2 training to support and embed their learning of this approach. Additionally, a senior Supervising Social worker role has been created to lead on Therapeutic approach and to act as an ambassador for the whole Fostering Service, who is responsible for ensuring that all new relevant research is cascaded down to the service. Additionally, this dedicated worker will continue to expand supervising social workers own 'toolbox' with strategies and responses they can offer to foster carers to develop and employ within their work with children. Foster Carers

have access to the clinical psychologist for consultations and complex case supervisions bi-monthly which has been reported as being beneficial and supportive by foster carers. The staff team's knowledge base of therapeutic parenting and approaches has increased significantly due to all of the above.

Resources available through this scheme are:

- All foster carers can access the National Association for Therapeutic Parenting
- Clinical Psychologist offering consultations to carers
- DDP training for SSWs which will be introduced at support groups

Below is an overview of the support offered by this scheme to date:

Group Work Therapeutic Parenting

Non-Violent Resistance

Therapeutic Parenting

Thera play

Therapeutic Stories

Therapeutic Life Story Work including Carer

Resilience carers

This scheme is to meet demands for a specific cohort of children aged 10+, who are at risk of being placed in (out of county) residential homes due to their complexities and difficulties in finding family placements. Resilience foster carers have a team around the child including therapeutic training and support. The residential sector supports the placement and social workers. We are working closely with a local psychologist service, Broad Horizons, who have developed bespoke training for these foster carers to address key challenges in caring for this cohort of children. Clinical supervision is part of their offer to staff and foster carers.

We set out to have 10 Resilience scheme households by the end of March 2023 which would have enabled a further 6 children to be stepped down from residential care. Within this reporting period, we have achieved 7 households with 5 children in placement as of March 2023, with two other Resilience carers significantly progressed in assessment at this time.

Training Offer for Resilience Carers

Please see separate annual Training Report, with the highlights from this being:

Before attending fostering panel there is an expectation that carers must complete the Specialist Foster Caring Training Programme presented by Broad Horizons.

The training further develops skills in relation to the understanding of the emotional and traumatic experiences of children and young people in placements that have been identified as having complex needs.

On completion of that training and clinical supervision, the foster carer achieves a certificate in Specialist Foster Care.

Broad Horizons exclusive DART model is tailored to meet the learning needs for each individual to become a specialist foster carer.

The core principals focus on:

Dissociation

Attachment

Resilience

Trauma

Family Link/Short Break Care for Children with Disability

Family Link gives disabled children in Northamptonshire the chance to spend time with another family to give their family a break. This could be for an afternoon or a few days.

There were 7 family link foster carer households at the end of March 23 which is 2 less than the previous year. During the year 2022/23 we did not approve any new households. Further work is currently being undertaken to ascertain how many families we need going forward which is one of the priority areas in our recruitment strategy.

The Family Link carers are supported by two dedicated Supervising Social Workers from within the Fostering Service who lead on this support alongside their respective allocated fostering households. This ensures that a 'joined up approach' to the support that our Family Link foster carers receive.

Parent and Child Placements

We currently only have one approved foster carer households who is able to offer 'Parent and Child' placements. There remains an area of focus for the Independent Fostering Agency within the forthcoming reporting period, A targeted workshop was delivered to the supervising social worker cohort to support a wider understanding of the specialist support required for 'Parent and Child' foster carers at the whole Service Development Day held in March 2023. This was delivered by our specialist 'Parent and Child' foster carer.

These placements have offered opportunities for parents to care for their children and whilst neither led to children and their parents successfully returning to the community. The foster carers have been supportive in transitioning the children to their permanent carers when it became evident that their parents were not in a position to offer the consistent, nurturing care for the duration of their childhoods.

8. Connected Persons and foster carers granted temporary approval under Regulation 24

Connected Persons Foster Carers and Special Guardians

The Connected Persons Team undertakes assessments of people who are connected in some way to children being supported by the Trust. These assessments are typically of family members but may also include those who are connected to the children in other ways for example, trusted friends of the family, other professionals supporting the children including teachers and others who have a meaningful relationship with the children and who are able to evidence a commitment to supporting the children to maintain family relationships into the long term.

Assessments usually consider applicants to be the long-term carers of the children as either Foster Carers or, increasingly, as Special Guardians. Indeed, over the period of this annual review there has been far more emphasis on supporting prospective Connected Persons to become Special Guardians and to this end an SGO training package has been provided to social workers across the Trust and to Connected Persons which helps them to make more informed decisions about the opportunities that Special Guardianship conveys as opposed to fostering.

In terms of trends for the Connected Persons Team there has been a levelling off of the number of family and friends' assessments being undertaken this year compared to last year. This is mainly due to the development, through training, through the sharing of updated policies and procedures and through greater co-working, of better understanding across the Trust of the requirements of fostering as specified within Fostering Regulations and National Minimum Standards. This enhanced understanding has meant that referring agencies are better informed when making referrals to the Connected Persons Team and considering other options for children in terms of permanence.

In 2022 - 2023, there were 217 referrals into the team which is a reduction from the figure of 254 in 2021 - 2022. This reduction is mainly explained because of improvements in the screening process which has meant that a higher number of initial referrals have not progressed beyond this stage as they were identified as not meeting the requirements of Fostering Regulations and National Minimum Standards.

Furthermore, in terms of Connected Persons being approved by the Agency Decision Maker there were 4 more approved Connected Persons carers at the end of March 2023 as compared to the previous year, 34 in total. Additionally, 35 other households undergoing assessment were closed prior to the assessment being completed for reasons including placements no longer being required, applicants withdrawing and children being returned to their parents following positive parenting assessments.

The specific challenges for our Connected Persons foster carers and Special Guardians are fully recognised within the Fostering Service and to this effect a specific Kinship support offer has been developed this year for approved Connected Persons carers and those undergoing assessment. This offer includes a quarterly Kinship coffee morning which gives carers the opportunity to meet other carers and members of the team on an informal basis to both catch up on current developments as well as to take the opportunity to meet current and new carers to share their experiences of the assessment process and the opportunities and challenges that go side by side with being Connected Persons.

Most recently a Special Guardianship group has been set up specifically focussed on Special Guardians. This is in its infancy but is already beginning to bear fruit with an Open Day event for all Special Guardians being planned for later in 2023.

There are also more formal meetings with the Northamptonshire Foster Carers Association which are for all foster carers whether Connected Persons or Mainstream and which are regularly attended by Connected Persons carers.

In terms of the support to families and children going through the assessment process the Connected Persons Team continues to provide high levels of support and training as it has always done. The Connected Persons Induction training programme has been improved and built on in that there is now an IT based training programme that sits alongside the face-to-face programme, which enables applicants undergoing assessment who aren't able to attend face-to-face training to access the same training provision.

Furthermore, as already alluded to an SGO specific training programme has also been developed and currently 6 face-to-face sessions have taken place with social workers from across the Trust and with prospective Special Guardians. It is expected that this provision will support more applicants to become Special Guardians thus supporting families and children to move on in their lives without the need for ongoing Children's Services input. However, this does not mean that further support is not available as, if requested, the Post Adoption and SGO Support team provides a range of support to those Special Guardians who identify a need post order.

9. Involving our Foster Carers

Our vision is to work as one team together with children and their foster carers at the centre of that team.



We aim to work in partnership with our foster carers and are facilitating opportunities for them to share their views and influence service developments. Plans to achieve this include the development of task groups which offer opportunities for co-production between the Fostering Service, foster carers, our children and young people.

Managers, including NCT Chief Executive Officer, meet regularly with the Northamptonshire Foster Care

Association and foster carers are actively involved in recruitment activities. Additionally, any new process or change in process is also shared at the monthly IFA/NFCA Forums to which all of our foster carers are invited and a diary of dates for these meetings have already been shared with all of our foster carers through until the end of the year. These monthly meetings have been in place since July 2022. Managers from within the Fostering Service attend the NFCA committee meetings held on a monthly basis which is a further opportunity to share any changes to policy and practice. The NFCA committee members then further disseminate this information through the area foster carer support groups offered across the county on a monthly basis.

In January, a joint Child in Care (CIC), NFCA and IFA Forum was established to meet quarterly to support the development of relationships with our foster carers with both the Fostering Service and the CIC teams. This

has been well received and is progressing the development of both the new Savings policy for Northamptonshire children in foster care and a joint children's social worker and supervising social worker visiting policy, to ensure the 'Team around the Child' approach is maintained.

Moving forward in partnership with Northamptonshire Foster Carer Association we intend to work together to further develop a support group programme and events for the year ahead.

As referenced elsewhere within this report, the NFCA continue to deliver support groups across Northamptonshire on behalf of the Fostering Service and within this reporting period, the SLA has been reviewed in this regard.

A bi - monthly magazine, 'Share the Care', continues to be prepared and shared with all foster carers to share information, updates, and good news stories in respect of the Fostering Service and foster carers report that this is really helpful in receiving all updates in one place.

One of our Foster carers attends Corporate Parenting Board and takes an active part in contributing to service development through this forum.

10. Involving our children

Foster children and birth children are encouraged to provide feedback for their foster families' annual review and it is positive to see that feedback was received from looked after children and young people in 83 % of household reviews, which is a decrease from 94 % last year, and from birth children in 93 % of household reviews, which again is a slight decrease on 98% from last year. Most children report to be happy and settled in the families they live with. Where a child might express concerns, this feedback enables us to respond in a timely manner.

Celebrating the successes and achievements of children in our foster families is an important part of what we do and foster carers and supervising social workers present these to managers within NCT and the IFA.

Young People who are currently in care or are care experienced young people are supported by the fostering service to lead a workshop during the 3-day preparation training for potential foster carers. This is enjoyed by participants and also allows the young people to assess how the participants naturally relate to them. They then provide feedback regarding the applicant's suitability to foster.

A children in care consultation group is planned for this forthcoming reporting period, with a dedicated survey to be undertaken with our children and young people placed within our in-house foster carers to help inform and shape the delivery of our Fostering Service for our children and to ensure that the child's voice is heard through our service development.

'Karing Kids' support group has been ongoing for a number of years in Northamptonshire in recognition of the key role that birth children play in fostering households and to thank them for their



contribution to fostering. One of the aims of this group is to support with the retention of foster carers and improve the stability of our children in care placements. In November 2022, we held a 'Karing Kids' competition to design a logo. We have used the winning entries to create a pull up banner to be used at our recruitment events and 'Skills to Foster' training to support applicant foster carers gain an understanding of our support offer to their own birth children.

We are rightly proud of all our children, and we will continue to capture and celebrate all they do and their successes.

Children and young people's views are integral to the fostering service.

Positive feedback is celebrated, and any worries children and young people raise about their care are taken seriously and addressed with the foster carers and where necessary in line with the complaints policy.

Children in fostering families are also consulted as part of the foster carer annual review. Children's lived experiences are explored in support and foster carer supervision.

11. Learning and Development

Foster Carer Training Programme

Please see the annual training report.

NCT's Fostering Service offers a comprehensive online and 'face to face' training offer to our foster carers. This is kept under regular review and supports the mandatory training requirements for our foster carers. An annual survey is undertaken each year to garner feedback from our foster carers as to the value of the training made available to them as well as individual feedback and reflection forms that are completed at the end of each training by the foster carers. Additionally, within the Annual Review process, foster carer are always asked to provide as to the feedback as to the quality of the training that has been made available to them. This ensures that the training offer remains of a good standard and meets the varied learning needs of all our cohort of foster carers.

A Foster Carer learning, and development programme is produced annually. All Foster Carers have their own eLearning accounts through which they can access training online. Feedback on each course is requested from attendees and tells us that foster carers are finding the available courses informative and of value. A personal development plan for each individual foster carer has been introduced which is discussed and reviewed in supervisions to measure impact of learning and how this is supporting the child in placement.

As an action of the SCCIF inspection undertaken in February, a mandatory training requirement policy for foster carers has been reviewed and updated. Foster carers had been written to and a specific tracker put in place to record progress made against this. This includes the following requirements:

All foster carers seeking approval with NCT's Fostering Service must complete the following mandatory training courses within initial assessment:

- First Aid
- Skills to Foster' for mainstream foster carer applicants
- Connected Persons Induction for kinship foster carer applicants
- Online Safety
- Basic Safeguarding- to include Virtual Reality
- Health and Safety for foster Carers – An introduction
- Safeguarding Children for Foster Carers and Adopters only

Within the first twelve months of approval, all foster carers must also complete:

- Signs of Safety 1 day Introduction

Additionally, each approved foster carer (i.e. both foster carers where a two carer household) must complete one of the following safeguarding courses within each review period (i.e. annually as an absolute minimum). This needs to be only one of the courses detailed below:

'Face to Face' safeguarding training offer

Keeping Children and Young People Safe Online for Foster Carers and Adopters - Webinar

Bitesize Gangs and Knife Crime for Foster Carers and Adopters only

Safeguarding Children for Foster Carers and Adopters only

Keeping children and pets safe in the home - Webinar

E-Learning safeguarding training offer

Contextual Safeguarding

Female Genital Mutilation

Introduction to Safeguarding

Peer on Peer abuse

Radicalisation

Children and Young People who Run Away or Go Missing

County Lines

Gangs, Guns and Knives

Child Trafficking

Digital and Internet-Supported Self-Harm

Harmful Sexual Behaviours

Child Sexual Exploitation

Online Safety and Cyberbullying

Pornography and the Potential Impact on Young People

Social Media, Selfies and Sexting

The identified safeguarding course to be completed in the forthcoming review period must be included within the foster carers' individual PDP as part of each Annual Review.

Additionally, within each three year period following initial approval, all foster carers must renew the following mandatory training:

- Safeguarding Children for Foster Carers and Adopters only
- First Aid Training

A Foster Carer learning, and development programme is produced annually. All Foster Carers have their own eLearning accounts through which they can access training online.

NCT offer both face-to-face and online delivery as we recognise that the needs of our foster carers vary according to the they care they provide, with our face-to-face training offer being significantly increased over this last year.

Face-to-Face Training	E Learning
Within our current training offer we have over 56 face-to-face courses which are offered throughout the year. They are bookable and the offer can be viewed online.	We have over 70 courses available via E Learning. The courses range from knife crime, drug and alcohol awareness to court skills, healing environments and positive parenting techniques.
186 face-to-face courses delivered	780 E Learning units have been allocated and fully completed.
1475 attendees booked onto the courses and fully completed them.	

In addition to the Skills to Foster Training and a number of face-to-face and e-learning courses, the Recruitment team continues to be accredited in using Virtual Reality (VR) training. This is a tool we use within every assessment for prospective foster carers. It allows applicants to experience abuse and neglect from a child's perspective, as well as understanding the impact of trauma and how certain stimulus can trigger a trauma response in a child or young person. This resource has been used to great effect within assessment and has provided strong evidence of how applicants will be able to support a child or young person in a more therapeutic manner once approved as a foster carer.

Training	Feedback
Critical thinking in assessment	<i>Great course, well delivered learnt a lot how to put critical thinking into practice</i>
Working With Anxiety	<i>This was an online webinar presented by Jessica van Maanen. It was a very good overview of the topic giving a good balance of theory followed by practical examples of how to help reduce anxiety in the children we are caring for. There was balance between the use of the PowerPoint slides and talking through the topics in such a way as to keep them interesting. I was particularly pleased that we were given references to some of the materials used so that there is an opportunity to go deeper into some of the ideas presented.</i>
Working With Anxiety - Webinar	<i>I was pleasantly surprised how engaging this training was. We have been promised a copy of the Power Point. I have already been reading more by Dan Seigel as a result of this webinar.</i>
Keeping children and pets safe in the home	<i>Useful training and relevant to our role</i>
Keeping Children and Young People Safe Online for Foster Carers and Adopters - Webinar	<i>Our trainer was excellent and one of the most engaging and knowledgeable trainers we have had on our journey. Thank you so much for making a difficult subject informative and effective!</i>
Working with Anxiety	<i>Very informative and the trainer was excellent in the way she delivered the course. She was very calm and kept me focused and interested.</i>
Critical thinking in assessment	<i>Great course, well delivered learnt a lot how to put critical thinking into practice</i>

More recent discussions with Foster Carers have shown that they would prefer more local training and we have successfully piloted some training at one of our local groups for foster carers in the Corby area which was very well received. Training and contact hub lets have been established in Local and Independent Libraries across Northamptonshire within this reporting period and have been very well received.

In addition to the formal 'classroom' training, Foster Carers have access to a wide range of resources to support them to develop which are available through the online subscription platforms - Research in Practice and Fostering Network, Coram BAAF.

Although it is improving, training compliance remains a challenge for the service and a Fostering Training review has produced a draft proposal to renew the training programme for foster carers and improve compliance with training.

Foster carers are supported in completing the Training, Support and Development (TSD) workbooks as well as Advanced Level portfolios. Completion of these documents is linked to carer development and progression, which supports carer retention.

12. Placement Stability

The percentage of children who have lived in the same placement for 2+ years has remained strong (66%) and this tells that most children are appropriately placed in homes that are meeting their needs.

We continue to see an increase in requests for children to become cared for and this, combined with the challenges experienced both locally and nationally in identifying suitable carers who can meet children's complex needs, has contributed to the reduction in short term placement stability. The use of emergency carers has increased and, whilst offering a place of safety to children and young people, they experience a change of carer within a short space of time. Work continues to be undertaken to scrutinise new placement requests with a focus on supporting foster carers to continue caring for children at times when instability is experienced and ensure support for challenges faced within the foster home.

Monthly sufficiency board meetings continue to take place with colleagues in NCT to assess what is needed to improve stability for all looked after children and to ensure that all children receive the support they need.

The aspiration is for all children to live within stable and nurturing homes for the duration of their childhoods. Focus is on provision of support to prevent likelihood of placement breakdown and includes developing skills, knowledge and resilience of foster carers through the public health funded fostering support project, use of placement stability meetings, and greater involvement of birth families through progressive contact arrangements. Further work is planned within this forthcoming year to better cement robust processes in respect of the reporting and recording of placement stability meetings and to ensure that learning is then taken forward and cascaded through the Fostering Service, to support the stability of children's fostering placements more widely.

We are seeing a positive impact of the completion of the Initial Matching referral document at the point a child is initially matched with a carer and the individual Safe Care Plans in which the child's needs are highlighted. These plans are being linked to foster carer's own Personal Development Plans. This is starting to enable the carers and supervising social workers to ensure the training plan is around the child and the

needs of the Fostering household. This remains an area of continued development and focus within the Fostering Service.

The Independent Fostering Agency continue to have a Clinical Psychologist role embedded through the Public Health project which focusses on the outcomes for children in our foster families through placement stability.

The Psychologist has developed a training plan for staff which include: DDP & PACE, Adverse Childhood Experiences', coping with change, Restoring Resilience, Emotional Regulation, Self-Reflection (tree of life), Managing difficult conversations, Therapeutic Stories, Blocked Care.

The cohort of SSWs, Practice Managers and Team Managers who attended DDP (Part 1) last year, have been offered DDP (part 2) training within this reporting period and this has further embedded their understanding of therapeutic practices and the wide learning across the fostering service. This enhances the support offer available to our foster carers and children.

Monthly drop-in sessions for staff to discuss possible referrals to panel and seek advice are in place and continued to be well attended. The reasons for attending the drop-in sessions have included: to ask for clinical advice around complex cases; to ask for advice around placements at risk of disruption; to ask for advice around how to meet the mental health needs of children and foster carers.

Permanency has been achieved for 8 children where long term matches between child and foster carer have been presented to panel this year, an increase on 6 children from the previous year. This number is still lower than we expect, given the number of children in long term placements who have not yet been officially matched. The Fostering Service are committed to working in partnership with NCT's children's teams to progress permanence matching for children in a timely manner and the Fostering Service Manager now sits on the Permanence Tracking Panels that are held twice monthly, once in the West and once in the North of the county, since September 2022 to support the early identification of permanency planning for children and to maintain the timely progression of these plans. It is therefore anticipated that within the forthcoming year, the numbers of children who become permanently matched with their foster carers will increase significantly.

13. Fostering Panel

Please see annual Panel Report.

Northamptonshire Children's Trust Fostering Panel continues to have a significant role in maintaining quality services for children in care. The recommendations that panel make will always be based on providing a stable, secure, restorative and therapeutic living environment for children in care. The independent Fostering Panel and decision maker make timely, qualitative, and appropriate recommendations and decisions in line with the overriding objective to promote the welfare of children in foster care.

Fostering Panel provides an important Quality Assurance function to the Fostering Service. This year a total of 115 cases (74.68%) were rated as excellent or good. This is a decrease of 5.62% from the previous year with satisfactory and inadequate reports rising by 7.36%. Quality Assurance is discussed at the regular Joint Chairs and Team Managers Meeting. Additionally, the Registered Manager has observed a total of four Fostering Panels (both virtually and 'face to face' and across a mixture of Panel A and Panel B) since coming

into post in late June to support the Quality Assurance function of her role and the delivery of Fostering Panel. The Fostering Service meets quarterly with panel chairs and panel members are also invited to participate in Independent Fostering Agency -learning events. Bespoke panel training is provided twice yearly, in May and November.

In November, Fostering Panels moved from being held fully virtually to being held virtually and 'face to face' on alternating weekly basis; there are therefore now two monthly virtual Panels and two 'face to face'. The transition to this new arrangement has worked successfully with positive feedback from applicants, carers and social workers. To continue to improve the experience of fostering panel for applicants, approved foster carers and professionals, feedback is sought after attendance at panel.

Panel feedback

"I found panel to be a very positive experience. This was the first face to face panel in a very long time and I was worried it would feel overwhelming, however it was quite the opposite. As always panel was well structured, and I found the questions for the applicant to be appropriate. The carer was given sufficient time to respond and was listened to. Every member on panel had a lovely smiley face which is very reassuring and puts people at ease."

"I felt Panel were excellent today. This was a complex assessment, but all questions were sensitive and supportive. I really got a sense that Panel were delighted to recommend such a positive outcome for both children in this case."

"I have enjoyed attending both types of panels. I usually find that new applicants prefer virtual as they prefer the comfort of their own home and do not feel as nervous. However today the applicants enjoyed meeting face to face as they had fostered before and felt it was more personable. This was my first face to face panel since the pandemic and it was nice to meet everyone, and I felt the panel experience overall was very positive."

"The panel members themselves were very welcoming and friendly to me and the applicants.

Appropriate questions were asked, and panel identified key strengths that were highlighted in the assessment.

I was also given positive feedback on the report and how previous information had been incorporated, which was valuable."

"We had what felt like a very honest meeting reviewing our unorthodox first year of fostering. Our professional and personal challenges were met with understanding and respect, while taking practical perspectives on how to move forward. We both felt that the panel were very supportive and encouraging, empowering us as foster parents despite our setbacks. The questions covered reassure us that we have answers where attention is needed and incite further consideration to how we can improve.

Our needs and requirements were well considered, to make sure that we are fully equipped and able to undertake the role to the best of our ability."

"We were happy with the panel process and welcomed the questions from the panel. We appreciated the way we were told that we'd be recommended to be approved at the time of panel and the individual panel members reasons and comments made it feel more personal even though it was via TEAMS."

"Thanks very much for making me feel at ease. The general introductions helped to relax and put me at ease along with the questions which were put across in a straightforward manner."

Application	Numbers
Mainstream Assessments	18
Connected Person Assessments	42
1st Reviews	59
Change of Approval	9
Other Reviews	14
Match - In-House	2
Match - Agency	6
Termination of Approval	3
Extension of Reg 24 Placement	26
Representations	0
Closures	61 (to include mainstream and connected person's foster carers)
Short Report: Connected Persons	3

14. Complaints

There were 4 complaints made by foster carers between April 1st 2022 and March 31st 2023:

- Two complaints were made by carers in response to delays in agreed building works being progressed to provide an extension to the carers' property to support the fostering task. This building work is now progressed in one case and cannot be progressed in another due to the property being Housing Association owed and agreement not being given for the work to be carried out.
- One complaint related to the fact that the children's social worker had arranged to visit the two children in placement at school against the foster carers' wishes. This was predominantly a complaint against the allocated children's social worker but did also consider the fact that the SSW had supported this visit.
- One complaint was received by a foster carer subject to an ongoing investigation following several disclosures being made by a child and the fact that the other child in placement, the sibling of the child who has made the disclosures, has not been allowed to return to her care.

The theme this year was that complaints received were about foster carers experiencing a lack of support from NCT, but not necessarily directly the Fostering Service.

Three of the complaints were partially upheld but not solely against the Fostering Service but NCT more widely and one complaint cannot be concluded until the outcome of the investigation is known. Following all complaint investigations and response, recommendations made focussed mainly on a need for improving communication and timeliness in responding to concerns before they escalate in an official complaint.

Learning from these complaints is cascaded through team meetings. Peer reflective sessions will be introduced in the coming months to understand themes from complaints and collaborative reflective practice discussions (CRPDs/case audits).

Within this reporting period, there were 13 complaints made by children:

- One related to a child who complained about the home conditions, the way the foster carers' managed the behaviour of the other young people in placement and the foster carers' dogs whilst staying in a respite placement.
- One was made on behalf of a child via their school as he had become very worried that he would be 'told off' by his foster carer when he accidentally spilt paint on his jumper in an art class.
- One related to a child alleging that the male foster carer had hit his own children.
- One child complaint that the Foster carer had, when checking the child's phone found a picture where the top part of her body did not have clothing on. The female carer had taken a picture of this image and the child stated that this picture was sent in a text message to an adult ex foster Child aged (31) who subsequently showed the child the picture. The carer has apologised to the child and said the picture had been sent via a text message in error.
- One young person raised concerns with her social worker and her birth mother about her previous foster carer who had resigned.
- Four related to children being upset by comments their foster carers had allegedly made about their birth families.
- One related to a foster carer damaging their property (PlayStation game).
- One was made on behalf of a child via their school as to his 'unkempt' appearance.
- Two related to foster carers hurting a child: One when the birth parents of a teenage child complained that he had sustained a small bruise to his chest when the carer took him out of his seat in the car to separate him when he started fighting with his sibling in transit and one of pulling hair when the foster carer went to stop a child from hurting herself and causing damage with a hairbrush.

The Fostering Service has managed all these complaints made by children or young people against their foster carers during this reporting period through the Schedule 7 notification process. LADO consultation was sought on each occasion.

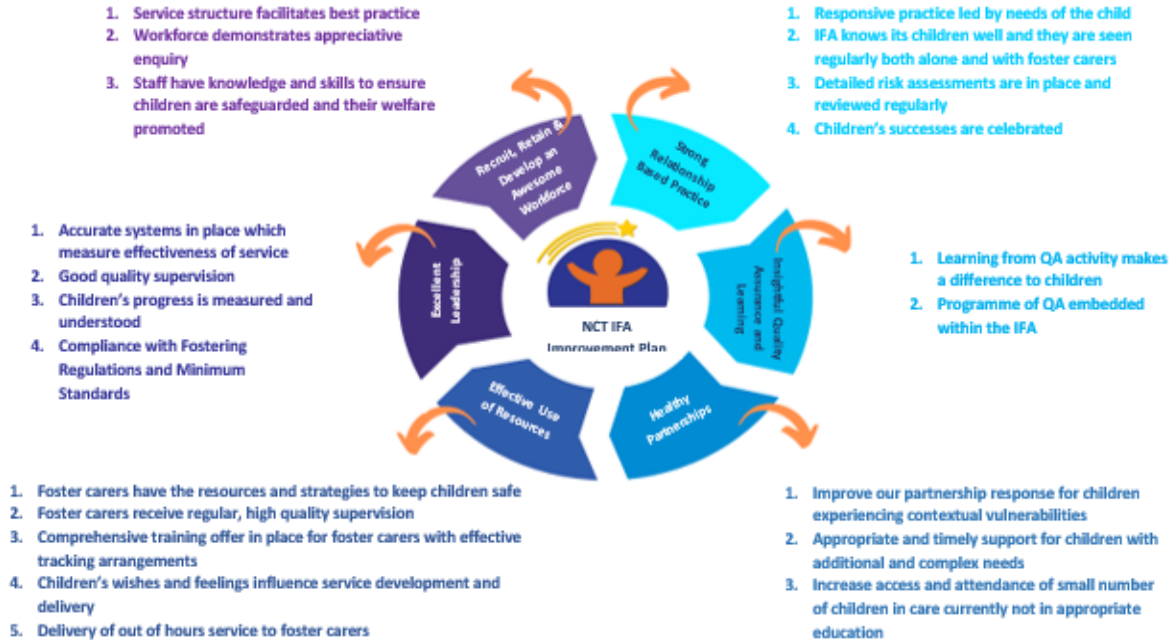
The expectation is that all of these children were visited by their allocated children's social work and their foster carer's allocated SSW very quickly after these complaints were raised. Training is identified where appropriate to support the development of foster carers in respect of the specific complaint raised.

Children are expected to be seen regularly in their foster placement and the dates and frequency of these visits are monitored within our Children's tracker. Children's 'wishes and feelings' are regularly sought, and children are made aware of how they can complain if they are unhappy with their fostering placement. Further tracking measures and auditing practices will be introduced to the Fostering Service to ensure that children are being seen in their fostering placements regularly and a new 'Visits to children' policy, to include reporting and recording expectations for SSWs, will be implemented to be able to better monitor this.

Children are always supported and encouraged to give feedback as to their experience of being in foster care for their own CIC Reviews as well as their foster carers' annual reviews.

15. Service Developments Planned for 2023 - 2024

Following the outcome of the SCCIF Inspection in February 2023, a robust Improvement plan remains in place for the Fostering Service which will be kept under regular review. The outcomes framework informing this plan include:



Additionally, the following targets for the growth and development of the Fostering Service remain in place:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Further develop of the infrastructure of the services reporting systems. NCT is committed to purchasing a system that is effective for a fostering service. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ The Fostering Strategy and Retention Strategy that has been implemented is progressed to ensure all the actions we are undertaking contribute to increasing our recruitment and the retention of our foster carers.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Continue to analyse the CRPD’s by end of March 23 to measure quality and identify areas of learning and development. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Ongoing review and refinement of Review of Placement making/ Matching – implement use of matching tool and comprehensive recording system for vacancies.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ To work together with our foster carers to improve on the training offer. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Carer engagement: To continue to improve and do more, to engage, strengthen relationships, and develop a sense of belonging to the agency and have a broader reach with our fostering families.

✓ Continue to build upon the comprehensive foster carer support group offer now in place for carers.

✓ Review our support and financial offer in consultation with our foster carers. To ensure it is competitive and contributes to the retention of our foster carers.

✓ Ongoing recruitment to the Resilience Fostering Scheme.

✓ To progress the development of support to our carers and children outside of normal working hours by supervising social workers.

✓ Develop a regular and systematic way of reviewing all foster carer resignations and all placement break downs, to ensure we learn and continuously improve our practice and the support we provide.

✓ To continue to work in partnership with our marketing team and be instrumental in implementing our recruitment and communications strategy.



NORTHAMPTONSHIRE CHILDREN'S TRUST VOLUNTARY ADOPTION AGENCY ANNUAL REPORT

2022-2023



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1. Purpose of Report

The Local Authority Adoption Service Regulations 2003 and National Minimum Standards 2011 require adoption agencies to provide a written report to their executive, i.e. the Children's Trust Board and the North and West Northamptonshire Councils respectively in relation to the activity of the Adoption Agency.

In order that they are able to satisfy themselves that the agency is complying with the conditions of registration (Minimum Standards 25.6; Statutory Adoption Guidance 3.3, and 5.39). This report has been prepared to achieve this.

The report includes information about the activity and performance of the Northamptonshire Children's Trust Voluntary Adoption Agency (NCT VAA) for the period 1st April 2021 to 31st March 2022.

2. Introduction

Northamptonshire Children's Trust Voluntary Adoption Agency was formed and registered with Ofsted in November 2020 to provide adoption services on behalf of Northamptonshire Children's Trust.

In January 2022 NCT VAA had its first Ofsted inspection as a Voluntary Adoption Agency since registration, the outcome of which was that the service was rated as GOOD by inspectors.

In addition, in October 2022 Northamptonshire Children's Trust was inspected within the ILACS framework and the work of the adoption service was considered within that process with the inspection report noting that -

'Strong adoption work means that children benefit from permanence at the earliest appropriate opportunity, sometimes with foster to adopt carers. Adopters benefit from the support of passionate, knowledgeable and skilled social workers. Adopters reported positively about their preparation and journey to becoming adoptive parents'.



The table below provides an overview of the progress made during this reporting period toward achieving the identified areas for development from the 2022/23 period.

Area for Development	Actions Achieved	Impact
<p>Family Finding and Transitions Model to be embedded in practice utilising research undertaken by the UEA to promote positive transitions for children to adoption and promote ongoing relationships with foster carers post placement.</p>	<p>Model launched in May 2022 and now is fully embedded into practice.</p>	<p>Family finders state that the model supports consistent, transparent, and evidenced based practice which is focused on the child's needs. They feel the model has supported collective decision making with improved management oversight.</p> <p>Adopters and foster carers are positive about the increased opportunities for them to meet and get to know each other prior to introductions commencing which supports all involved to feel positive and give the child 'permission' to move on with opportunities to maintain contact post transition focused on child's needs.</p>
<p>Training and support to adopters and prospective adopters will be enhanced by the launch of the FAL (RAA) core training and support group offer which will be complimented at a local level in response to local needs.</p>	<p>FAL training calendar launched and online booking system in place managed via the FAL central hub team.</p> <p>Twice monthly support groups are facilitated by NCT (1 day time and 1 evening group) for adopters – see report for details in addition there is FAL support group which NCT adopters are also able to access.</p>	<p>Adopter preparation Training has a stronger focus on therapeutic parenting and the lifelong impact of early experiences which provides a good foundation for adopters understanding of the needs of adopted children.</p> <p>Adopters are able to access a wider range of training via the FAL calendar.</p>



<p>Support Services for birth families to be reviewed to ensure services meet the needs of families and support them to maintain relationships with their children, as appropriate, following the granting of an adoption or SGO order</p>	<p>A 'Taking Stock' review of services has been completed considering supports offered and aspirations for future development.</p>	<p>The service has made links with the PAUSE project – the adoption service manager is now a member of the PAUSE strategic partnership board.</p> <p>The service has linked with PAUSE project workers to identify a group of birth mothers who would be willing to meet, to gain their views on what support services they feel would be beneficial in order to support a collaborative / co production approach to future developments.</p>
<p>Develop service user feedback mechanisms to enable the voice of children young people and their families to inform practice and policy developments.</p>	<p>Online service user feedback forms have been developed that can be completed and returned anonymously via MS forms.</p> <p>Feedback forms have been designed to capture feedback at key points across the adopter assessment and placement process as well as for families accessing post order support services.</p> <p>FAL have additionally developed similar online feedback mechanisms to capture adopter experiences of FAL share service activity</p>	<p>Forms will be launched for use from April 2023</p> <p>Feedback themes will be reviewed quarterly by the adoption service management team to inform practice and policy developments</p>
<p>Awareness raising activities and training in relation to the benefits and challenges of direct contact in adoption to be established for adopters, SW's and panel members.</p>	<p>General discussions are had with social workers individually and collectively within team meetings re the benefits and</p>	<p>The impact of this work is limited at present as the work is in its infancy.</p>

	<p>challenges of post adoption contact.</p> <p>Panel regularly feedback in relation to exploration of post order contact when considering matches for children and adopters.</p> <p>Plans for post adoption contact are routinely discussed in permanence planning meetings.</p> <p>Initial scoping discussion have been held with researchers who conducted the UEA contact after adoption study in relation to a staff training day on this topic which would include adoption service staff, panel members and wider NCT staff.</p>	<p>Issues relating to <i>safe uncertainty, risk assessment and management</i> need to be explored in conjunction with this work and will be progressed during the 2023/24 reporting period</p>
<p>Adoption Service Staff Training and Development plan to be launched in April 2022.</p>	<p>Training and Development Plan was launched in April 2022 as planned.</p> <p>Alongside generic training adoption specific training has been sourced and accessed for adoption social workers and managers in line with the plan as follows during this period-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using the Secure Base Model in Adoption Assessments • Learning from Serious Case Reviews where children had been living with adopters, SGO carers or foster carers 	<p>Adoption staff report feeling valued by the provision of adoption specific training opportunities. Staff are particularly positive about the secure base training, and this is routinely utilized within prospective adopter reports to support analysis and evidenced based recommendations.</p> <p>Feedback from adoption panel chairs within their annual report acknowledged the <i>strong emphasis upon a learning culture within the agency.</i></p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'We are Still Humans' supporting Birth Parents through the adoption process and contact • Assessing Prospective adopters considered for Sibling Groups • 'Blended Families' – Adoption from the perspective and experience of birth children <p>Alongside formal training the service hold monthly <i>learning lunches</i> which provide opportunities for workers from across the service to share areas of interest or expertise with each other to promote a culture of shared learning.</p>	
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3. Service Remit

The voluntary adoption agency was registered in November 2020. Prior to this, it operated as the adoption service for the local authority.

Co-location of adoption staff within the NCT office base supports collaborative working in relation to planning and placements of children for whom adoption is the plan and in relation to families in receipt of post order support services where there may be safeguarding concerns.

The Adoption Agency has the following remit:

- Recruitment, preparation, and assessment of adoptive parents.
- Family finding for children for whom Northamptonshire Children's Trust has a plan of adoption.
- Adoption Support to include provision of assessment and support to children and families both pre and post Adoption Order, services for adopted adults to access their birth records, support for



birth families affected by adoption, Letterbox contact exchange and support with direct contact post order.

- Support for children, young people and families for whom a Special Guardianship Order has been granted.

4. Family Adoption Links Regional Adoption Alliance

In January 2022 Northamptonshire formally became a partner of Family Adoption Links (FAL). This is a regional adoption partnership bringing together adoption services across Rutland, Leicestershire, Leicester City, North Lincolnshire and Lincolnshire and Northamptonshire. It aims to provide excellent, friendly inclusive services to those looking to adopt and families who have adopted.

As a partnership we are working together to improve outcomes for those children who enter care and are not able to return to their families of origin. We aim to ensure that *our* children achieve emotional, physical and legal permanence; growing up in loving homes with adults who provide them with a strong sense of security, continuity, commitment and identity.

FAL operates through a hub and spoke model enabling NCT to benefit from coordinating central functions whilst retaining direct service delivery functions within their own borders. This ensures the Partnership reflects the local context, adapted to meet the needs of local children and families, and maintains clear links to local Children & Families Services.

During the 2022-2023 reporting period the service has become a fully embedded partner within FAL with representation on all work stream and management groups. NCT have led the work to develop a FAL stage 1 pack for social workers supporting consistent practice across the partnership and are leading the Early Permanence work stream.

The FAL partnership supports NCT, and other agencies, to extend their support and training offer to adopters at all stages of their journey and work undertaken via the family finding work stream is supporting the tracking and placement of children from across the partner agencies with **82%** of partner agency children now being placed within the region with their families benefitting from the development of supports, training and consistent practice models delivered by the partnership.

In October 2022 the partnership launched the **Adopter Hub** and **Collabor8** groups, the purpose of which is to develop forums to support consultation and co-production of services going forward. The *Adopter Hub* group has representation from adopters from all partner agencies and similarly *Collabor8* is a group for adopted young people. The focus of discussions and topics is led by the groups and



supported by FAL staff – both groups have chosen to focus on education in the first instance and these discussions will be fed into work within the education work stream and development of the *education passport*.

5. Service Structure

The Registered Individual for the Voluntary Adoption Agency is Christina Skeel. Operational management of the service is provided by Tracy Morton as Adoption Service Manager supported by team managers responsible for two teams and an adoption panel service as outlined below.

Adoption Recruitment, Assessment and Family Finding Team
Team Manager x 1
Practice Manager x 2
Family Finding Social Worker x 2
Senior Social Worker x 1
Social Worker x 8
Administrator x2
Post Adoption and SGO Support Team
Team Manager x1
Practice Manager x 2
Post Adoption Counsellor x1
Post Adoption Adults Co-ordinator x1
Adoption Support Co-ordinator (Letterbox) x1
Family Support Worker x 1
Financial Allowances Officer x1
Administrator x 2
Adoption Panel
Panel Adviser x1
Panel Co-ordinator x1.5
Panel Administrator x1

All social work staff are registered with Social Work England. Workers within the service have a range of post qualifying experiences and are supported by NCT to add to their academic and professional qualifications to enhance their practice as appropriate.

Recruitment is carried out in line with the NCT's Equality and Diversity policies and recognises good employment practice. NCT and the Adoption Agency seek to recruit a diverse workforce that reflects the community that they serve. All staff having direct contact with children must undergo enhanced checks with the Disclosure & Barring Service (DBS) to ensure that they are suitable to work with



children. In line with a recommendation made as part of the Ofsted inspection a safer recruitment checklist for the Voluntary Adoption Agency has been developed to sit alongside NCT's recruitment process which ensure that the safe recruitment of staff meet the required standards. ('Adoption: national minimum standards,' page 71, paragraph 24.1)

Social work staff have regular monthly supervision from their managers, and their professional competence is appraised annually in line with NCT's staff supervision and staff appraisal schemes.

In line with the requirement made as part of the Adoption Ofsted inspection in 2022 a standalone Adoption Service Training and Development programme has been developed and was launched in April 2022 to ensure compliance with The Voluntary Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2003, regulation 15(2)(a) this will be reviewed in April 2023 and updated as appropriate. In addition, the supervision record used by the adoption service was also amended to reflect compliance with regulations.

6. Adoption Panel

All Adoption Agencies, whether Local Authority or Voluntary Adoption Agency are required to have an Adoption Panel under Regulation 3(1) of the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005. The Panel makes a recommendation to the Agency Decision Maker in relation to:

- The suitability of prospective adopters to adopt
- The proposed placement of a child with a particular prospective adopter
- In the case of children whose birth parents are consenting to their adoption, a recommendation as to whether the child "*should be placed for adoption*"

The Agency Decision Maker then makes a decision on behalf of the agency, taking into account the recommendations of the panel and all relevant assessments and reports.

NCT VAA adoption panel is held weekly, as required, to support the timely approval of prospective adopters and progressions of matches for children. The panel adviser acts as the day-to-day link between the agency and the independent panel chairs and this is further supported by regular meetings and shared training opportunities between the agency, panel chairs and the agency decision maker. In November 2022 a panel training day was jointly facilitated by the panel chairs and the service and focussed on two key areas.



1. Learning from the Child Safeguarding Practice Review, undertaken by Cumbria Safeguarding Children Partnership, following the death of Leiland James Corkhill who was placed for adoption and whose adopted mother was convicted of his murder.
During the session the chairs presented an overview of the case and facilitated group discussions with panel members focussing on key areas of practice followed by a presentation from the adoption service manager of NCT VAA response and learning from the report.
2. Cultural Competence with a presentation of the experience of a family moving to the UK in the 1960's and the discrimination they faced and overcame then and now.

Feedback from panel members about the day was positive regarding opportunities for reflection, discussion, and learning.

It is recognised that there is a positive and respectful working relationship between the agency and the panel chairs with challenge being offered and considered by both sides appropriately. Regular liaison meetings support the ability to address themes from feedback quickly when necessary and as such there are no surprises in the 6 monthly or annual panel reports to the agency

During the 2022-2023 reporting period, the panel met on **41** occasions and considered the following number of cases on behalf NCT VAA

Adopter approvals	31
Matches for NCT children	37
Plans for Relinquished children	0

7. Adoption Service Performance

Adoption performance is measured and reported nationally via the completion of the Adoption and Special Guardianship Leadership (ASGLB) return which forms the basis of the publication of the adoption scorecard.

At the time of completing this report the adoption scorecard for the 2022 – 2023 reporting period has not been published as information from Q4 returns is not due for submission until the end of April 2023 and data will be then require validation prior to publication.

What we know from locally held data is that of the children matched with adopters during the 2022-2023 reporting period 41.67% were matched within 4 months of a placement order being granted this equates to 15 children. Of the remaining 21 children 44.4% were placed within 4 to 8 months of the PO being granted which equates to 16 children and 13.9% which equates to 5 children were placed within 8-12 months of the Placement Order being granted within this cohort there were 2 sibling groups of 2 boys.

**37 children
presented to
panel for a
match**

- ❖ During the 2022/23 reporting period **37** Northamptonshire Children were matched and placed with adoptive families of which:
- ❖ **26** were placed with adoptive families recruited, assessed, and approved by Northamptonshire Children's Trust Voluntary Adoption Agency (NCT VAA)
- ❖ **11** were placed via inter agency placements (adopted families recruited, assessed, and approved by another agency)
- ❖ In addition, **6** children were placed by other Local Authorities with NCT VAA approved adopters.

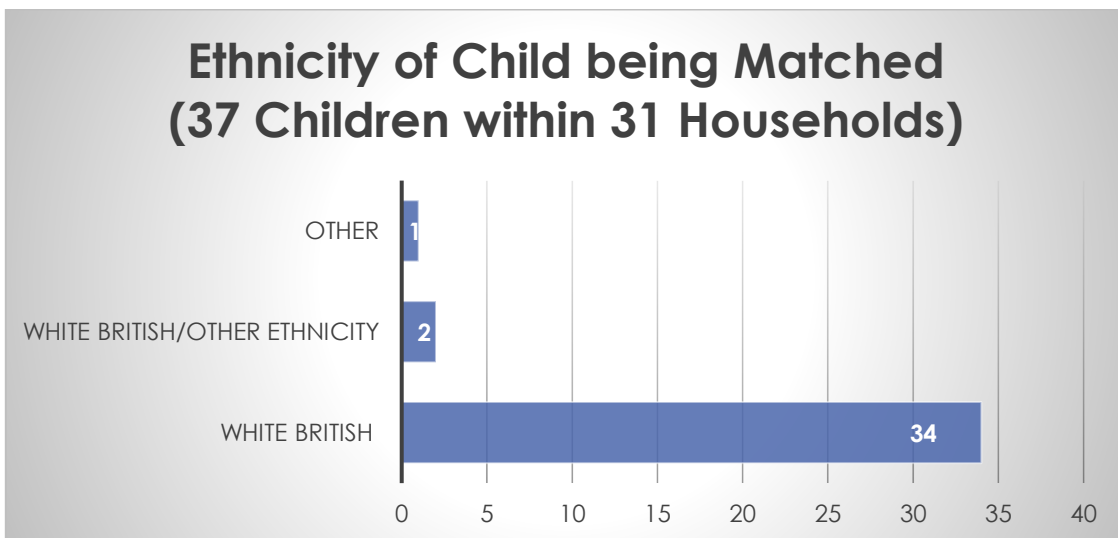
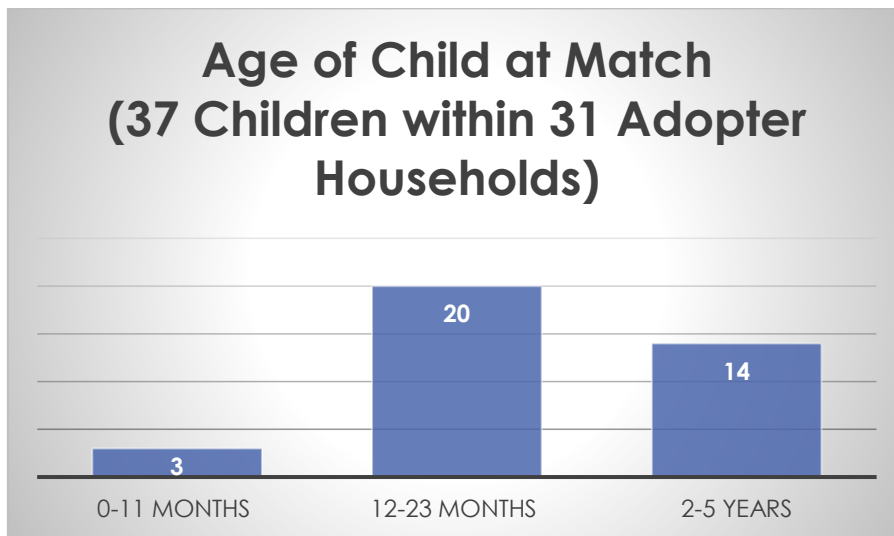
In relation to the 11 children placed via inter agency placements these were three sibling groups of 2 children and five individual children for whom placements with families who were considered as being able to meet their holistic needs and seen as the *best match*. Of these 11 children 5 were placed with FAL partner agency adopters.

In relation to the 6 children placed with NCT VAA adopters these consisted of 5 individual children and a sibling group of 2. Two of these children were placed from a FAL partner agency.



During the 2022 – 2023 reporting period 56 children for whom NCT were responsible had a plan of adoption agreed via the Agency Decision Maker compared to 41 during the 2021 -2022 reporting period. This number is still lower than during the 2019 – 2020 reporting period when 59 children had a plan of adoption but does indicate a steady return to pre pandemic activity levels.

The charts below provide an overview of the age and ethnicity of the children matched for adoption.





The data indicates that the majority of children matched for adoption are aged 12-23 months – given that within this cohort 13 of these children had benefitted from an early permanence placement which has allowed them to be placed with their prospective adopters, on average, 183 days sooner than would have been achieved via a traditional adoption placement route this will translate to a much higher percentage being placed in their permanent placement under 12 months of age which is beneficial for their longer term stability and attachment development. There is also a high proportion of children placed aged 2-5 years which reflects the agency's ambition and success in exploring adoption 'not just for babies' and in terms of keeping siblings together when it is assessed to be the right plan for them.

8. Family Finding

Family finding for NCT children for whom adoption is the plan is undertaken within the adoption service. There are two social workers whose role is dedicated to the family finding task and they are supervised by a practice manager who has oversight of all family finding activity.

The use of fortnightly tracking meetings for all children from the point that a parallel plan of adoption is made is supporting the service to identify at an early stage any emerging themes or needs in relation to the characteristics of children likely to require an adoptive family. In conjunction with this the introduction of **permanence planning meetings** led by the Family Finding workers is supporting the ability to have conversations at the earliest opportunity with childcare social workers in relation to children's needs, future contact plans, life story work and the identification of key family members who may either be able to offer permanence for the child or for whom an ongoing contact arrangement could be considered if the ultimate plan were adoption.

Family Finding social workers report that;

'PPMs are well and truly established and useful. They support Family finders and their practice managers to know the children. The meetings are useful for child care social workers, particularly those new to adoption & permanence planning.'

The adoption service manager is a member of the unborn baby tracking meeting which has supported the ability to identify at the earliest opportunity babies who may have a plan of adoption or where early permanence placements could be considered.

Alongside this fortnightly tracking meetings are held in relation to adopters which is supporting the ability to identify and consider links between adopters and children at an early opportunity and to identify if an external adopter resource may be needed.

In March 2023 the service introduced a monthly Adoption Tracking Panel the purpose of which is to;



- Monitor the progress of adoption plans for looked after children upon the conclusion of care proceedings to reduce drift and delay in achieving the agreed plan
- Advise and make recommendations in respect of care planning and consider the potential for the use of early permanence placements. For families where previous children have been placed for adoption consider the appropriateness of early discussions with previous adoptive families
- Monitor and advise on permanency planning processes to maintain a focus on plans being progressed in a timely manner
- Track permanency planning for adoption from the conclusion of proceedings through to the point it is secured for the child
- Endeavour to resolve any presenting issues/obstacles and ensure that there is effective communication between the professionals involved
- Escalate concerns with senior manager, as required, where cases highlight drift or difficulties that will hinder implementation of agreed plans
- Provide 6 monthly reports to the SLT on the numbers of cases reviewed, outcomes and any practice issues
- Monitor cases in respect of changes of permanence care plan and ensure that revocations of orders are progressed in a timely way e.g., placement or care orders
- Panels will agree a review period on a case-by-case basis generally between 3 and 6 months.

Whilst there has only been tracking 1 panel held at the time of writing this report it has demonstrated the value of the additional level of oversight and professional curiosity brings to the care planning and monitoring process for the child.

As the FAL partnership develops there is an increasing shared ownership of the family finding task in terms of taking a whole partnership responsibility for oversight of children waiting for placements across the region. Monthly FAL family finding meetings share information in relation to children and adopters waiting to support the early identification of potential links across the partnership and all partner agency children's detail are placed on the FAL link maker site from the point that the ADM agrees a plan of adoption.

This collective ownership supports the partnerships' ability to be responsive to the needs of children waiting for placements across the partner agencies e.g., in organising adoption activity days, profiling events or featuring children (anonymously) within the partnership website

On 27.1.23, the partnership held a virtual profiling event called a 'Discovery Event.' The Discovery Event provides registered adopters with a secure link to where they are able to see information



including videos, photos and an overview of the child provided by a recording of the social worker and /or foster carer talking about the children. The secure link is accessible to view for a period of 72 hours.

The partnership has also held two in person activity style days called 'Getting to Know You' events on 14.10.22 and 18.03.23

Below is an overview of the numbers children who attended these events and the impact -

Getting to Know You Event – June 2022

16 children attended the event 1 of whom was from NCT. The event resulted in 4 partner agency children being matched with adopters.

Getting to Know you Event – March 2023

13 children attended this event 1 of whom was from NCT. The event resulted in 6 links being explored for children of which 2 were with NCT adopters.

Discovery Event – January 2023

The secure link video was viewed 171 times and over the weekend that it was shared Linkmaker enquiries quadrupled in relation to the children featured

All adopters who attended reported the event was beneficial for them with specific feedback noting that –

'We found it beneficial being face to face with children'

'It was nice to spend time with children, not just looking at profiles'

During the 2022/23 reporting period in addition to the above at a local level the service have held 2 *virtual profiling events* where approved and waiting adopters are provided with anonymised information about children for whom the service are family finding to support the ability for adopters to remain open minded in relation to the characteristics of the children they may be able to consider, adopters were also able to hear how the service identify and match children and the processes involved in this.

Feedback from adopters attending the sessions was that -

'Adopters felt reassured about the robustness of the matching process and pleased that they weren't aware that they were being considered for a particular child until it was identified that the match was positive'



A practice guidance model for family finding and adoption transitions was developed and launched in May 2022, the practice model was designed utilising the research and transition model developed by the University of East Anglia (UEA). The model has strengthened existing family finding practices and led to a more child focussed, evidence based and transparent approach to matching and linking.

'I feel linking with our adopters is much more child focussed this past year.' – Quote from Family Finding Social Worker.

When family finding for children, it is essential that adopters are supported to make an informed decision in relation to linking and matching with a specific child or siblings. The new family finding model incorporates increased opportunities for foster carers and adopters to meet and share information ahead of the formal introductions process and for adopters to have *anonymous 'getting to know you'* meetings with the child to help them to *'learn the child'* outside of the formal introductions process. Feedback from foster carers and adopters who have experienced these meetings is very positive. Family Finding Social workers report that;

'Without exception, all foster carers, adopters and social workers have expressed very positive views re the 'Getting to Know You visits'. Feedback has been that these have had a positive impact on introductions with the child and adopters feeling better prepared for the intensity of introductions being familiar with each other already. Prior to the changes last year these were done with some but not all children. Feedback has been that all involved are pleased these are now in place for all of our children.'

As a result of work undertaken by the service to consider the learning from the Child Safeguarding Practice Review, undertaken by Cumbria Safeguarding Children Partnership, following the death of Leiland James Corkhill the service has developed a presentation which will be delivered to the support network of adopters prior to the children being placed with them which revisits some general topics from family and friends training they may have attended but is personalised to focus on the specific child's early life experiences. The session will be facilitated by the adoption SW and focus on what the child's early life experience may mean now and in the future for the child and adopters and give ideas in relation to therapeutic parenting techniques that may be useful. The session will also reinforce that until an adoption order is granted the child remains a looked after child and that the adopters will have delegated parental responsibility during this period, what this means and also the responsibilities of the network in respect of sharing any concerns they may have both in relation to the support needs of the adopters and in respect of the welfare of the child. These sessions will commence for matches progressing from April 2023.

9. Early Permanence

Early Permanence placements allow babies and young children who may need adopting to be placed with a potential permanent family earlier than a conventional adoption.

Early Permanence is an umbrella term we use when talking about certain types of adoption placements for babies or toddlers. It includes placements also referred to as Fostering for Adoption (FfA) and Concurrency placements.

Early Permanence helps to avoid delay in deciding a very young child's future, at a time in their life when days and weeks really matter.

Findings from the Coram 2017/18 Longitudinal study of Early Placements noted that early placement is not a panacea but offers the opportunity to build secure attachments from the earliest age. This has created stability of placement despite the difficulties presented which in turns supports the long-term connection and understanding of the adopter in respect of their child and has benefits in relation to maintaining relationships with birth family relatives and the child's life story.

**13 children
were placed in
early
permanence**

- ❖ During the 2022- 2023 reporting period 13 Northamptonshire children benefitted from early permanence placements. This allowed these children to be placed within their prospective adoptive placement an average of 183 days earlier than if a traditional adoption placement route had been followed.

There is currently a national focus on the use of early permanence placements for children with a view to increasing the use of such placements for a wider range of children including siblings. The adoption service manager is leading the FAL Early Permanence workstream and attends national learning events to support the development of practice and process at a local and regional level. As part of the agreed work plan for the FAL Early Permanence workstream an application for the *Working Towards Early Permanence Quality Mark* is being prepared for submission in the summer of 2023.

10. Adoption Orders Granted



- ❖ During the 2022-2023 reporting period 32 adoption orders were granted for Northamptonshire children.
- ❖ In addition to adoption orders granted at the end of the reporting period there were a further 17 children in adoption placements awaiting the adoption order.

11. Adoption Disruptions

During the 2022 – 2023 reporting period sadly there were 3 disruptions to placements of children pre-adoption order. These 3 disruptions equate to 5 children – 2 sibling groups of 2 and 1 single child.

Disruption meetings have been held in relation to the two disruptions involving the siblings and a third meeting is scheduled for April 2023 in relation to the 3rd disruption. Disruption meetings are chaired by an independent chair with experience and expertise of adoption who, following the meeting, produces a report and practice recommendations for the agency as appropriate.

Disruption meetings are not intended to apportion blame to individuals involved and recognise and acknowledge that disruptions occur due to complex, multi-faceted issues which could not have been predicted, that said they provide a valuable forum for reflection, review, and learning.

As an agency we have used the learning from these meetings to review and develop our practice, strengthening areas of potential vulnerability and have produced reports in response to the recommendations made. Reports are shared with panel, and we have plans for a joint service and panel learning event to consider the key themes emerging from the meetings.

12. Adopter Recruitment

The service offers a daily enquiry line which those considering adoption can access to speak directly with an adoption social worker should they wish to do so. Information in relation to adoption and an online enquiry form can also be accessed by the website which has been rebranded as the service has become a member of the Family Adoption Links Regional Adoption Alliance. As a result of this



membership monthly information evenings are now managed and delivered centrally by the partnership.

Below is a selection of feedback provided by prospective adopters attending the sessions.

'Whole presentation very good and all useful'

'I found it very informative, I had already read and researched the information given, but hearing it directly also clarified a few thoughts I'd had about it. I think if anything could be improved, it would be to go through any questions at the end as it broke up the continuity of the information given. But I had a really enjoyable evening.'

'The most useful part of the process was hearing from people who had gone through the adoption process.'

A central calendar of training including preparation training for adopters is accessible via the FAL website, in addition NCT adopters are able to access locally provided training details of which are included later within the report.

At a local and national level there are recognised challenges in identifying placements for sibling groups, children from black minority ethnic backgrounds, children over the age of 5 or those with additional or complex health needs and the service will undertake specific marketing activity to attract adopters able to consider children with these characteristics as required. The website includes anonymised information in relation to children waiting for adoption from these *priority groups*, these stories are regularly updated in order to maintain a focus on the children and interest of prospective adopters.

As a partner of Family Adoption Links Regional Adoption Alliance (RAA), the VAA is able to utilise a broader range of adopter recruitment and awareness raising opportunities via social media and at a local *'in person'* level. All of which is undertaken in liaison with NCT Communications colleagues.

During the 2022-2023 reporting period enquiries to adopt and attendance at information events was centrally managed and coordinated by the FAL hub team. During this period across the FAL partners 778 households registered to attend an information event of which 137 were NCT VAA enquiries with 395 households attending 111 of which were NCT VAA enquiries.

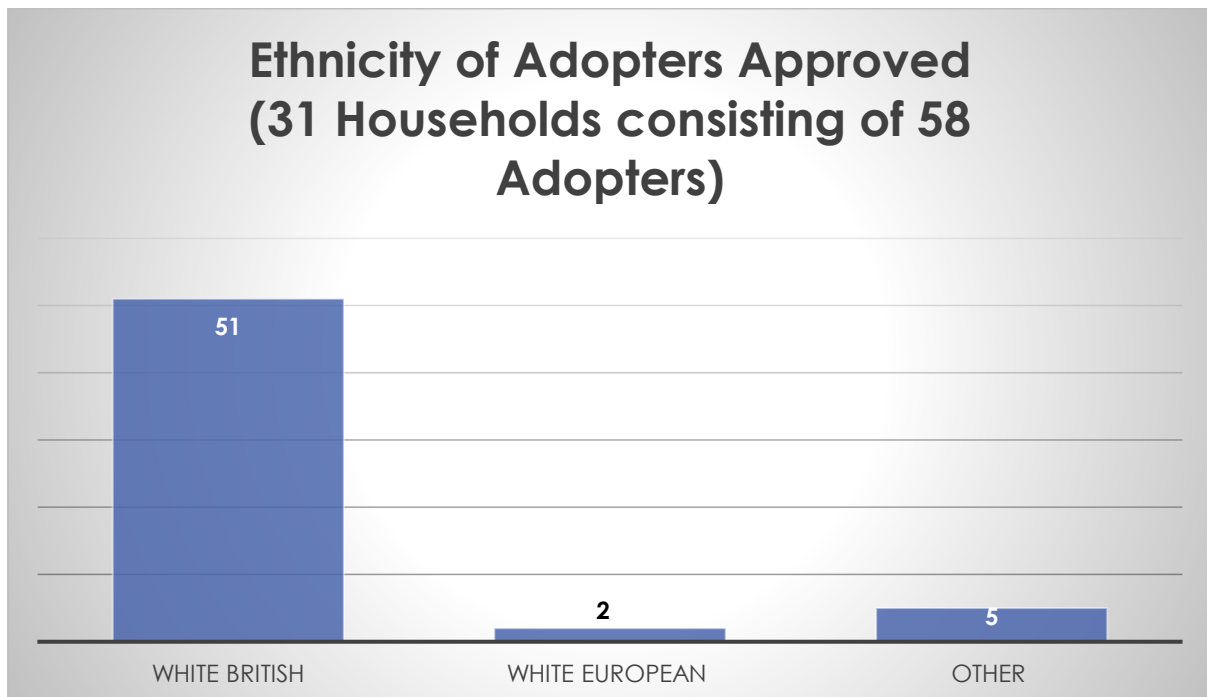


Overall NCT enquiries in this reporting period resulted in the progression to stage 1 of 28 Adopters, 25 of which have progressed to stage 2, which resulted in **31** adopter households being approved, a demographic breakdown of which is illustrated within the tables which follow.

Below is a sample of feedback from adopters in relation to their NCT VAA adoption assessment experience.

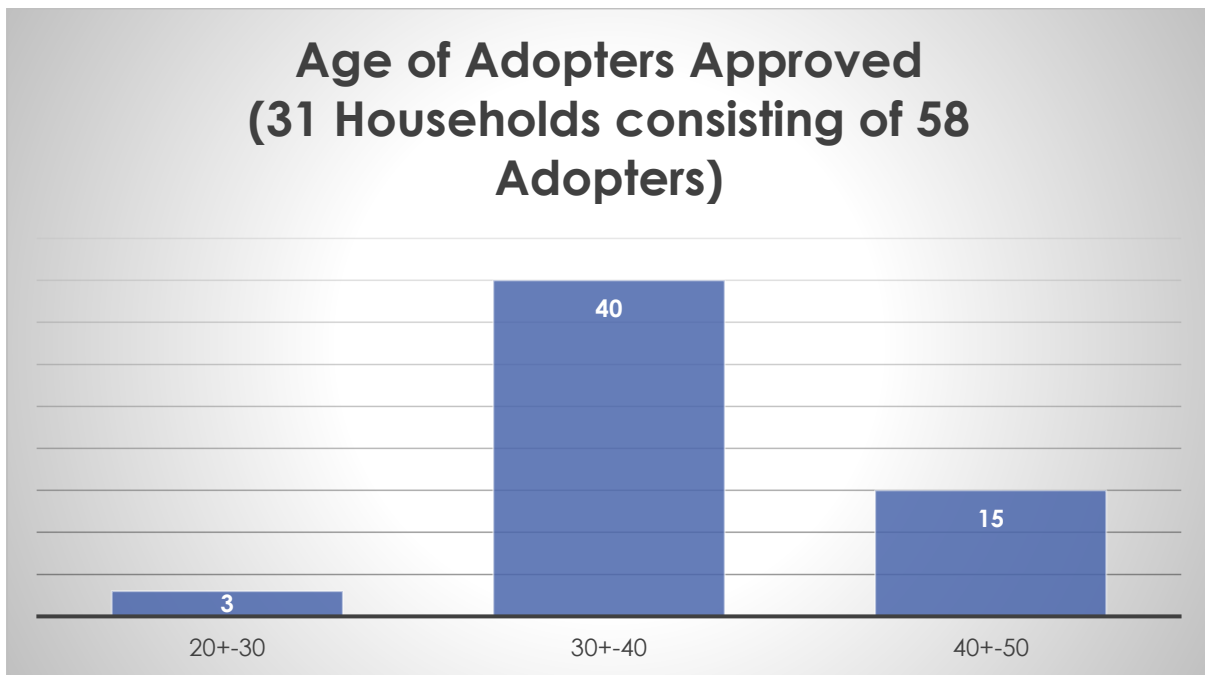
'We have been lucky to have had the same adoption social worker throughout our process, and have a good relationship with them, as we feel we can ask her anything especially for support.'

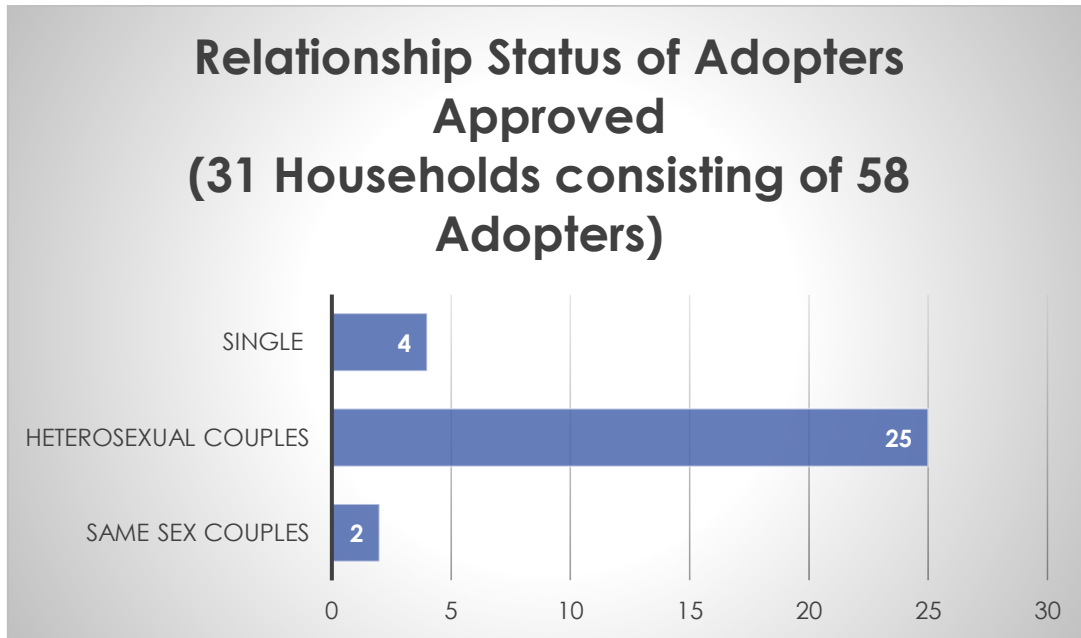
'Our social worker has been amazing throughout the process; she has talked us through all the sections of process and supported us when things got a bit tough in looking for a match.'





As outlined above the ethnicity of NCT adopters recruited broadly reflects the ethnicity of NCT children for whom adoptive placements are sought. As an agency we are always mindful of the need to recruit a broad range of adopters able to meet the needs of children at a local, regional and national level and as such marketing activity and materials designed in conjunction with our FAL partners aims to reflect this. Our FAL partner agencies have differing ethnic and cultural demographics to NCT which supports the partnership to work collaboratively at a regional level to identify cohorts of children with a plan for adoption and target recruitment activity in response to this.





Timeliness of adopter assessments is tracked via the adoption panel as part of their quality assurance process, during the 2022-2023 reporting period the panel noted that 41.94% of stage 2 adopter assessment presented to panel were completed within the recommended 12 week timescale. This is in part due to unprecedented level of staff absence within the service during this period and also due to the complexities presented within the assessment for some households which, in some instances, has led to the need to pause the assessment process or to extend it in order to give sufficient time to explore issues and undertake a robust assessment. The service is mindful of this and will monitor this timescale going forward – strengthened practice during stage 1 of the assessment should support the ability to progress applicants at a time that is right for them and identify any issues that may need addressing prior to commencing stage 2. We have a target for completion of stage 2 assessments within the 12-week timescale of 80% for the 2023- 2024 reporting period.

The adopter recruitment and assessment team work closely with colleagues within the post order support team who are able to offer advice on adoption support and learning opportunities in preparation for the matching and placement of children with an adoptive family. Post adoption support is routinely discussed with prospective adopters during their training and preparation and the post order team co-deliver the preparation training provided to adopters. Workers from the post order support team are available for advice and consultation with SW's and adopters when placements are being considered and during transitions and early stages of placement.

As a result of the publication of the Leiland James Corkhill Child safeguarding practice review, undertaken by Cumbria Safeguarding Children Partnership, the service has undertaken a review of adopter assessment, family finding and support practice and as a result have introduced additional measures to support robust safeguarding. These include the requirement to seek references from counsellor's adopters may have engaged with and more detailed exploration of financial information including debt management during stage 1 of the adopter assessment process. In addition, we have introduced an 'end of stage 1 meeting' which is chaired by the adoption team manager and is the point at which the applicants experience, and views of their stage 1 process are discussed, references and checks are reviewed and progression to stage 2 is discussed and agreed as appropriate. A direct work tool kit has been developed to support social workers to gain the views and support an understanding of the *lived experience of children already part of the prospective adopter household* including birth children, step-children or previously adopted children.

13. Step-Parent Adoption



- ❖ In addition to adopter recruitment, assessment, and preparation the team also undertake assessments for Step-Parent Adoption. During the 2022 -2023 reporting period the service received 120 enquiries in relation to applying for a step-parent adoption and undertook 9 step-parent adoption assessments resulting in 6 adoption orders being granted.

14. Adoption Support

The Post Order Support Team provides support services for children, young people and their families following the granting of an Adoption or Special Guardianship Order (SGO). In addition, the service provides specialist support to birth relatives via an independent counsellor based within the team and supports adopted adults wishing to access their birth records.

These services include:

- Counselling, information and support for birth parents whose children have a plan of adoption or are placed for adoption



- Counselling for adopted adults in accordance with Schedule 2 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002. Those wanting intermediary service to track birth relatives are signposted to appropriate independent agencies.
- Assessments of adoption support needs pre and post order and when appropriate will make applications to the Adoption Support Fund to support the provision of therapeutic services for adopted children and their families.
- Comprehensive adoption support for those affected by adoption in line with the Adoption Support Services Regulations, both prior to and after an Adoption Order has been made. This will include adoptive families' not known to the Agency who reside in the County and request adoption support assessments three years after their Adoption Order was granted. Likewise, the team provides adoption support to adoptive families who have adopted placements Northamptonshire children but live outside of our area for a period of three years after the granting of the Adoption Order.
- Post order support services for families where children are placed under a Special Guardianship arrangement.

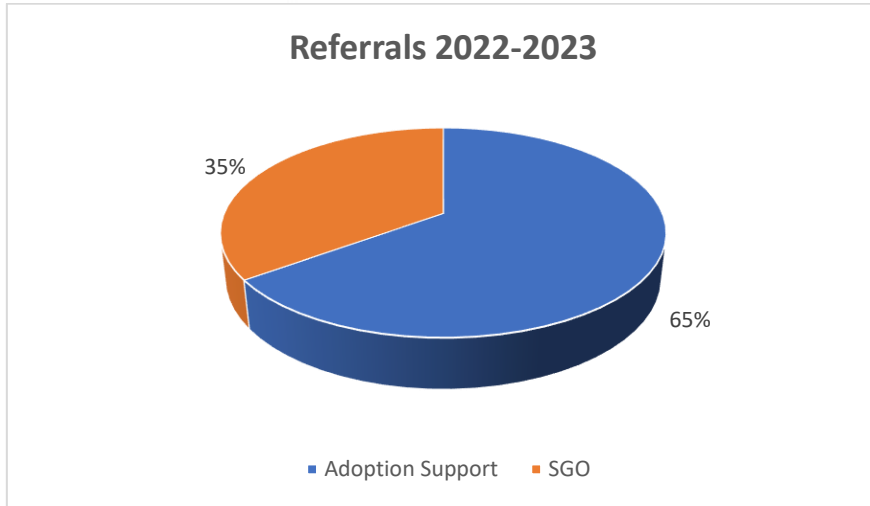
As previously mentioned, Post adoption support is routinely discussed with prospective adopters during their training and preparation, and day 2 of the adoption preparation training is delivered by workers from the post order team. Workers from the post adoption support team and the adoption recruitment team now co facilitate adoption support groups which provides further opportunities for adopters to speak to and become familiar with the post order team

What we know from the feedback received from the families with whom we work, other professionals and from the Ofsted inspection is that what we do has a positive impact upon children, young people and their families both in terms of supporting the quality of family life and relationships and in terms of children managing to access education.



- ❖ Of these referrals 65% related to adoption support and 35% to SGO support as documented below.
- ❖ Resulting in 160 assessments of need.





The post order support offer for families starts with the provision of a listening ear and an open door, provided via the VAA duty social work facility, which is open to all SGO and adoptive families. Contact information for this is outlined in both Adoption and SGO Support Plans which are prepared for the families at the point the child or young person is placed with them and accessible via the Adoption service website.

There is a duty worker available daily to respond to contacts from families. The duty worker can offer advice and signposting and if appropriate will commence the referral/initial assessment pathway to families and will use a Developmental Dyadic Practitioner (DDP) informed approach to offer an empathic and supportive experience to a family.

The service works closely with colleagues in NCT Children in Care teams to provide information in relation to support services and are available to offer in person information and advice to those families considering SGO.

During the 2022/23 reporting period the service has worked collaboratively with colleagues within the fostering connected persons team to develop an SGO pathway which included information for prospective SGO cares in relation to the role of an SGO carer, training to help them prepare for the role and understand the lifelong implications for children of their early life experiences and supports available. The SGO support plan document has been updated to support an improved emphasis on the likely and known support needs of the child and therefore what support the SGO carers may need. During January 2023 SGO workshops were delivered to staff across NCT to launch the SGO pathway and a further session are planned which will be recorded and can be used within the training and induction process for new employees.



At times SGO and adoptive families may be in receipt of services via NCT safeguarding teams in these circumstances the post order team will provide advice and support as a member of the *team around the child* in recognition of their post order status and the lifelong implications of their early life experiences.

On a national level there is a focus on support and services provided to SGO and Kinship carers, as a service we are participants in the East Midlands Permanence Board Project /Steering Group the focus of which is Improving Services to SGO and Kinship Carers. The work of the group is in the early stages and an audit of services and current provisions for partner agencies has been completed and will inform priorities and focus going forward.

15. Social worker support

Both the social workers and family support worker within the post order support team are trained in a combination of therapeutic parenting interventions including

- Therapeutic life story work at foundation and diploma level
- Theraplay© at foundation level, higher level and on the practicum with clinical supervision
- DDP at level one and level two
- Video Interactive Guidance
- NVR at foundation level
- BUSS model

This supports the team's ability to undertake focussed direct work with children, young people, and their families. The team have developed a number of tools to support them to gain the views, wishes and feelings of children including a young person's referral form and a suite of direct work resources. A children and young people's guide to post order support has been developed and is available via the website link below:

[https://www.nctrust.co.uk/adoption-fostering/Documents/Post Adoption Support A guide for children.pdf](https://www.nctrust.co.uk/adoption-fostering/Documents/Post%20Adoption%20Support%20A%20guide%20for%20children.pdf)



During the 2022/23 reporting period the service has facilitated three therapeutic based programmes for families which include two types of group-based support and one individual programme for families as follows.

Empowering Parents Therapeutic (EmPaTh) groups:

These are groups to support therapeutic parenting, delivered by a therapy provider on a commissioned basis and funded by ASF or directly by NC Trust where ASF access is not available. To date, there have been five groups completed and there is one group currently ongoing. The groups last for 12 weeks and are led by a psychologist and supported by a therapist.

35 families (representing 69 children) have engaged in the groups and feedback has been extremely positive. Access to the groups is offered as soon as a family contact the team for support and some families attend groups prior to being allocated a social worker, whereas others attend the groups as an outcome of an assessment of need and this may be alongside the support of a social worker.

25% of those who attended the groups did not seek any further support outside of the groups, which indicates that the support made sufficient difference to eliminate the need for more intrusive/intensive social work support.

Feedback has been extremely positive, with 71% of families providing written feedback which indicated that the course was helpful and was very positive. Examples of general feedback include:

“The course has really helped me to be still and calm and not try to fix everything straight away and to be more accepting of the situation”

“It hasn't been easy, but it has been useful”

“Easy minor tweaks to what I was already doing made quite a difference”

“I've tried to use a few strategies with my child and when I have, it has worked really well. It's trying to remember to use them and not react in the moment. As I definitely see a different outcome when I use a strategy learnt on the course, then reacting to certain behaviour. Sometimes difficult though.”



Energy Groups

These groups have been run over a six week period for children aged 5-9 who are struggling with emotional regulation. The groups use a combination of the BUSS method and interoception curriculum to support children to build awareness of body sensations which will support emotional regulation.

As a result of building up the child's interoception awareness, using fun sensory based activities and 'experiments', the programme seeks to increase the child's awareness and encourage the child to link their body sensations with emotions and hence to learn about their triggers and gain valuable coping strategies which support emotional regulation and result in more positive choices/behaviours. Parent sessions assist families to learn about their child's sensory needs and how to support them and a parent participation session is included as part of the groups.

The groups have only just commenced, and we have so far reached 8 children with the first group. Feedback from parents is in the process of being gathered in the one to one applying the learning sessions but an early comment that was offered in writing was:

"The regulation group was brilliant and has given me loads of ideas"

Building Bridges

This is a six week programme facilitated by the family support worker which uses a DDP and Theraplay© base from a qualified Theraplay© and VIG practitioner. The programme focusses on empowering parents to start to understand the trauma needs of their child and to use PACE model to meet the individual needs of their child. Observations of the parent-child relationship form the basis of parent coaching and support.

This has been offered to 6 families this year and feedback has been positive, including:

"I just want to say what a difference (the worker) has made to our lives. She has helped us through a difficult time and given us the tools and strength to keep going"



At times parents, carers and children can be in a place of feeling very distressed and getting the help they need to understand their children can change life for everyone. Below are some examples of the feedback received from families accessing the service:

“Thank you so much for all you’ve done for us this year, it makes the world of difference! “

“(worker) gave us loads of practical strategies and was really able to get to the reasons behind Arthur’s behaviours. Dee has an incredible wealth of knowledge and was excellent in supporting us. She is so easy to talk to and very friendly. We really enjoyed the sessions with her.”

“(worker) was kind, capable and professional and genuinely cared about improving C’s situation”

As is evident from the feedback above families accessing services from the team feel that those interventions had a positive impact on their family life and the wellbeing of their children. This is also a view shared by other professionals involved with the families, working collaboratively with the service to consider the holistic needs of the child or young person. The service has built positive links and working relationships with colleagues in the virtual school which supports them to advocate for adopted children and their families as appropriate.

16. Support Groups

Support groups are facilitated for adoptive families and special guardians pre and post order.

Support groups for adopters are facilitated jointly by the adopter recruitment and post order support team and are open for adopters at all stages of their journey (following approval as suitable to adopt). Daytime groups are held monthly and have been re branded as ‘Adoption Stay and Play’ sessions as anecdotal feedback was indicating that the title ‘support group’ may be off putting for some who felt they didn’t need support but would want to have an opportunity to meet other adopters and for them to have a space for their children to meet.

Social workers facilitating the Stay and Play groups see the session as an opportunity to have informal discussions with families re their children’s presenting behaviours and offer advice re therapeutic parenting techniques which may support them and their child as well as an opportunity to revisit the adoption support offer available.



In recognition that not all adopters are able to attend daytime support groups the service also facilitates a monthly evening online support group. As with the stay and play sessions adopters are invited to attend from the point that they commence Stage 2 of their assessment process. The sessions have a broad discussion topic which is emailed out to adopters on the mailing list in advance of the group in order for them to make a decision to attend if particular topics are pertinent to them at any given point.

As well as being advised of the groups via their SW's, adopters are routinely invited by via the service mailing list and information is available on the NCT and FAL website All NCT VAA groups are open to adopters from FAL partner agencies and in addition there is a FAL online support group which adopters are able to attend.

Feedback from sessions is positive as demonstrated below –

'We enjoyed meeting others in the same position as ourselves and others who have had a child placed with them, in an informal social setting,'

Social activities including summer picnics and Christmas parties are also facilitated by the service supporting the ability for adoptive families to make connections with others informally and for adopted children to have the opportunity to get to know other children like them to support their sense of acceptance and self-esteem. In addition, the post order support team negotiated cut price tickets to a Christmas Light Show and a day at Wicksteed Park for adoptive and SGO families.

One family reported that;

'We particularly found the organised social events to be supportive and encouraging.'

Support groups are also held for SGO carers which mirror the offer outlined above for adopters, other than access to groups via FAL, and are facilitated solely by the post order support team.

Going forward the post adoption & SGO support team will have a supporting role in a coffee morning designed for kinship carers including Special Guardians, alongside the fostering service.



17. Training

Adopters are able to access a range of training pre and post order as detailed below, some of which is directly delivered by the service and some via other routes. As part of the Family Adoption Links partnership a programme of core training across the region has been developed which will be complimented by specific training or workshops on a local level in response to the needs of those accessing the service.

An overview of the FAL training offer can be found via the [2023 FAL What's On Calendar](#)– some training is delivered face to face e.g. the adoption preparation training and Early Permanence training whilst others are online. Adopters are able to book onto any courses via an Eventbrite system which is centrally managed by the FAL hub team.

Since the FAL programme was launched in July 2022 and up until the end of March 2023 NCT adopters accessed 170 training sessions on courses including;

- Non-Violent Resistance
- Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder
- The Child's Sensory World
- Adopting Siblings
- Early Permanence
- Therapeutic Parenting
- Talking about Adoption
- Family and Friends Training



At a local level NCT adopters are also able to access training via the NCT ILearn programme and E-Learning training via the link below. During the 2022-2023 reporting period adopters attended 168 training sessions via this route. which includes courses relating to the following topics;

- An Introduction to Attachment
- Birth Parents in the Lifelong Adoption Journey
- Child Development
- Bitesize training Gangs & Knife Crime
- Identity
- First Aid
- Letterbox contact
- Separation and Loss
- Transracial Adoption
- Equality and Diversity
- Contextual Safeguarding
- Radicalisation
- Resilience and recovery

[Children Services Training Online - AC Education \(ac-education.co.uk\)](https://www.ac-education.co.uk)

Below is a sample of the feedback received from adopters attending training;

'The prepare to adopt training got me thinking more about the child being at the centre of adoption process. I will try and do this throughout the journey going forward as it's not just about my wants.'

'We gained a better understanding of a child's view from the prepare to adopt training. It was great thanks'

'We found the friends and family training really good. It will help us to support everyone when the child moves in with them.'

Therapeutic parenting training groups have also been established the details of which are within the post order support section of the report.

Below is an overview of the training and support groups available to adopters for the coming year.

Training /Support Groups Programmes	
20 April 2023	Stay and Play Group
26 April 2023 8-9pm	Online Support Group birth family time - Modernising our ideas around direct contact and letterbox with birth families.
18 May 2023	Stay and Play Group
31 May 2023 8-9pm	Online Support Group behaviour - Challenges & triumphs with behaviour issues
15 June 2023	Stay and Play Group
28 June 2023 8-9pm	Online Support Group - Exploitation and how we can do our best to protect our children
14 July 2023	Kinship Coffee Morning (SGO)
20 July 2023	Stay and Play Group
26 July 2023 8-9pm	Online Support Group - Therapeutic parenting
17 August 2023	Stay and Play Group
23 August 2023 8-9pm	Online Support Group - Self-care and family fun. Ideas for fun family times and holidays and keeping self-care alive in August!
20 September 2023 8-9pm	Online Support Group - School support - Challenges & triumphs with school issues
6 October 2023	Kinship Coffee Morning (SGO)
19 October 2023	Stay and Play Group
25 October 2023 8-9pm	Online Support Group - Facing fears and phobias
28 November 2023 8-9pm	Online Support Group - Letting birth family time letterbox families.
20 December 2023 8-9pm	Online Support Group - Managing the holidays, sharing ideas and common tricky moments and how to plan to succeed.
January 2024 8-9pm	Online Support Group: You're ok, I'm ok - Promoting good self esteem
21 March 2024	Stay and Play Group.
February 2024 8-9pm	Online Support Group: non-violent resistance parenting. Dealing with loss and grief.
March 2024 8-9pm	Online Support Group: looking after adult relationships /Your adult relationships and how to care for them.

18. Financial Support

Within the service there is a finance officer whose role it is to undertake annual reviews of financial support allowances and set up new allowances once agreed for both adoption and SGO families.

749 financial allowances

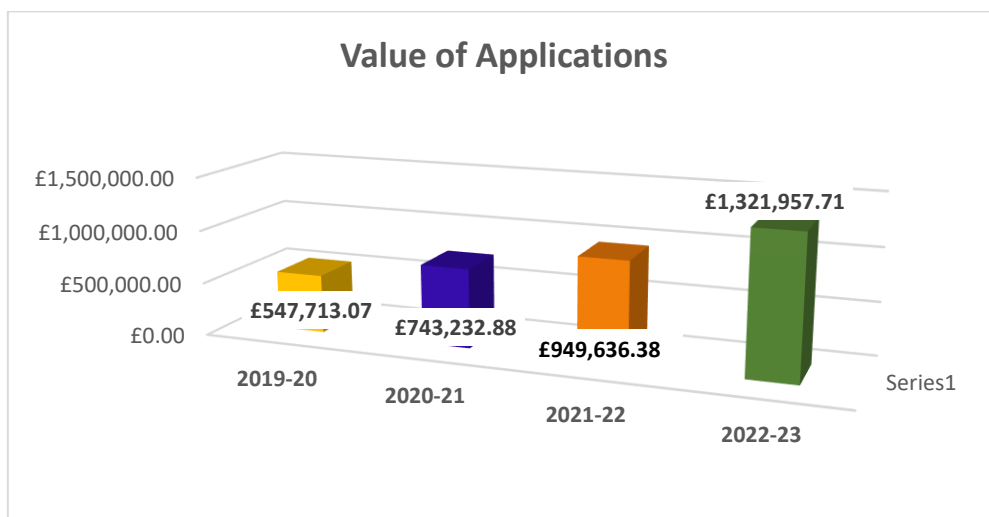
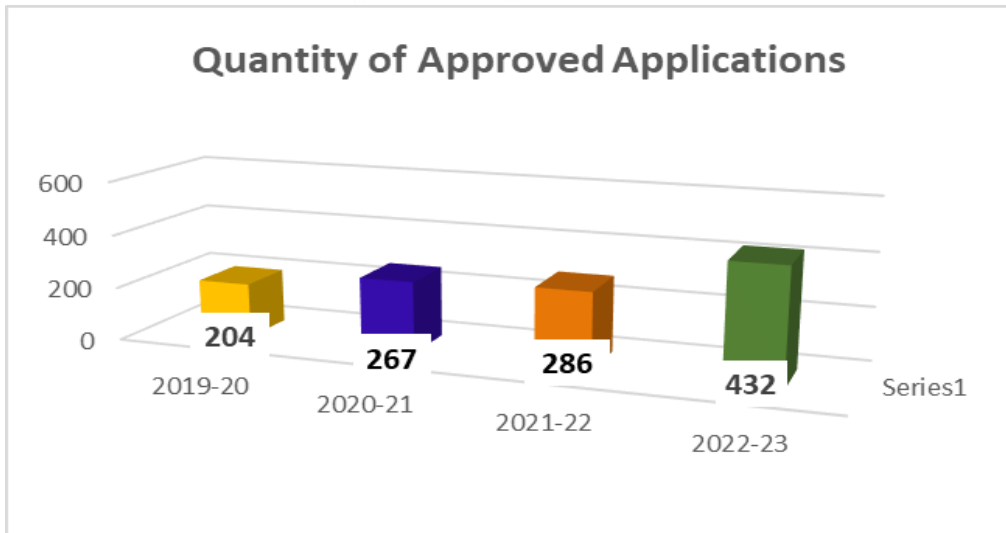
There are currently 749 financial allowances being paid to carers and there have been 37 new allowances awarded during the 2022-2023 reporting period. Adoption support allowances are not common with only 76 out of the total 668 allowances being paid to adoptive families. Allowances are normally offered for a time limited period either at the start of an adoption or as a result of an assessment of need where a family experiences additional financial pressure relating from the needs of their child. All allowances are subject to an annual review.

The SGO financial support policy was reviewed and updated in November 2022.

19. Adoption Support Fund

432 Applications to Adoption Support Fund

The provision of post order support for both adoption and SGO families is enhanced by the use of the Adoption Support Fund (ASF). During this reporting period the service made 432 applications to the adoption support fund resulting in the provision of over £1.3m of funding for specialist therapeutic interventions to support children, young people and their families. The charts below indicate a rise in both applications to the ASF and the allocation of funding compared to the previous three reporting periods.



As a high user of the ASF the service was invited to take part in the ASF outcomes pilot which commenced in January 2022. Independent evaluation and feedback from the adoption sector indicates that the provision of funding for therapeutic services is having a positive effect however there is not a systematic way of measuring outcomes from ASF funded therapy. The outcome measures pilot aims to support the development of the ASF and improve the overall understanding of what works and also.

- Improve agency's ability to deliver the right support offer to children a families
- Inform which therapies work best for children and families
- Enable services to have data to inform their commissioning



The outcome measures pilot reported on its findings at the end of 2022, which concluded that a national rollout of the Outcome Measures Project will be incorporate into all ASF activities in the coming years, and we expect this to begin in June 2023. As a service we are in a very strong position to participate in this due to the involvement that we had in the pilot project.

20. Adoption Support Newsletter

As a partner agency of Family Adoption Links the VAA co produce a quarterly newsletter called 'Thrive' which can be emailed via the service mailing list or downloaded by adopters via the website. The newsletter provides information in relation to training, social events articles, and ideas for adoptive families. In March 2023 900 adopters across the FAL partnership received the online newsletter and there was an opening rate of 59.4%.

21. Birth Family Support



During the 2022-2023 reporting period the service received 33 referrals from birth family members requesting support in relation to the children being adopted or placed in a special guardianship arrangement. Below is an example of feedback from those accessing this service.

'(Counsellor) has helped me immensely, she has helped me separate my feelings/emotions into what I can deal with now and in future. She is kind understanding and has huge knowledge of many things. I feel more settled in myself and parenting than I have at any point before.'

Links have been developed by the service with the PAUSE project and as a result the adoption service manager is a member of the PAUSE strategic partnership board and work is being finalised to develop links with the project to gain the views of birth mothers in relation to what support services, they may find useful. The service would like to develop this work with an aim of making a video with birth mothers to share at adopter training to support adopters understanding of birth parents' situations and the significance of their ongoing role in adopted children's lives.

22. Post Order Contact



619 Letterbox Exchanges

There is a dedicated letterbox co-ordinator within the post order service who manages post order contact arrangements for both adoption and SGO families, during the 2022-2023 reporting period there have been **619** exchanges of letters, cards and photos between birth and adoptive families. The letter box coordinator is also central, due to the relationships built with birth parents, in exploring introducing direct contact where either birth family or adoptive family are seeking to establish this and mediates to consider these possibilities, alongside social workers from the service.

We have supported 8 direct family time sessions during this reporting period a family support worker within the team is engaged in assisting families to make agreements and facilitate meetings. This is an area of work we plan to develop in the coming year in line with the modernising adoption agenda and the importance of supporting children and young people to develop a sense of their identity and maintain significant relationships. Post order contact plans are routinely discussed during permanence planning meetings to support with the development of care plans reflecting the lifelong needs of adopted children.

The Adoption UK Adoption Barometer report published in June 2022 reporting the following from the online survey completed as part of the information gathering process;

- 70% of prospective adopters believe direct contact should be standard for adopted children as long as it is deemed safe
- 69% of adopted adults who did not have childhood direct contact regretted not having the opportunity
- 80% of adopted adults and 88% of adoptive parents who were involved in direct contact during childhood were glad they had participated

As a service we recognise and value the ongoing importance that birth family members have in relation to children placed for adoption or cared for via special guardianship arrangements in respect of supporting the child's sense of self and their identity. We are committed to developing the services we provide to support contact arrangements including direct contact. This includes the need to discuss plans for children during permanency planning meetings and by asking professionally curious questions during tracking panels and Child in Care reviews and when necessary, challenging the notion of risk often associated with post order contact.



Below is feedback from those who have been supported by the service, in face-to-face family time:

“(worker) has been like a breath of fresh air and she really has supported me not just with arranging contact but also while we are at contact. (worker) has been amazing and very supportive and helpful during and in between visits.”

23.Support to Adopted Adults

Supported 141
Adopted
Adults

Within the service there is a coordinator and social worker who support adults who have been adopted who live in Northamptonshire to locate and access their records. These records can be paper or electronic and can be from last year or as long ago as the 1930/40's.

Finding their records enables adopted adults to learn details about their early life that may have eluded them for many years and to resolve worries and questions that they may never have even shared with anyone. Where appropriate the service will offer advice and signpost people in relation to how to trace and locate their birth family and this is a life changing event for many who thought they would be lost to each other forever.

During the 2022-2023 reporting period the service has supported 141 adopted adults to access their birth records compared to 90 in the 2021/22 reporting period.

Below is an example of feedback received from an adopted adult:

“It was a wonderfully endearing experience to read through such detailed and well logged work over all those years. I learnt so much about myself and lots of memories came flooding back, both good and bad. I think I have got some kind of closure from the documents, which was like being handed your past on paper. I really enjoyed it. Thanks so much for your help”



24. Summary

The service has continued to have a successful year in terms of adopter recruitment, matching for children and supporting families post order. During the 2022/23 reporting period the service has taken the opportunity to *take stock* and review practice across the teams. Work following the Leiland James Corkhill safeguarding practice review has strengthened practice which will support the ability of the service to safeguard children throughout their adoption journey.

The partnership with Family Adoption Links (FAL) is now embedded and is bringing benefits in terms of a broader training and support offer for families and in terms of supporting family finding for children across the partnership.

As a service we remain aspirational in terms of our vision for an *Effective Adoption Agency in the 21st Century* and as such recognise that whilst it is important to continually monitor the effectiveness of our locally and regionally delivered services It is equally as important to maintain an outward facing awareness and response to national drivers, reports and research and consider the implications of this upon local practice development.

In July 2021 the Department for Education published the *Adoption Strategy – Achieving Excellence Everywhere*. The strategy set an expectation to strive for excellence in all adoption services meeting the needs of every child waiting for adoption and for all adopted children who need support. Whilst this strategy was published in 2021 the aspirations outlined within it remain the focus of work being undertaken at a national, regional, and local level as it continues to mirror the vision which we have as a service.

In June 2022 Adoption UK published its annual Adoption Barometer report, below is a summary of the recommendations made;

- Create and implement quality standards for the journey of prospective adopters through preparation, approvals and matching, for use by all adoption agencies.
- Introduced ringfenced, multi-year government funding for adoption support across all nations of the UK.
- Produce clear, specific support plans for every child to be placed for adoption, distinct from the placement plan, agreed with their adopters and reviewed at least once a year.
- Adoption agencies to have a duty to provide the adoption support set out in a child's assessment of support needs.
- Train education and health professionals in early childhood trauma and associated conditions, including Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder and Attachment Disorder.



- Provide free, expert, lifelong support for establishing and maintaining birth family relationships including during childhood and when tracing birth relatives in adulthood

These recommendations are aspirational and far reaching in terms of considering adoption within the wider societal context. As a service whilst we cannot address all the recommendations, we are mindful of them within our day-to-day practice and service planning and are mindful that these are recommendations borne out of feedback gathered from adopters, adopted young people, adopted adults, birth parents and professionals across the sector. As such we have a responsibility to view this as we would other forms of feedback. In response, as part of our review of service areas during the 2022/23 reporting period we have:

- Strengthened our QA process in relation to support plans to ensure they are reflective of the child's needs,
- Maintained links with education and health partners and share information and training opportunities with them to support attachment aware practice
- Held workshops with education colleagues re Supporting the attachment needs of children in schools, and education passport is being developed via the FAL adoption support work stream
- Made a commitment to applying for the Early Permanence Quality Mark which is underpinned by an agreed set of nationally agreed practice standards.
- Established links with the PAUSE project to support our understanding in relation to what birth families would find useful in terms of support services including support with post order contact arrangements.
- Developed training workshops re managing attachment needs which can be delivered to staff across residential children's settings.

Overall, we feel we have had a positive year across the service and whilst we are all saddened by the adoption disruptions, we have experienced we have used these as opportunities for review and reflection of practice and as such continue to strive for excellence in all that we do.



18. Plans for development 2023/24

The service has a strong foundation of good practice upon which to continue to develop during the 2023 – 2024 reporting period and have identified the following priority areas.

1. Continued development of tracking systems including embedding the adoption tracking panel to support oversight and planning for children alongside effective tracking of adopters to ensure that matches for children are made in a timely manner.
2. Tracking and data collection systems to be developed for the post order support team.
3. Strengthened quality assurance systems including an audit framework to be embedded within the service.
4. Awareness raising activities and training in relation to the benefits and challenges of direct contact in adoption to be established for adopters, SW's and panel members.
5. Feedback mechanisms for service users to be embedded and feedback used to inform practice developments and co-production – including feedback from the Adopter Consultation Hub and Colabor8 groups.
6. Early Permanence Quality Mark to be applied for.
7. Share learning from recent disruptions to inform practice across the service including with the adoption panel and the wider children's trust teams.
8. Developing an Adoption Community to support adopters and adopted children and young people to have a network where that can share experiences and links with others who share an *adoption identity*.

Tracy Morton

Adoption Service Manager

April 2023



**Northamptonshire
Children's Trust**

Independent Reviewing Officer Service - Annual Report 2022/2023



**Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Service
Northamptonshire Children's Trust**

Date Published as final version – 22.06.23

Authors: Mikesk Kotak & Gerry Vaughan – IRO Service Managers

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Introduction

The Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Annual Report is a requirement set out in the IRO Handbook (2010). It is directed that the report should be written in a format which is easily accessible to children and young people who live in care.

This report contains a summary of work completed by Northamptonshire Children's Trust's (NCT) Independent Reviewing Officer service between 1st April 2022 and 31st March 2023.

It is the duty of NCT, commissioned by the respective unitary Authorities (North Northamptonshire and West Northamptonshire Councils) to act as corporate parents for all our Children in Care and, as any good parent, it is our duty to ensure that our children and young people are safe, healthy, supported to do well in education, employment & training and are helped to transition smoothly into adulthood.

NCT's vision is **Children, Young People and Families are at the heart of all we do, in every action we take and every decision we make.** Our commitment, which was co-produced with children and young people is:

'What we do today affects your tomorrow, we promise to walk side-by-side with you.'

The Role of the Independent Reviewing Officer

The appointment of an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) for a child or young person in the care of a Local Authority is a legal requirement under s.118 of the Adoption and Children Act (2002).

The role of the IRO is set out in Care Planning Regulations and Guidance (2010) and Children Act (1989). The Children and Young Persons Act (2008) extended the remit

of IROs from a focus on chairing reviews to reporting on Local Authority's performance in respect of the wider case management of children's Care Plans.

Detailed guidance and regulations for Independent Reviewing Officers and Local Authorities was published in 2010 as the 'IRO Handbook'. In this, it states that the primary role of the IRO is 'To ensure that the Care Plan for the child fully reflects the child's current needs and that the actions set out in the plan are consistent with the Local Authority's legal responsibilities towards the child'.

A guide to help children and young people to understand the role of the IRO has been developed and can be found at the following link:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/221761/young_20peoples_20guide_20to_20the_20independent_20reviewing_20officers_20handbook.pdf

In this guide it states that: -

- *The main job of the IRO is to make sure that your care plan meets your needs.*
- *They will do this by first, chairing your review, second, by letting you have your own say in your review and third, by following up to make sure that people actually do what they agreed to do.*

Children and young people are reminded that Children in Care Review belong to the young person, and it is essential that the IRO knows how and what they feel.

Furthermore, the IRO Handbook states that IROs must: -

- promote the voice of the child;
- ensure that plans are based on a full and proper assessment of each child's needs;
- make sure that each child knows how they can get hold of an Advocate;
- act as a safeguard against children staying in care longer than necessary, or not getting the services they need, because of a lack of good planning;

- listen to children and see that they understand any changes to their Care Plan and
- make sure that the Local Authority is a good “corporate parent” to children in care

The IRO Service

The IRO Service is part of the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Service (SQAS) within Northamptonshire Children’s Trust. The service comprises of 19 IROs (16 full-time, 3 part-time) 84% is female, and 26% are global majority identity. The service is managed with the support of an Assistant Director, Strategic Manager and two IRO Service Managers; all of whom are permanent members of the service. There is an extensive range of experience in the team, with IROs who have experience in youth justice, fostering, adoption, kinship fostering, children in care, safeguarding (child protection), mental health, separated children (unaccompanied asylum-seeking children - UASC), children with disabilities, substance misuse services and CAFCASS. Five IROs are designated Signs of Safety champions. The service continues to be supported by a dedicated business support team, without which, the service would struggle to function effectively.

The IRO Service is a separate service to the Child Protection Chair Service, which is supported by 10 Child Protection Chairs (CPC’s) and a Service Manager. Having a separate service enables IROs to focus solely on the needs of our children and young people who are in care and ensure they receive good quality services in line with the IRO Handbook and Care Planning Regulations. Whilst CPC and IRO Services are separate, some officers are recruited as joint IROs and CPC’s, enabling services to be flexible to meet the needs and demands placed on either service area.

The IRO Service, whilst employed by NCT, is an independent service whose functions include ensuring that NCT meets the needs of Children in Care, monitoring the performance of the Trust’s function as a corporate parent and to identify areas of

practice that require improvement. As a service, we take the view that having a positive, collaborative working relationship approach, whilst remaining a critical friend to our colleagues, is more effective to work towards best outcomes for our children and young people. The service also recognises the importance of acknowledging and highlighting good practice that Social Workers evidence and the positive impact this has on children. IROs regularly praise Social Workers, share good practice, and bring positive work to the attention of senior leaders, including the Chief Executive of the Trust, who acknowledges each contact personally.

IRO caseload (number of children and young people they should work with)

1. The IRO handbook recommends a caseload between 50 to 70 children and young people per IRO. Ofsted (2013), *Independent reviewing officers: taking up the challenge?* A thematic inspection of IRO services states 'although a lower caseload was not a guarantee of high-quality work, IRO input was likely to be more effective where caseloads were manageable'
2. The number of cases held by individual IROs has varied and has, at times, risen above 80 cases. Individual caseloads have ranged from 40 (part-time staff) to 84 cases per IRO during the reporting period. At the end of the reporting period (31st March 2022) the average caseload was 71; however, this included the 2 Service Managers managing small caseloads due to the increasing numbers of children coming into care and IRO absence (long-term sickness and maternity leave). This resulted in IROs also having to cover for colleagues, and this is not reflected in the average caseload data.
3. Size of caseload does not always provide an accurate picture of the volume of work for an individual IRO. It does not account for additional reviews due to placement breakdown or disruption, additional visits to children - prior to, or between reviews, children in out-of-county placements or large sibling groups.

Progress made April 2022 to Mar 2023

The IRO Service continues to be a permanent staff group. This year saw some changes in the staff group, with four new IROs joining the service because IROs retired, went on maternity leave, moved to an Auditor role and creation of new post from existing hours using hours 'released' when IRO's chose to reduce hours and work part-time. The team has remained stable, with 50% of the team engaged in their IRO role for more than 5 years and 5 IROs with over 8 years' service. This has resulted in our children and young people benefitting from someone consistent in their life, and with whom they can build a positive, stable relationship. This is vital at a time when some children in care have experienced higher than desirable changes of Social Worker. The IRO has been able to be the constant and therefore able to ensure that the child's assessed needs are met and regularly revisited as part of the care planning and review process.

The last year has seen the IRO service being able to fully return to in-person reviews, following the conclusion of Covid concerns. IROs comment that they continue to value this position and they are able to visit children and young people in their homes and engage with them in-person. Some young people have continued to request that visits take place virtually, as they find this way of communicating more engaging and less formal; similarly, reviews now benefit from learning gained during Covid to enable i.e. face to face, virtual and hybrid meetings, as agreed / directed by the young person. As a service we have agreed that all first and second reviews are ideally in person and face to face in order to start to build that important relationship with the children and young people.

IROs rightly believe that active participation of children and young people in their review is critical. IROs continue to prioritise and support children and young people to share their views and be part of their review in a range of ways - from attending face-to-face or virtually, writing their views for their review, having an Advocate support them to share their wishes and feelings, and supporting children to chair their own reviews.

IROs have made effective use of a range of approaches to engage with young people, using various IT platforms. In the last year there was a 15% increase to 54% of children and young people attending their review compared to last year. Overall, 82% of children and young people were able to either attend or share their views with the IRO prior to, or at their review enabling the young person's voice to be more clearly heard and enabling them to actively partake in the decision-making about their life

IROs continue to work closely with CAFCASS, holding 2 joint meetings / workshops last year. Joint IRO / CAFCASS Guardian workshops allow both services to develop good practice and to share concerns relating to cases, consider Family Proceedings Court practice and Deprivation of Liberty Orders (DOLS) and to share developments within services. IROs continue to attend regional IRO seminars to develop their practice and the service provided to children and young people through learning from other authorities.

IROs continue to write their Chair's report directly to the child or young person - subject to the young person's age and understanding and this includes a summary letter to all children / young people regarding their review meeting. The young person has a choice of receiving the full report, summary letter, or both. Over the last year we have had 1½ service development days and writing to the child has been discussed and good practice shared to further progress this practice and to act as role models across the Trust. (See appendix A).

IROs continue to raise formal and informal escalations on individual cases when there is a significant impact for a child. Alongside the daily report, the service creates a quarterly report highlighting team performance and themes raised. Key findings from this process are shared with senior managers in a quarterly report to the Quality Assurance Board. The report is available to operational Service Managers and themes are addressed in regular Service Managers' meetings, the latter is chaired by IRO Service Managers; these meetings have become better attended and more focussed during the last year.

Children and young people have fed back to IROs that they continue to find having one-page profiles (see appendix B) beneficial and this assists in making the first meeting more informal. IROs continue to update and send their one-page profiles to children and young people prior to their first review and new IROs are required to complete their profile upon appointment.

Examples of challenges by IROs: -

- An IRO raised concerns about the quality, safety, and cleanliness of a placement and this resulted in 5 young people being moved into appropriate accommodation.
- When a young person had photos taken and they were published in the local paper or on the school website, they put an emoji over her face as a standard risk averse response for children who are in care rather than a risk managed approach which the IRO was able to support. The IRO then agreed to advocate that her face be shown - which was in line with her views and wishes.
- IROs attendance at final care planning meetings and challenge to the proposed plan where the IRO has assessed this to not be in the best interests of the child/children - for example, a plan for 4 siblings was to be 2 separate plans: adoption for the younger siblings and long-term fostering for the older siblings. Following challenge, this was changed to a plan of long-term fostering for all 4 children, where very regular family time could be supported into their futures.
- IRO supported 2 young brothers to present their concerns regarding their sleeping space and the need for an urgent extension (previously agreed, but not actioned) to the Chief Executive and the Director of Children's Social Care. An extension to this property is now progressing.
- IRO raised concerns regarding a CPR (Child's Permanency Report) for a child where there had been no management oversight or quality assurance checks and the work was of an unacceptable level - this has been addressed and now reflects the child's history.
- IRO raised concerns regarding a lack of school place for a young person living out-of-county. As the IRO and Social Worker did not get a response through the escalation process, the IRO made a formal complaint using the Local Authority's complaint's process where the young person was placed, and this resulted in instant resolution of the issue.

Example of compliments for IROs: The work and support of IRO's has been appreciated by many children and young people, parents, carers, and professionals.

Please see below for some examples of this: -

Foster carers shared... The IRO was absolutely superb and a key driver in ensuring A and B's voice was heard. It would be excellent to have him involved again.

Fostering Social Worker shared... We just wanted to say thank you for all your support. You are excellent at coordinating these meetings, ensuring clear actions and accountabilities are taken.

Parent shared.. *"I just want to say thank you to you and A for everything your kind words and support.. I know your jobs not easy just like social services but I want you guys to know I appreciate what you all do and very lucky to have had two very supportive people. It helped me see what is right and the importance of parenting and help me see I am a great mum people can change and I'm not worthless i am strong and to know my kids will grow up with happy memories makes me happy. So thank you both very much".*

Parent shared.. *"Thank you so much i want you to know you have been a very active and positive part in my struggles as a parent I'm really grateful for your help guidance and I have learned so much about myself it's daunting but I'm glad I want you to know you are amazing at your job you will be missed also sorry if I've been hard work I never meant to be it's my of trying to say thank you for everything you have done for me and my family on after what happens next you deserve our gratitude and more there are not many people like you who are open to understanding You will be missed and remembered Thank you so much for everything*



Foster carer shared this after the review about the IRO... I just wanted to write a few lines to praise her as we thought she was really professional and a great advocate for our children. She was no nonsense and was not worried about talking about the difficult subjects that needed discussing, doing it in a caring but respectful way. It was a pleasure working with her and we hope to again, people are always to ready to complain so I wanted to praise instead.

Practice manager shared: She has gone above and beyond in her role as IRO with one of our families. She has been available when the carer has called and been reassuring to her. She has been extremely supportive of the family who sing her praises highly.



SSW shared ...she was talking with the young person B. And she talked about several social workers and other professionals in her life since she and her siblings were subject to care proceedings in 2015-16. B named the IRO as the only professional who really shows an interest in her life, takes time to listen to her views and try to support her. I also have observed the same during reviews where the IRO's approach was child centred and encouraging the YP to voice her views. The IRO has also emailed us to chase the actions as part for planning for next review. The organisation, communication and attention to detail are few skills to mention. There was always response the same day when the IRO was copied into emails and prioritised attending a professional's meeting organised at short notice.

Family time supervisor...Just a short note to say that I have just read the CIC notes you put on FB's Care First observations and, I have to say, it is one of the BEST I have ever read! I am sure that people are quick enough to complain about things but not many speak up to say a "Well done" do they? I think its beautifully written, for FB to read when he is older if he chooses to – very sensitive to his situation and careful consideration on the way it was written in the style of "writing to the child" - its also informative for other professionals involved in this child's life. So, a big Thank You from little old me 😊 tell your Boss I said so too

A compliment from an adoptive placement breakdown parent where there has been a really challenging journey. *Just wanting to say thanks again for all your hard work and keeping him, ooh making sure he's become the lovely young wonderful lad that he has. Thanks for being there for him and for us, we've met very few of those people on our adoption journey and we really really appreciate it. Take care Bye bye*

From April 2022 – March 2023, 3036 Children in Care reviews took place:

The timeliness of the first Children in Care review in 2022/23 was 83%. Delays occurred as result of IROs changing dates in the best interest of young people, following changes of Social Workers, late notification of children entering care, and, in some cases, unavoidable delay caused by IRO sickness absence. The percentage of second reviews on time was 88% and subsequent reviews was 93%. Some reviews were out-of-timescales through IRO sickness, and it was not considered in the best interests of the young person to allocate to another IRO to meet performance targets. Other reasons include changes of Social Workers, delaying reviews to enable a Social Worker to attend Court, to enable parental attendance and, in some cases, so that young people could attend the review.

The table below show timeliness of completion for IRO decisions and recommendations reports for year ending March 2023. The figure is taken from the reporting system. The 'actual' figure relates to data which has been corrected to consider human data entry errors which, in the report, shows as 'missing' and is recorded by the data entry system as being out-of-timescale. Unfortunately, this year the 95% target for chair reports was not achieved as result of unexpected long-term sickness and maternity leave.

Report type (Target 95%)	Reported Figure	Actual Figure
Decisions	83%	96%
Chair's Review Report	78%	86%

The following priorities were highlighted in the 2022 / 23 IRO Annual Report (**What we said / What we did**): -

- Ensure that the voice of the child / young person continues to be central to care planning for all our young people and is supported and evidenced by greater use of the Mind of My Own App to record and represent their wishes and views for children in care reviews.
 - IROs received training on the use of the Mind of my Own App and IROs have encouraged young people to use the App to provide feedback and their views and wishes for their reviews. Many of the children and young people have however shared that they are not happy to download and use this and prefer to talk with their IRO and use feedback forms.
- Ensure the Care Plan / Pathway Plan holistically explores and identifies each child and young person's needs, particularly focusing on children and young people's cultural and diversity needs.

- IROs have attended cultural competence training and have also taken part in bespoke training focussing on the role of the IRO and CP Chairs; this training included a focus on care planning and diversity.
- There are now 2 equality influencers in the IRO service.
- Team meetings now have a monthly focussed discussion regarding any individual needs to be considered in care and pathway planning, with a specific focus on equality and diversity.
- Continue to develop our practice of writing reports and summary letters to children and young people to ensure this becomes consistent across the service.
 - This has been consistently implemented across the service, including with new IROs who have joined the team.
 - An IRO has developed a training course about “Writing to the Child” with the Learning and Development team and some IROs have been able to attend this for their development.
- Work with our colleagues in NCT by facilitating monthly Service Managers’ meetings, with the aim of sharing good practice and identifying areas of concern so we can develop joint plans to address these.
 - This has been progressed and these meetings now take place bi-monthly. There has been good attendance across the Children’s Trust to work together at this level.
- Progress monthly quality assurance meetings to review themes identified through escalations and standing team agenda items regarding policy, procedural, and practice concerns. This will be supported by developing action plans to address matters identified with peers in NCT.
 - This has been progressed as a standing agenda item in the Service Managers’ meetings and through bi-monthly meetings with the Children in Care Strategic Manager.
 - Service Improvement plans have been updated to address these issues.
 - This was an area reviewed in an IRO development day, where themes and concerns were identified which will inform the IRO service development plan.
- Support and encourage IROs to fully evidence the direct and indirect contact they have with children and young people and their families.
 - We continue to monitor this and have tried to support this through making changes to the Chair’s report; unfortunately, the IT system could

not support this change and we await the new system to be able to progress this further.

Children in Care population

The number of children in care has continued to rise from 1185 in care at the end March 2022 compared to 1226 at the end of March 2023. (A more detailed breakdown is found at Appendix C).

Priorities for 2023/24

As a service we have identified the following priorities for the year April 2023 to March 2024:

- Ensure children and young people's voices are heard by updating our consultation forms to make them more age-appropriate and accessible, whilst concurrently supporting them to use the Mind of My Own app. Further surveys to be undertaken by the Independent Advocates on themes to be agreed with the IROs and Children in Care Council.
- To continue to focus and improve evidencing our understanding of each child's unique diversity. Service Managers to undertake observations and case audits to assess context and substantive practice in this area.
- All IROs to attend Cultural Competence and Writing to the Child training.
- To develop the role of the link IRO with respective children's teams across the Trust and to build effective working relationships which will enhance the lives of all our children and young people. Services from across the trust will be invited to the IRO Team Meeting to share and develop our understanding of the full range of roles across the Children's Trust.
- To positively reflect upon our learning in our work with children and young people and use appreciative inquiries to facilitate this and further development days.
- To ensure IROs understand their role within the developing Child Exploitation framework.

- IROs to ensure that Care Plans identify the clear route to permanency by the second children in care review
- Where IROs identify a concern that has a significant impact on the Child/Young Person's Care Plan they will address these issues consistently using the dispute resolution process.

Overview and Summary

The last year saw an increase in the number of children and young people coming into care. As a result, caseloads for IROs have remained over the recommended amount outlined in the IRO Handbook. IROs have continued to increase the number of in-person reviews and enabled young people to make an active choice if they prefer hybrid or virtual meetings. Performance this year has not been as consistent as we would have hoped for, but we have had significant illness and loss in the team, alongside the return to more face-to-face work – with associated time lost from travel-time.

The service continues to work in collaboration with NCT colleagues to acknowledge areas of good practice and highlight areas that require improvement. The service has welcomed four new IROs to the team in the last year. The service continues to benefit from having a stable and permanent workforce, who are committed to being the best advocates they can be for the children and young people in our care.

Appendix A: Writing to the child examples:

Child in care review Summary provided to young child:

Hello A, My name is B(IRO) and I am your independent reviewing officer. At the time of writing this report you are nearly 5 months old and whilst I appreciate you are too young to understand the current circumstances and offer your views, wishes and feelings, I wanted to write this record should you wish to read this when you are older, in hope this record will support your understanding of the meeting and decisions agreed in your best interest. My role as your independent reviewing officer is to oversee your care plan and what I mean by care plan is a document that considers your safety and wellbeing, ensuring your needs are adequately met in the environment where you live, your health, education, identity and family time. Today is your second child in care review. A, I can confirm that your current care plan is a twin track plan and what I mean by a twin track plan is consideration for your longer term care needs to be met and for you to be cared for with your family or with connected other and if this option is not deemed a in ensuring your needs are consistently whilst ensuring your safely and wellbeing, as a last option a plan of adoption for you to be cared for outside of your family will be considered. A, you have a new social worker named C and she shared in the review that despite her best efforts she has not been able to consistently engage with your mum to complete the parenting assessment, and due to non engagement, the assessment is negative which means your social worker is not recommending a return of you to mums care at this time. Mum is understandably upset receiving this news and has shared in the meeting today that a number of personal circumstances have impacted her engagement. C and myself and have urged your mum to speak with her legal representative to seek an extension and to do this as a matter of importance for the court to consider. A, your mum has put forward your great maternal uncle to be assessed as a possibility to care for you long term. Your social worker is going to complete an assessment as part of parallel planning. C aims to have the initial viability screening assessment completed within the week and if positive this will progress to a more in-depth assessment called a Connected Person Assessment. In the review A, your foster carer proudly shared updates about your progress. Your foster carer (FC) often shares pictures of you on various outings and you have the most precious smile that lights up your face. FC explained that you are gaining weight steadily and that this has been supported with a change in milk which appear to have eased your symptoms of reflux. A you are now provided Kendamil milk and this replaced Cow and Gate, you take 5-6oz every bottle and you are having feeds every 4 hours. At the time of writing you are 6.7kilo. Your health visitor has completed your 4.5 month development review and you are meeting your age expected milestones, which is fantastic. FC has shared that in the last 3 months, you have accompanied them on various trips and outings such as visiting a new country of Scotland, going to Butlins and you enjoy going out in your pram in the community exploring, taking in your surrounding. FC described you are becoming more active and personable each day and that you are an absolute delight to care for. Next steps, in respect of your care plan A, is C will complete the assessment of your great maternal uncle and mum will explore if she can obtain an extension to engage with C as part of her assessment. Whilst all of the assessments are being undertaken, you will continue to be cared for by your foster carers who love and value you greatly. I have set another date to review your care plan for 6 months 26/06/2023. Your IRO

Dear

This was your first child in care review, following you becoming looked after. You left the hospital following your premature birth at 19 days old and moved straight to the care of J, following the granting of an Interim Care Order by the Court on the same day. An assessment of mummy is being completed to see if she is able to care for you in the future and given she has not put anyone else's names forward, twin tracking has been agreed. This means that in the future you will either return to mummy's care or permanence will be achieved for you by way of adoption. This decision is not taken lightly and your social worker will work with everyone to ensure the wise Judge in Court is given all the information to make a forever decision for you. social worker agreed to finalise your My Care Plan within 10 days of your review, that being 08/06/23 and this is to be shared with mummy and daddy on completion. I was pleased to hear you have settled well into J's care and your development is evident, which was agreed by everyone in your review including you mummy. A great photo was shared with everyone of you in your swimming costume, we all joked that by your next review in 3 months time you will have hopefully grown into it! I'm so looking forward to seeing your development over the next few months and I look forward to visiting you again before your next review on 08/08/23. Best wishes

Appendix B: One-page profiles of 2 new IROs

Hi! My name is Nina Loyal.
Here is some information about me...



What makes me happy?

Helping others to have a good and happy life.
Seeing people being treated fairly and with respect.
Performing random acts of kindness whenever I can.
Knowing that people I care about are doing well.
Relaxing at home with absolutely no chores left to do!
Eating chocolate and ice-cream (a little bit too much!)

Things people like about me

I am always truthful, thoughtful and kind.
People have told me that I am good at listening and helping.
I speak up when I see that things are not right or unfair. I think that usually people need to know more about a situation so they can understand others better.
I look at the whole story before having an opinion about something.

I might feel sad when

People being negatively judged. For example because of their skin colour, language, heritage, ability, gender, mental health and other things about them or their situation.
The people I care about are unhappy or unwell.
Something unfair or unkind is happening.

As an IRO, it is my job to make sure that :-

- your care plan meets your needs and is based on a proper assessment of these.
 - decisions taken are ones that are best for you, follow your care plan and respect your rights.
 - I know how you feel and what you want to happen.
 - you know how to get hold of an advocate
 - plans for you are made as quickly as possible so you can feel settled in your home.
 - everyone is doing what they should be and within the time agreed.
 - you feel able to attend your review meeting and be in charge of it with me if you are comfortable to.
- There is much more to what I do but I can tell you about that when we meet.

I need a little help with

Hearing things well.
To make things easier, I often wear hearing aids.
It helps if people speak clearly and look at me when they are talking.
It helps me to 'hear' more clearly if I see facial expressions and lip movements as well as the words being spoken.

I am really looking forward to meeting you
and getting to know more about you 😊



My name is Liz White. I am an IRO (Independent Reviewing Officer), and this is my 1-page profile!



What makes me happy?

Getting to know People and learning about their experiences

Listening to music and going to festivals

Watching films and Netflix series and Anime

Exercising, if I'm not eating chocolates and food

Knowing that I listen to the young people I work with, and support them the best I can



Things people like about me

I am friendly, and easy to talk to

I am always kind to people

That I always do my best to help people

I might feel sad when

When the young people I support are not happy, and feel that their voice is not being heard

I need a little help with

Getting to know you, and your journey. How are you feeling about coming a child, young person in care?

Who are the people most important to you? and how they can support you

What IROs do – My job is to make sure that YOUR Care Plan meets your needs.

These are **your** reviews, so it is very important that you make sure I know how you feel and what you would want to happen. This includes letting me or your social worker know who you want to come to your meeting and where you would like to have your meeting. It could be where you are living, your school, Virtual meeting, our office or somewhere else you feel comfortable, but it must be a private place where no-one else can hear us.

- ❖ Ideally you will attend your review if suitable.
- ❖ If you want to, I will help you to chair your review meeting, if you feel you don't want to, I can chair the meeting, or we can do it together
- ❖ I will make sure you have your own say in your review; and
- ❖ After the meeting I will do my best to make sure that people do what they agreed to do during the meeting.
- ❖

There is more to what I do, but I can tell you about that when we meet.

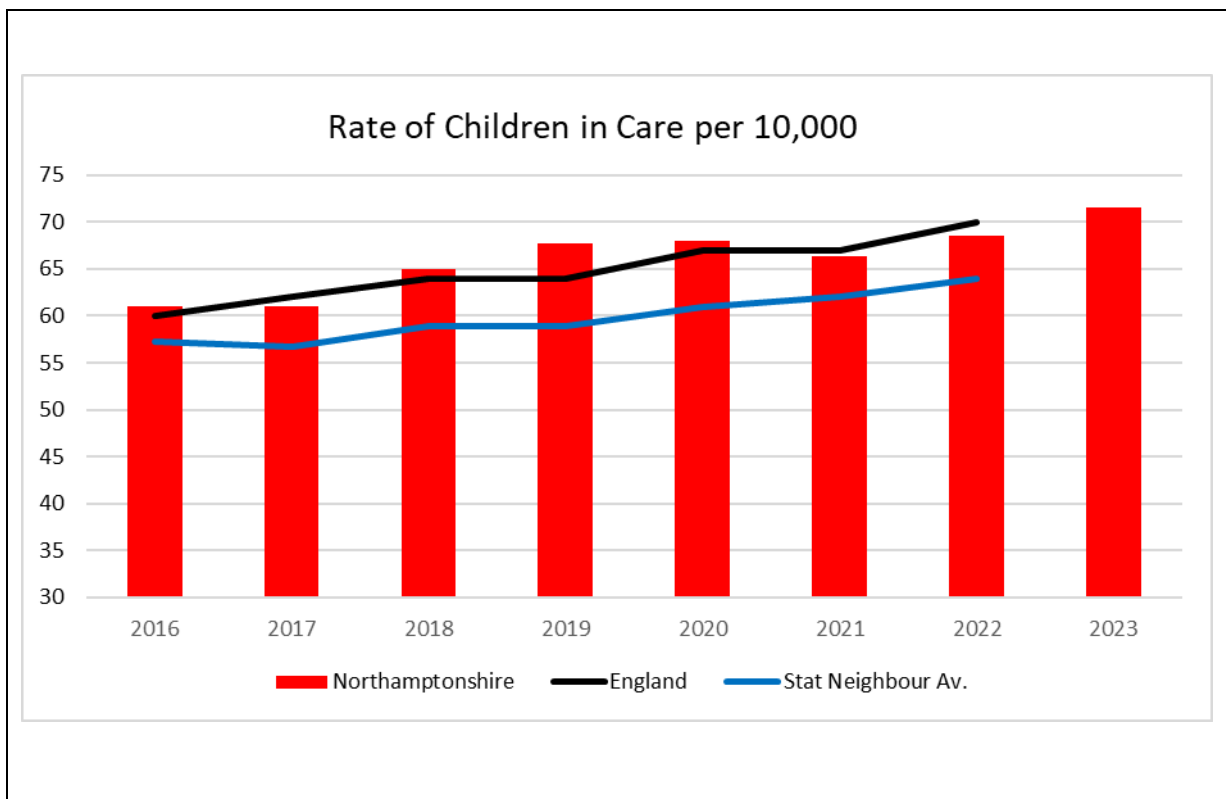
Appendix C - Children in care - data trends

Participation Data April 2022 to March 2023

Participation	0-3		4-6		7-9		10-15		16+		Grand Total
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
PN0 Under 4 at time of review2	527	99%	40	14%	32	10%	18	2%	11	1%	628
PN1 Attended spoke for her/himself	0	0	19	7%	43	13%	400	36%	510	64%	972
PN2 Attended spoke via an advocate	0	0	0	0%	1	0%	1	0%	6	1%	8
PN3 Attended used non verbal means	0	0	2	1%	0	0%	1	0%	2	0%	5
PN4 Attended did not convey views	0	0	4	1%	2	1%	6	1%	2	0%	14
Attended Total	527	99%	65	22%	78	24%	426	39%	531	67%	1627
PN5 Did not attend spoke via an advocate	0	0	13	4%	13	4%	32	3%	6	1%	64
PN6 Did not attend used other means	0	0	130	45%	158	49%	403	37%	114	14%	805
PN7 Did not attend did not convey views	0	0	57	20%	47	15%	145	13%	81	10%	330
Did not attend total	0	0	200	69%	218	68%	580	53%	201	25%	1199
Not recorded	3	1%	25	9%	26	8%	93	8%	63	8%	210
Grand Total	530		290		322		1099		795		3036

Participation	Grand Total
PN0 Under 4 at time of review2	628
PN1 Attended spoke for her/himself	972
PN2 Attended spoke via an advocate	8
PN3 Attended used non verbal means	5
PN4 Attended did not convey views	14
PN5 Did not attend spoke via an advocate	64
PN6 Did not attend used other means	805
PN7 Did not attend did not convey views	330
Not recorded	210
Grand Total	3036

Rate of Children in Care:



Commentary

The Northamptonshire child in care rate has steadily increased since 2016. At a rate of 71.6 per 10,000 head of population at the end of March 2023, it is above national (70). IROs continue, together with Children in Care team, to review cases of children who are having regular contact with family to assess if significant changes have been made that can enable children to safely return to the care of their family.

Gender of children and young people in care at End March 2023

	Male	%	Female	%	Total
2017/18	596	55%	488	45%	1084
2018/19	613	55%	502	45%	1115
2019/20	638	55%	525	45%	1163
2020/21	620	54%	523	46%	1143
2021/22	650	55%	536	45%	1185
2022/23	709	58%	517	42%	1226

Comparisons to National and Population statistics

Gender

	Northamptonshire 2023 (%)		England 2022 (%)	
	Children looked after	Population	Children looked after	Population
Male	58	51	56	51
Female	42	49	44	49
Commentary				
The above table shows that more boys than girls come into to care both locally and nationally compared girls.				

Ethnicity of children and young people in care at end March 2023

	All Children looked after %	Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children %	Non-Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children %
White	77%	6%	83%
Mixed	9%	1%	10%
Asian or Asian British	2%	20%	0%
Black or black British	7%	31%	4%
Other ethnic group	3%	24%	1%
Not stated			
Not recorded	4%	18%	2%

Comparisons to National and Population statistics

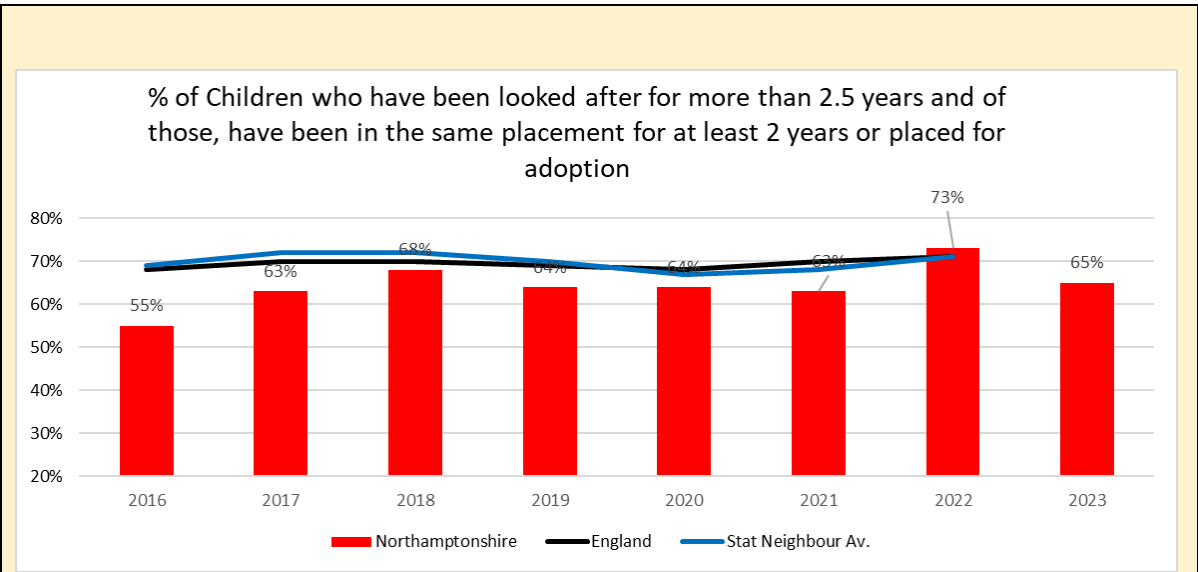
	Northamptonshire		England 2022	
	Children looked after %	Population %	Children looked after %	Population %
White	77%	83%	73%	74%
Mixed	9%	6%	10%	6%
Asian	2%	5%	5%	11%
Black	7%	5%	7%	6%
Other	3%	1%	4%	2%

Commentary

The above tables show that children and young people who are from mixed and other minority background are over-represented - both locally and nationally, when compared to the general population.

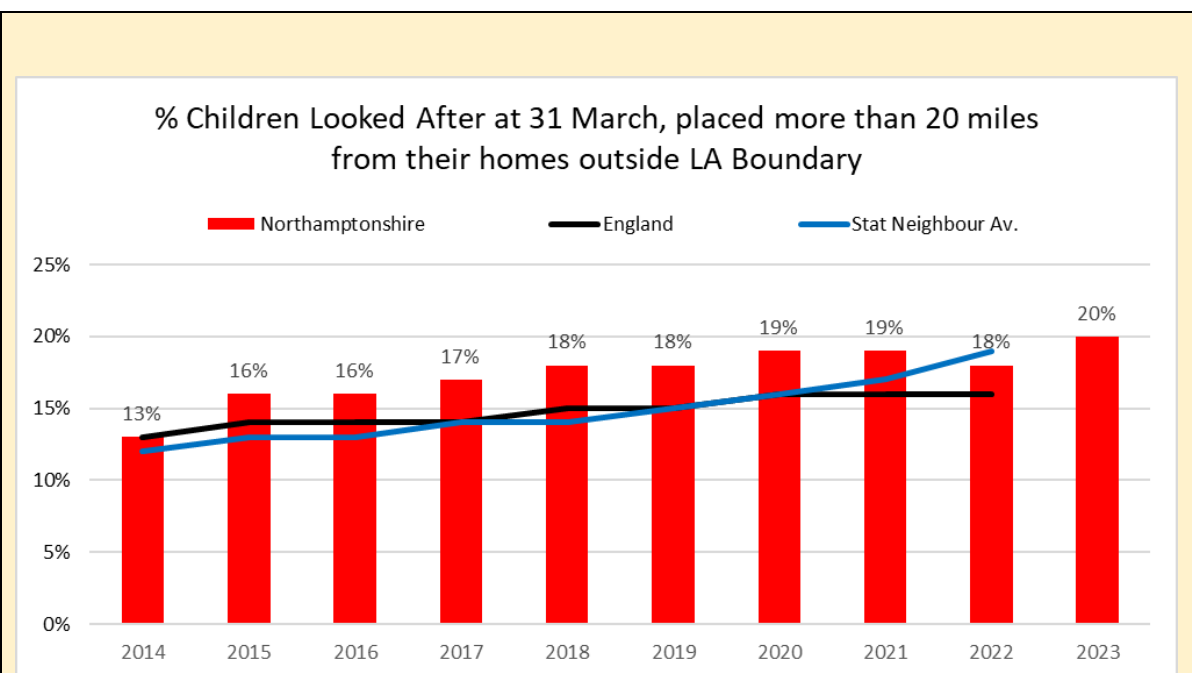
Children in Care at end March 2023 by age and placement type

	Under 1	1-4	5-10	10-15	16+	Grand Total
Children's Home	5	2	6	66	60	139
Fostering	41	85	135	265	96	622
Fostering (Friends & Family)	5	38	63	76	23	205
Independent living	0	0	0	7	135	142
Placed for adoption	0	9	4	0	0	13
Placed with parents	6	20	22	28	12	88
Residential care home/School	0	0	0	2	4	6
Other	3	1	0	2	5	11
Grand Total	60	155	230	446	335	1226



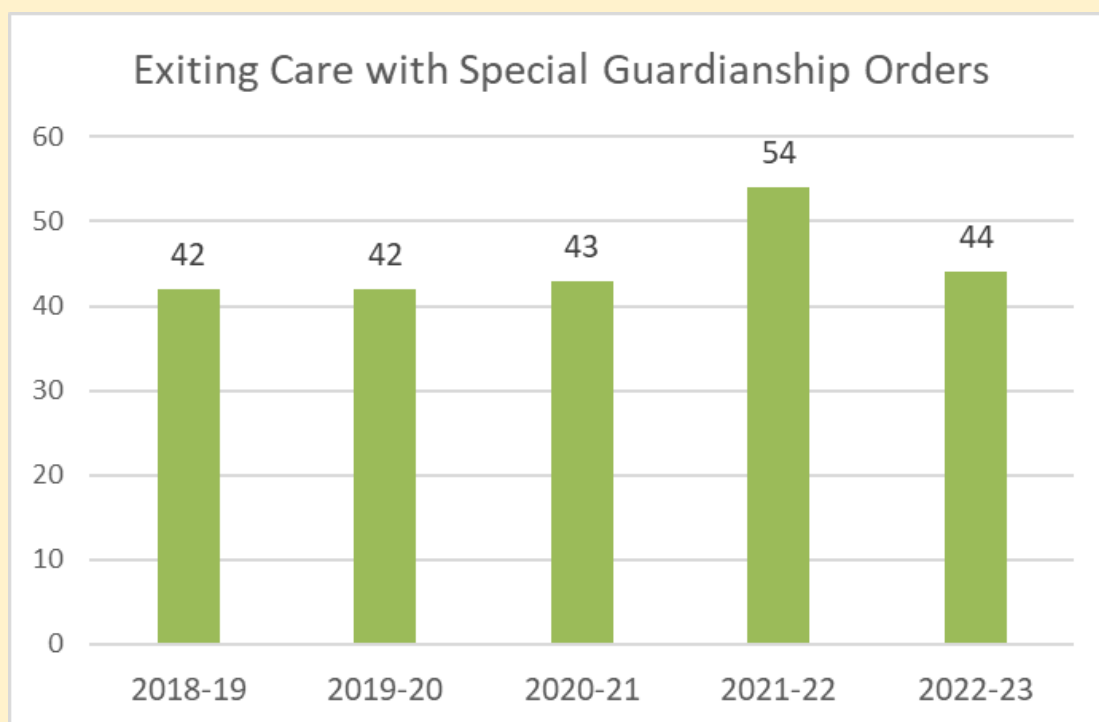
Commentary

This chart shows a decline for 2023, with the provisional end of March 2023 being 75%. The IRO Service has been involved in supporting stability through attendance at stability meetings and also within Circles to Success and tracking for permanence planning.



Commentary

The chart above shows the number of children placed 20 miles or more away from their family home and outside the Northamptonshire boundary. In some cases this means they could be closer to their family home than being placed in-county, which spans 56 miles along its axis. Placement sufficiency is a key concern local and nationally resulting in some children and young people having to be placed out of county.



Commentary

This chart shows that 44 children were made subject to a SGO in the year April 2022 to Mar 2023. Children in Care teams continue put forward plans for SGO as route to permanency with connected carers. IROs together with Social Worker also encourage foster carers to consider applying for SGOs for children who have been in long-term stable placements.

For the period April 2022 to end of Mar 2023

- Timeliness of reviews held compared to previous years

	2021-22	2022-23
% of Children in Care with their 1st review on time	78.9%	82.6%
% of Children in Care with their 2nd review on time	88.0%	88.3%
% of Children in Care with their subsequent review on time	93.2%	92.7%



Placement Sufficiency Strategy October 2022- March 2025

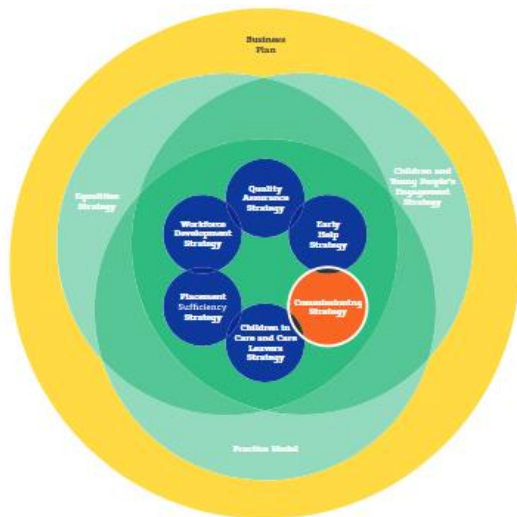
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1. Introduction

At Northamptonshire Children’s Trust we are dedicated to ensuring children, young people and families are at the heart of all we do – in every action we take and every decision we make. We know that what we do today affects children and young people’s tomorrows and we are focused on helping children and young people to live safe, be safe; fulfil potential; develop resilience and enjoy good health and wellbeing.

Our Placement Sufficiency Strategy sets out how we will ensure children in our care and care leavers have a home that is safe and suitable for their individual needs, where they are supported by people who care for them and about them to be achieve their full potential, develop resilience, enjoy good health and wellbeing and develop into adulthood. This will enable us to fulfil the *Sufficiency Duty*¹ along with West and North Northamptonshire councils by ensuring sufficient accommodation is secured that meets the needs of the children in our care and care leavers. Our Placement Sufficiency Strategy connects to the other core NCT strategies that together deliver our overall business plan:



In particular, it reflects the ethos and practice for working with children in care and care leavers, as set out in our Children in Care and Care Leavers Strategy 2021-25:

¹ Section 22G of the Children Act 1989

- 1** **Children and young people are best cared for wherever possible with their birth family or extended family.**

We recognise the strengths that are present in every family and help families to arrive at their own solutions to their own difficulties; we believe children are best raised within their birth family network and will do all we can to support this. We will ensure that the children in our care are only those who need to be in our care.
- 2** **Children and young people will live in homes that take account of their needs and preferences.**

We will work to ensure that positive opportunities and effective help are available at the earliest opportunity – encouraging children and young people to be ambitious and make the choices that mean they can thrive and achieve. Children's care will be well planned, promote stability and reduce the need for placement changes and emergency placements.
- 3** **Permanence and a sense of belonging will be secured for children and young people.**

Relationship-based practice will strengthen the relationships that are important to children and help them to stay connected to those people they love and are important to them.
- 4** **Aim high and have high expectations.**

We work with children young people and the families in which they live to ensure that they receive the support and services they need to live happy, healthy and successful lives.
- 6** **Children and young people develop positive and stable relationships with those who support them.**

Retaining a stable and resilient workforce which will empower and enable children, young people and families to achieve their full potential.
- 5** **Good outcomes for children and young people are achieved through a collaborative approach with partner agencies.**

Children, young people and their families experience consistent joined up approaches to assessing and meeting their needs.
- 7** **The views, opinions, needs and priorities of children in care and care leavers inform everything we do.**

We listen and observe attentively to children, young people and families, and respond to what they are telling us in order to inform how we improve the delivery of our services.

And is key to achieving this aspect of our pledge to children in care and care leavers, by achieving the outcome of *increased sufficiency of local placements so there is more choice for children:*

Make sure you are living in the right place

In delivering our Sufficiency Strategy we keep in mind what our Children in Care Council have told us about what **makes a good home**

People	Place	Other things that matter
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Motivate me • Support with medical needs and appointments • Kind hearted • Gentle • Patient • Approachable • Caring 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nice family who want to involve you in their family • Having someone there for you • Good company • Boundaries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Warm comfy environment • My own bed • My own space • Good food • Pets • Blankets • Safe
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activities to do • Groups to go to • Have access to things you like • Good school • Sense of belonging • Pocket money and budgeting

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having a voice is the most important • Someone to talk to • Friends • Need respect • Larger family wanting to be involved with the young people • Strict but fair • Organised • Mother / father figure • Agree rules 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being able to freely express myself without judgement • Help me with my future • Life skills • Help with homework • Informed about trauma and how it affects me • Understand feelings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respect my privacy • Wi-Fi • Own computer • Clean 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Happiness • Good birthday and Christmases • Holidays
--	--	--	--

Our Strategy is delivered within the **NCT Strategic framework**



Strategic Framework

Vision

Children, Young People and Families at the heart of all we do - in every action we take and every decision we make.

Our Commitment

(co-produced with children and young people)

What we do today affects your tomorrow, we promise to walk side by side with you

Outcomes Framework



Conditions for Success



2. Our journey since 2020

In Northamptonshire, the vast majority of our children in care are cared for in stable placements that are meeting their needs, supporting them to achieve positive outcomes and progression towards independence. Compared with 2020/21, a higher proportion of children who have been in care for 2.5 years or more have been living in the same placement for 2+ years or placed for adoption (68% YTD at August 2022 compared with 63% in 2020/21), bringing us in line with our statistical neighbours.

We use a mixed model of inhouse and external fostering, children's homes and supported accommodation to meet the needs of our children and young people. The majority of our children

are living in children's homes or foster care that is rated good or outstanding by Ofsted. This means we are assured that children receive good quality care and we can see how this helps them achieve good outcomes through their care or pathway plan reviews.

We have improved the quality of our NCT IFA (Independent Fostering Agency), which is now judged as 'requires improvement to be good' by Ofsted, and we continue to deliver activity to further improve the quality of the services delivered by our IFA. The vast majority of our NCT children's homes and those on our 'block contract' (where we have sole use of the homes delivered by an external provider) are judged to be good or outstanding by Ofsted. At the time of writing, 2 of the 14 NCT and block contract homes were judged as 'requires improvement to be good' and have plans in place to achieve an improved rating. All provision on our residential and IFA frameworks are rated good or outstanding by Ofsted. In the main any spot purchased registered provision we commission is rated good or outstanding.

Our 2020 – 2022 Sufficiency Strategy was delivered in a context of major local, national and global challenges and changes: The Covid 19 pandemic impacted our lives in a way most had not previously experienced and we continue to see the impact on children and families' mental health, pressure and dynamics in families, which has been exacerbated by cost of living increases in 2022. Nationally, there has been increased demand in public and specialist services whilst recruitment and retention challenges in care and social work have grown, and risks to children from outside their homes in the form of exploitation continues to cause serious safeguarding issues, trauma and stress to children and those who care for them across the country.

As is the case nationally, we have seen an increase in demand for our support, an increase in the complexity of needs of children and an increase in numbers of children in care as we emerged from lock downs. NCT have seen an increased number of safeguarding referrals; 43,393 initial contacts were received by children's social care across 2021/22, which is 2,020 more than 20/21. The number of children in care in August 2022 was 1218 in comparison with 1143 at March 2021. We also saw an increase from 785 children in placements in Apr 2021 to 888 in June 2022. Additionally, since 2020/21 we have seen an increase in the proportion of our children in care who have had 3+ placement moves in the last 12 months, and this is higher than England and statistical neighbour averages.

During this time, it has also been recognised that the placements market is not meeting the needs of children or local authorities: [Final Report - The Independent Review of Children's Social Care \(independent-review.uk\) \(June 2022\)](#); and The Competition and Markets Authority report on Children's Social Care [Final report - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#) (March 2022)

Within this challenging context, we have remained relentless in our drive to achieve the priorities of our 2020- 2022 Sufficiency Strategy:

- Improved placement stability
- Improved outcomes for children and young people
- Improved sufficiency of NCT fostering
- Improved sufficiency of placements
- Reduction of placement costs

The impact of this activity is that we now have a better early help offer which is having a positive impact enabling families to remain together or be reunited. We have improved our understanding of needs and have delivered plans to provide access to a greater number of fostering, children's homes and independent supported accommodation that is suitable to meet the needs of our children. We have reviewed our processes to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of placement searches to

enable the right placement to be found in a more timely way and have improved our quality assurance activity to ensure action is taken swiftly to address any concerns and better value for money is achieved. Many of the activities will continue as we move into the delivery of our 2022-25 Sufficiency Strategy and the continuing national sufficiency challenges and increase in demand mean this remains a top priority for NCT.

A summary of what we did to deliver these priorities and the impact on children and young people is provided at **Appendix 1**.

3. Sufficiency Assessment 2022 - Our children

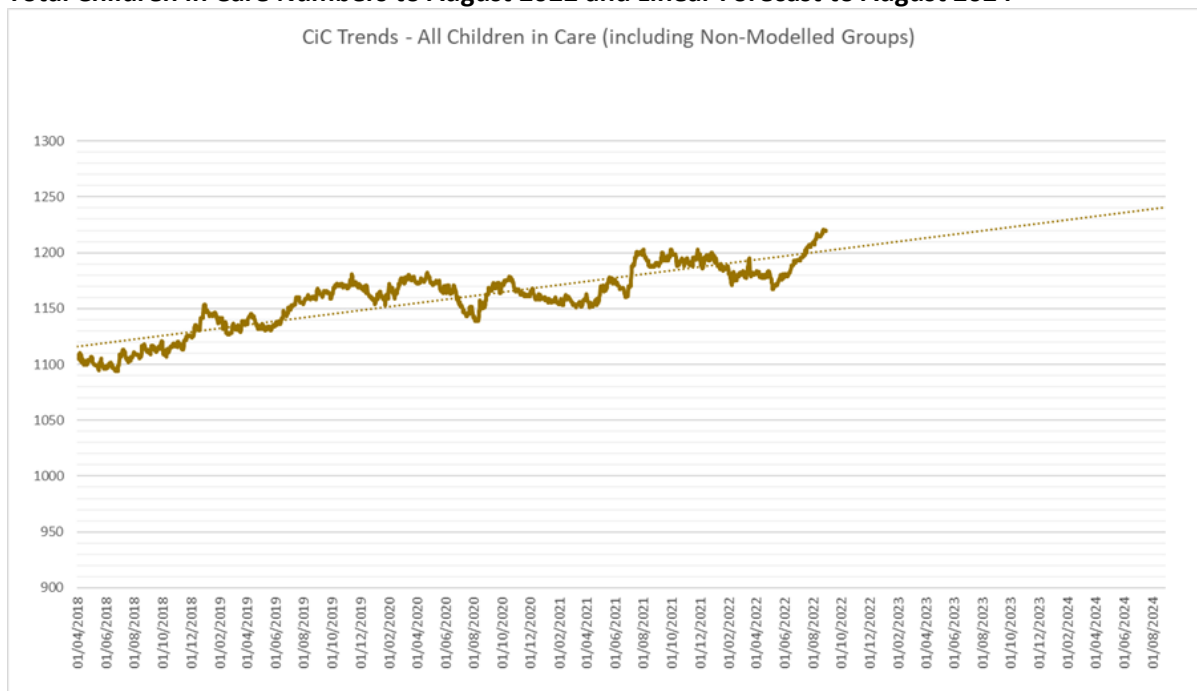
Number of Children in Care and Forecast

At the time of the 2020 -2022 Sufficiency Strategy, there were 1163 children in care. The linear forecast at that time was 1254 children in care by March 2022. As at 31st March 2022, there were 1184 children in care, 70 less children than our forecast. The number may have been lower than expected due to the Covid 19 pandemic and lockdowns from March 2020 when the number of children in care remained steady.

Overall numbers of children in care increased from 1094 to 1184 across 4 years up to March 22, which is an 8% increase. April – August 2022 has seen a further increase to 1218. This is likely due to the impact of the pandemic followed by a significant cost of living crisis, as well as separated children arriving after the allied withdrawal from Afghanistan. Using the Placement Modelling tool from the Data to Insights project with August 2022 data, a straight linear trend line estimates the August 2024 total care population at 1241². The forecasting tool also provides a lower and upper confidence intervals of 1185 and 1257 respectively. NB because the tool forecasts up to 2 years ahead and the current cost of living crisis could have a major impact on children needing to come into care, we will re-run the forecast every 3-6 months and adjust our plans accordingly.

² The term ‘modelled groups’ refers to children in care in foster placements, residential or supported accommodation. It excludes groups where modelling is not created – e.g. adoption placements, placements with parents and other placements.

Total Children in Care Numbers to August 2022 and Linear Forecast to August 2024



Based on current trend, the tool provides a forecast by age and placement type as per the table below:

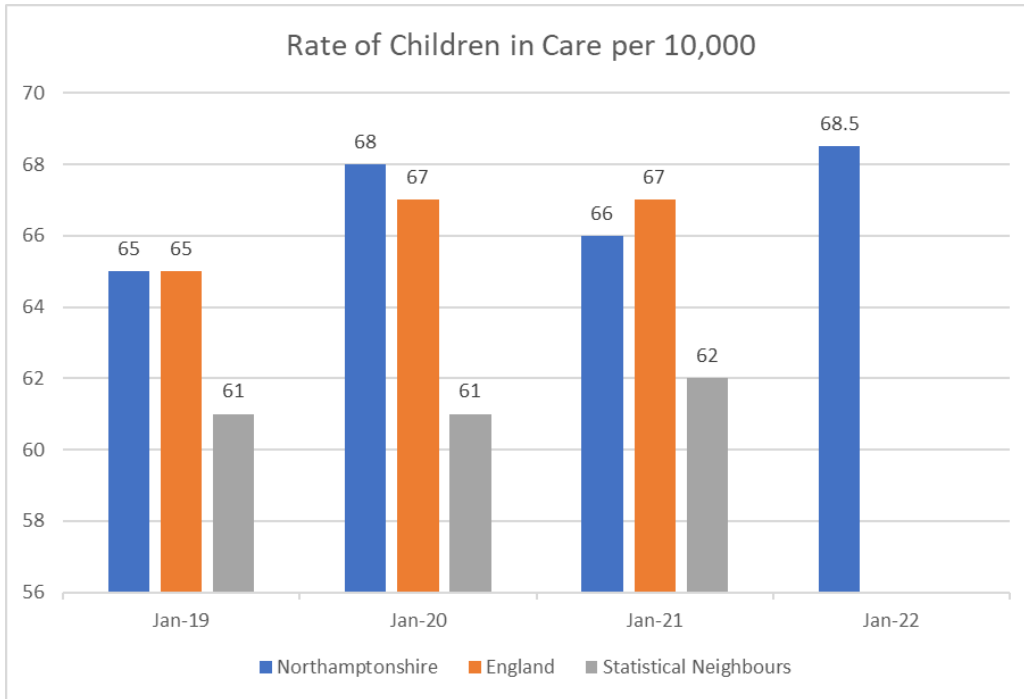
2024 Forecast Summary Figures for children likely to require fostering, residential and supported accommodation: Placement Type and Age

	Total - All	Total Modelled (Fos, Res, Supp)	Fos	Res	Supp	Age 0	Age 1_4	Age 5_9	Age 10_15	Age 16_18
31/03/2022 Actual	1184	1062	844	131	87	57	115	207	440	243
31/08/2022 Actual	1218	1093	847	139	109	43	136	188	441	285
31/08/2024 Tool Forecast	1221	1085	861	134	90	48	123	201	461	252
Base LCI	1185	1048	830	122	77	36	110	186	441	234
Base UCI	1257	1121	892	146	103	60	136	216	481	270
31/03/24 Linear Trend Forecast	1241	1114	862	141	111	44	139	192	449	290
% change Aug 2022 to tool forecast	0.2%	-0.7%	1.7%	-3.6%	-17.4%	11.6%	-9.6%	6.9%	4.5%	-11.6%

The forecast shows an expected increase in the numbers of children aged 5- 15 years and an expected increase in demand for fostering.

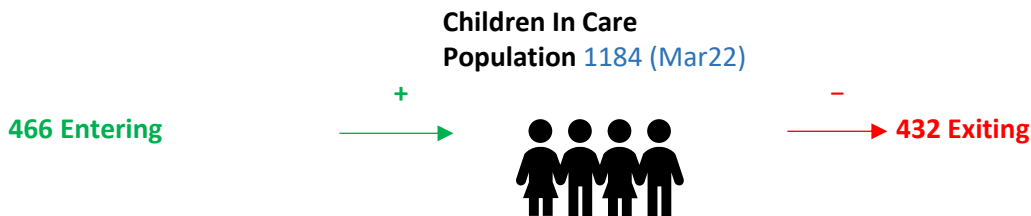
Rate of Children in Care per 10,000

As at March 2022, the rate of children in care per 10,000 was 68.5. This is slightly higher than the latest available national average 67 per 10,000. As with the number of children in care, the rate per 10,000 has increased since 2019.



Please note the rate of children in care data for England and Statistical Neighbours will be not released until November 2022.

Number of Children Entering and Exiting Care (all under 18s) April 21 – March 22



Gender and Age of Children in Care

In Northants, the proportion of **boys and girls** in care remained steady in 2020/21 (54%/46% respectively) and 2021/22 (55%/45% respectively). There were 194 females entering care in 2021/22 compared to 272 males.

This was similar to the latest available national data of children in care from 2020/21 (55.9% boys and 44.1% girls). Boys are overrepresented in the care system in comparison to both the county and national demographics.

Census data 2021

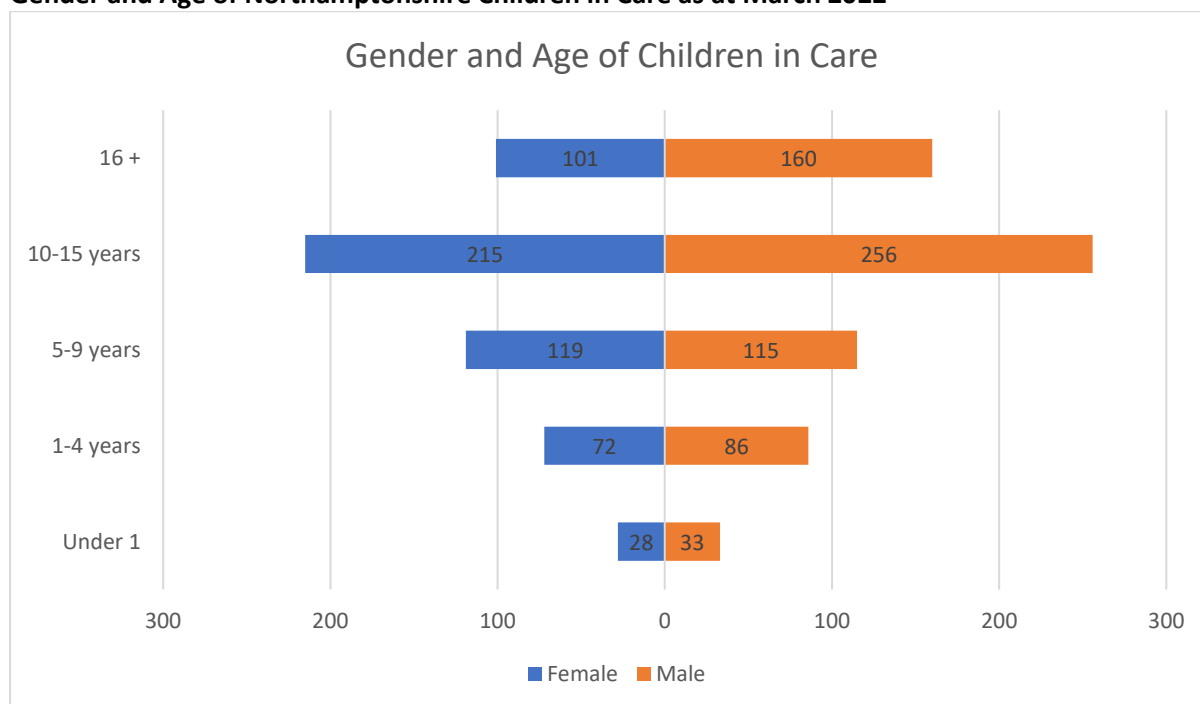
0-19 years old Northamptonshire	%
Male	51.04%

Female	59.86%
0-19 years old England & Wales	%
Male	51.23%
Female	48.77%

A What Works for Children’s Social Care study (2021) highlighted that boys are more likely to externalise emotions. There is some evidence to suggest that children who externalise are more likely to make positive progress in residential care³.

The **age group** with the highest number of children in care and entering care is the 10–15-year-old age group. We know that a significant number of this age group has a care plan of long-term fostering.

Gender and Age of Northamptonshire Children in Care as at March 2022



The largest group of children entering care during 21-22 were 10-15 year olds.

Entrants (March 21- 22)			Grand Total
	Females	Males	
Under 1	36	40	76
1-4 years	31	37	68

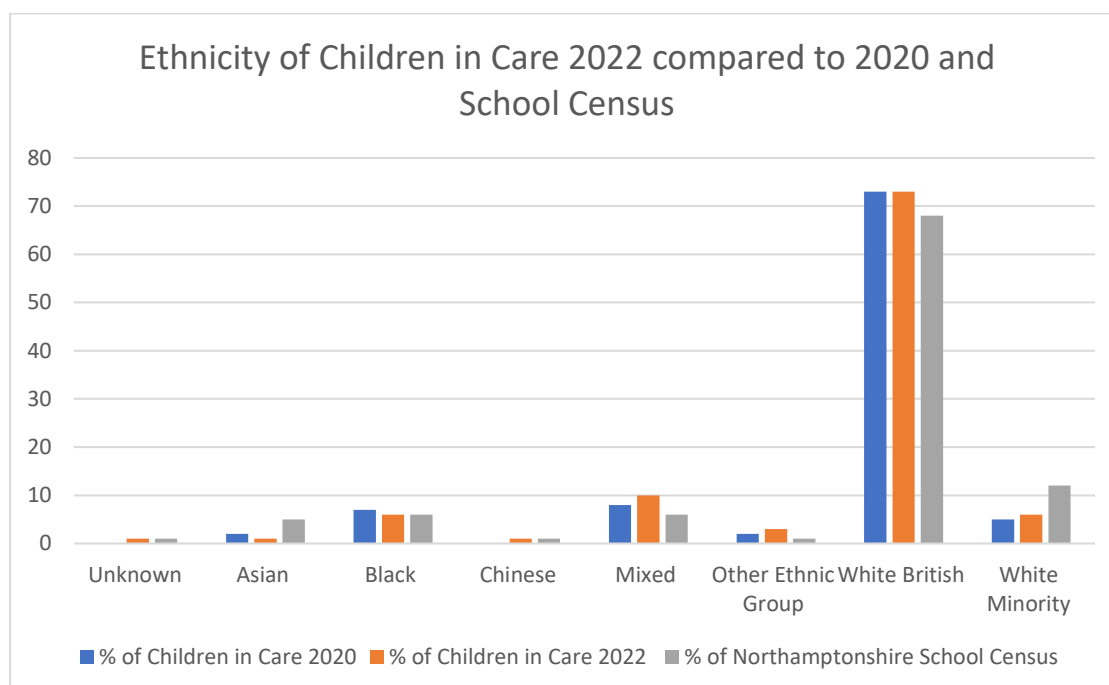
³ What Works for Children’s Social Care (2021) ‘Residential Care’, *Comparing the outcomes of residential care with other types of placement, such as foster care*. Available at: <https://whatworks-csc.org.uk/evidence/evidence-store/intervention/residential-care/#:~:text=Overall%2C%20residential%20care%20had%20no%20effect%20on%20children%E2%80%99s,care%20when%20both%20were%20providing%20%E2%80%98care%20as%20usual%E2%80%99>

5-9 years	39	59	98
10-15 years	63	72	135
16 +	25	64	89

Ethnicity of Children in Care

The largest ethnic group of children in care is White British, with 865 (73%) children and young people. The second largest is children from any other White Background (61 children, 5%) followed by African (50 children, 4%). The lowest number of children in care ethnic groups are Chinese (>5), Asian (>5) and Other Ethnic Groups (>5)⁴.

The profile of children in care is slightly different to the Northamptonshire school population as a whole with White British and Mixed Ethnicity being slightly overrepresented in the children in care population. This is change from 2019 when Black children were slightly overrepresented in the Northamptonshire care system compared with the school population.



Children In Care with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

There are 198 children in care with an EHCP (Education, Health, and Care Plan) (at March 22). 4099 children in Northamptonshire have an EHCP, which is 3.3% of all children. Of the 767 children in care who are of statutory school age 26% of children in care have an EHCP. Therefore, of the 4099 children in Northamptonshire that have an EHCP 198 of them are children in care which is 5% meaning that children with an EHCP are slightly over represented in the care system.

⁴ The ethnicity categories used are those used in the Census and further definitions and information can be found here: [List of ethnic groups - GOV.UK \(ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.service.gov.uk/ethnicity-facts-figures) and [Writing about ethnicity - GOV.UK \(ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.service.gov.uk/ethnicity-facts-figures).

There are currently 43 children in full time care in the Disabled Children’s service, 27 of whom are in residential care.

Needs of Children in Care

Reasons for Children Coming into Care over 2021/22 were:

Entrants by Reason	Entrants
Socially unacceptable behaviour	12
Parental disability or illness	12
Low income	0
Family in acute stress	23
Family dysfunction	79
Child's disability	7
Abuse or neglect	205
Absent parenting	50
Cases other than children in need	78

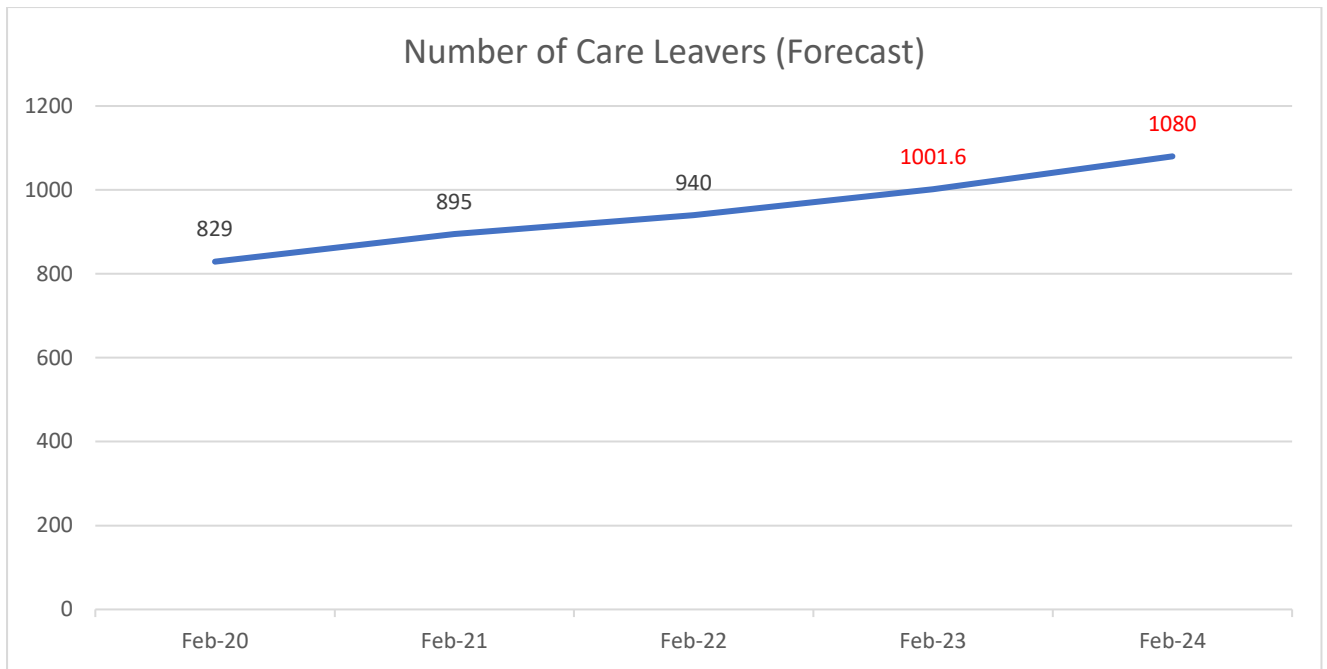
The most frequent reason for children coming into care is because of abuse or neglect. This means we will need placements that can support children who have experienced abuse and neglect and the effect this can have on children’s presenting behaviour, particularly as they reach teenage years.

Leaving Care

In March 22, 940 young people above the age of 16 were being supported by the Leaving Care team.

Leaving Care Cohort by Age	Grand Total (Mar 22)
16+17	258 (14 of whom are relevant so no longer in care)
18	146
19	140
20	165
21	100
22	55
23	47
24	29
Grand Total	940

Our projections tell us that this population is likely to grow to 1080 by 2024 which is an increase of 140 who are likely to require the support of the Leaving Care service (this includes 16 – 17 year olds supported by the service)



Number of Young People 18+ Entering and Exiting the Leaving Care Service Projections based on current age (April 22-March 24)

This projection is based on the number of 16 & 17 years old currently in care who may become care leavers and the number of 22 - 24-year-olds who are leaving care as shown in the diagram below.

The net gain in the care leavers population is potentially 127 by March 2024

It should be noted that over 21s choose whether they still want support from Leaving Care. However, it is envisaged with the forthcoming economic challenges faced in the UK, as well as other challenges facing young people such as mental health, that more care leavers may choose to stay supported.



The percentage of care leavers aged 17-21 and in employment, education or training was 60.6% and 92.5% were in suitable accommodation (August 2022), both above the national and statistical neighbour averages. This indicates the majority of our care leavers are on positive journeys to independence.

Separated Children

There are currently 68 separated children in care (also known as UASC – unaccompanied asylum-seeking children) and 48 entered care during 2021/22. 97% of the UASC population is male (66) and only 3% are female (less than 5). Out of the 48 UASC who entered care during 2021/22, 85% (41) are 16 or 17 years old. Only 7 (14%) are 10 to 15 years old. The number of separated children arriving in

the UK is impacted by international issues such as wars and will need to be monitored carefully to adjust plans according to any large increases.

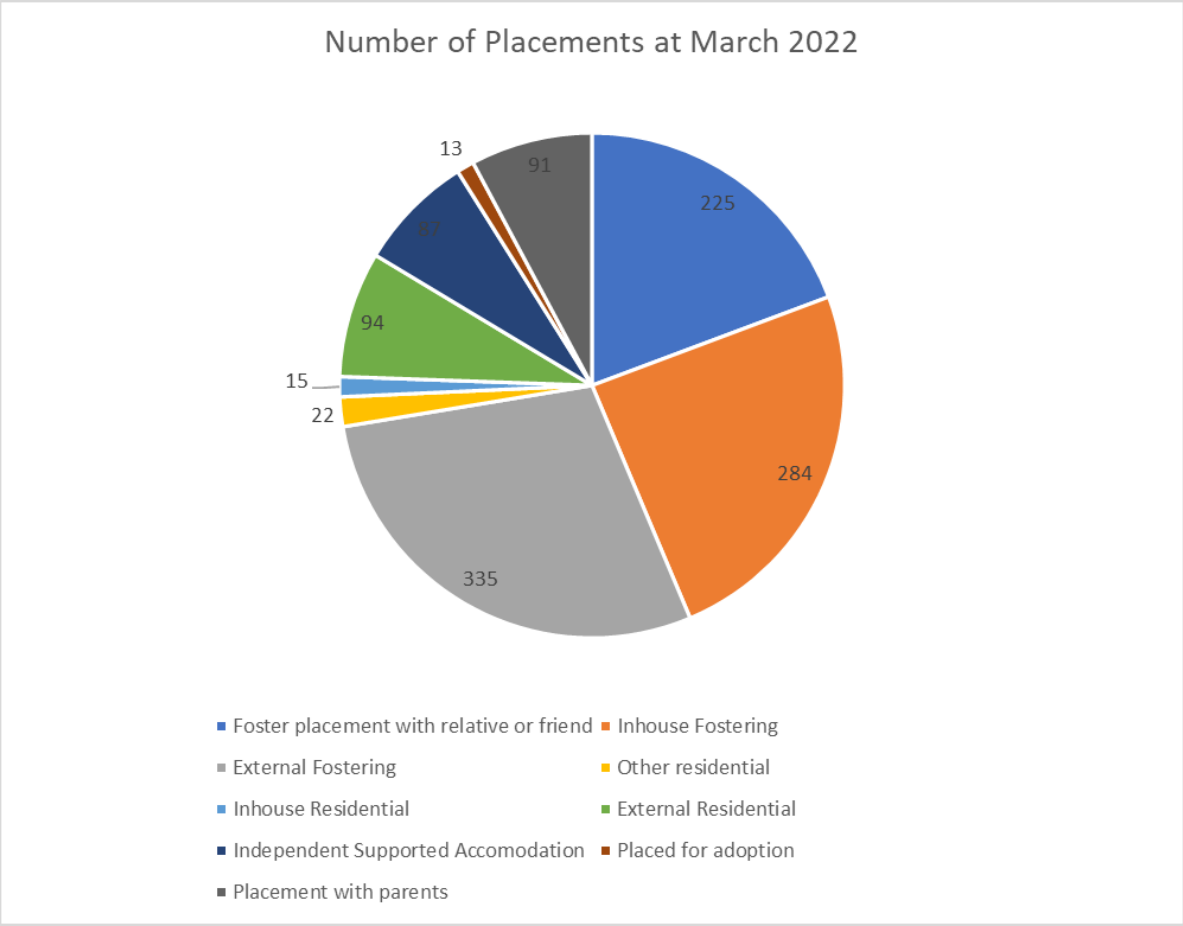
Age	UASC	Former UASC population (care leavers)
14	1	
15	3	
16	19	
17	45	1
18		43
19		50
20		56
21		24
22		19
23		14
24		8
Total	68	215
Grand total	283	

Of the 215 former separated children most have leave to remain status, 11 have no recourse to public funds and have the status of ARE (Appeal Rights Exhausted). All young people who are ARE will have a Human Rights Assessment before decisions are made as to next steps.

In the next year, according to the numbers above, 45 separated young people will become care leavers.

Current Placement Trends

Placement Types for CIC (Children In Care including separated children) and Care Leavers (including separated young people)



In March 22 the largest number of placements were with foster carers with 335 children placed with external fostering agencies and 284 with our internal foster carers. There were 94 children placed with external providers children’s homes. There were 82 under 18s in Independent Supported Accommodation and a further 204 over 18s were also in ISA placements.

49% of all placements for under 18s at end of August 22 were with external providers.

Separated children

For those externally commissioned placements we know that separated children and young people are placed in the following types of provision:

Placement Type	Number of Children in Care UASC
Supported Accommodation	37
Agency Fostering	15
Staying Put/Shared Lives	0

Placement Type	Number of Care Leavers UASC
Supported Accommodation	111
Agency Fostering	0
Staying Put/Shared Lives	10
HMOs	9

Planned and unplanned placement requests

We use the following definitions for our placement requests:

Planned	14 days notice or more
Short notice	4-13 days notice
Emergency	2-3 days notice
Crisis	Same day

The proportion of crisis placement requests have reduced since 2017 and the proportion of planned placements has increased. Planned placements allow for time to be taken for the best match to be found and therefore are more likely to have better outcomes for our children.

Placement Request Type	2017		2018		2019		2020		2021	
	CYP	%	CYP	%	CYP	%	CYP	%	CYP	%
Crisis	336	39%	444	37%	410	38%	308	35%	318	35%
Short Notice	264	31%	303	25%	259	24%	294	33%	280	30%
Planned	259	30%	452	38%	406	38%	283	32%	317	35%

58% of respondents to a People Too survey of our providers (Jan 22) said that the main reason they serve notice on a placement is due to challenging behaviour presented by the young person. The highest proportion (38%), when asked what would help more, said closer working and support from allocated social workers would be valuable.

There is a national shortage of placements that can receive children in an emergency or on the same day. To address this we are taking the following action:

- Taking actions to reduce placement breakdowns and need for emergency placements, informed by analysis completed on this in 2021 and 2022 (effective earlier intervention with families, effective multi disciplinary team and placement stability meetings, more effective and efficient placement request and brokerage processes, additional capacity to support NCT IFA and external placement stability)
- Focused recruitment of NCT emergency and short term foster carers
- Commissioning external emergency external foster carers
- Commissioned 2x new emergency children's homes (6 places in total) to be operational in Q3 22/23
- Secured continuation funding for therapeutic interventions for children in NCT foster care
- Improving our understanding of the impact for children of therapeutic support within placements

Type of placement requested vs type of placement secured

Due to the national sufficiency challenges it is not always possible to secure the same type of placement as that which was requested. This means the placement may not be completely in line with the child's care plan and a further move may be needed when a preferential type is available. Although it should be noted that more than one placement type may be suitable for a child. Data for the 12 month period of 1 Sept 21- 31 Aug 22 shows:

- Of the 688 children for whom a foster placement was requested, 49 went to residential care and 28 to supported accommodation – this suggests their needs could not be supported within available foster care places

- Of the 111 children for whom residential care was requested, 21 went to supported accommodation - this suggests their needs could not be supported within available residential care places

Unregulated/ Unregistered Placements

Places where children (other than disabled children) are accommodated while on holiday or taking part in leisure, sporting, cultural or educational activities where each individual child stays there for less than 28 days in any 12-month period, do not require registration with Ofsted and are unregulated. The child would however require a main placement, that should be regulated.

THE CARE PLANNING, PLACEMENT & CARE REVIEW (ENGLAND) (AMENDMENT) REGULATIONS 2021 came into force on 9 September 2021 and prohibit placement of children in care under 16 in unregulated / unregistered accommodation.

Where a service is **providing care for a child under the age of 18** in a static placement, this service must be registered by Ofsted. Failure to do so results in the placement being unregistered and therefore illegal. It is NCT policy that we do not place in an unregistered setting.

All young people over the age of 16 who have care needs and are living in accommodation other than foster care, are required to be placed in a children's home that is registered with Ofsted. Supported accommodation is not Ofsted registered and is therefore deemed an unregulated setting. We use the DfE published care and support checklist to confirm if care or support is being provided for over 16s if this is not immediately apparent. All independent and semi-independent provision for children in care and care leavers aged 16-17 will be required to register with Ofsted and subject to mandatory national standards from April 2023 and inspections from April 2024.

There are circumstances when it may be appropriate for a care home to be registered with CQC (Care Quality Commission) rather than as a children's home with Ofsted. If a child over the age of 16 is placed in accommodation because of their need for nursing care or personal care, the CQC provider would be suitable if registered to provide residential care and the child's plan indicates that would be the young person's permanent home beyond the age of 18. If the primary reason for placing a child in the accommodation is care that is not nursing care or personal care, it is likely this will be a children's home that should register with Ofsted.

Like children's services in other local authority areas, we have on occasion had to use unregulated provision for children under and over 16. This has been in the context of the national sufficiency challenges and there not being a suitable regulated provision available that could meet the needs of the individual child.

The decision to use unregulated/ unregistered provision is taken at Assistant Director level or above, with confirmation of how the placement can meet the child's needs, quality assurance checks and an unregulated placement risk assessment. Once a child is living in unregulated provision, IRO and senior management will continue alongside regular visits from the child's social worker and the Quality & Outcomes team. The Quality and Outcomes team continue to provide quality assurance and follow up any actions required of the provider with regards to quality, they will also provide advice and guidance regarding Ofsted registration and track progress of this.

As at 31st August 22, there were:

- 9 under 16s living in unregulated/ unregistered accommodation
- 9 over 16s living in Independent Supported Accommodation and receiving care

- 8 over 16s living in CQC registered provision, including 3 for whom the plan is for them to continue living in the placement after the age of 18

Of these children:

- A number had required a same day placement as a result of a police protection order and / or bail conditions meaning they could not return home
- A number were subject of deprivation of liberty order or applications were in progress
- A number had been living at a residential schools which had given notice and an alternative residential school had not yet been identified
- A number were living in provision that had applied or started the process to apply for Ofsted registration

There has been a commonality of needs of children for whom we have been unable to find regulated/ registered provision when the placement has been made and we are progressing plans to address this sufficiency needs

Needs	Progress so far on increasing our sufficiency to meet the need
Mental health issues, self-harm, suicide ideation	3 places planned - DfE capital bid in partnership with external provider and West Northants Council
Exploitation (particularly criminal and sexual)	Proposal to develop 3 NCT beds through unitary capital refurbishment scheme
Complex disabilities including ASD and behaviour that challenges	Additional 5 bed out of county children's home added to our block contract – operational from Nov 22
Trauma from a history of abuse	New provisions will provide trauma informed care

Emergency provision opening in the autumn 22 will provide 6 regulated beds with an external provider helping us to avoid need to make unregulated placements.

We are also commissioning a block contract for emergency same day and out of hours foster carers.

Unregulated foster care

If a child is placed with a connected person who is not approved under Regulation 24, or with a foster carer where the placement is not in accordance with their terms of approval, the placement is unlawful. Where it is in the best interests of the child to be in an unregulated foster care placements approval is required at Assistant Director level or above. A risk assessment and senior management oversight of actions will be in place.

There are 225 children living in Family and Friends Fostering arrangements. In July 22 11 of these arrangements were unregulated with the carers in the process of undertaking registration and training.

Proportion of Children living out of county and 20+ miles from their home

As at August 22, 17% of our children were living out of county and placed 20 miles or more from their home. This has decreased steadily from 19% in 2020/21 and 18% in 2021/22. We are now in line with our statistical neighbours and 1% point lower than the national average. Whilst in some instances an out of county placement is required, where it is not, we always seek to find a suitable home in county and within 20 miles of their home so they can continue to easily access support from local services and networks. We therefore need to continue to focus efforts on ensuring sufficient local provision that can meet children's needs

4. Current Sufficiency

Fostering

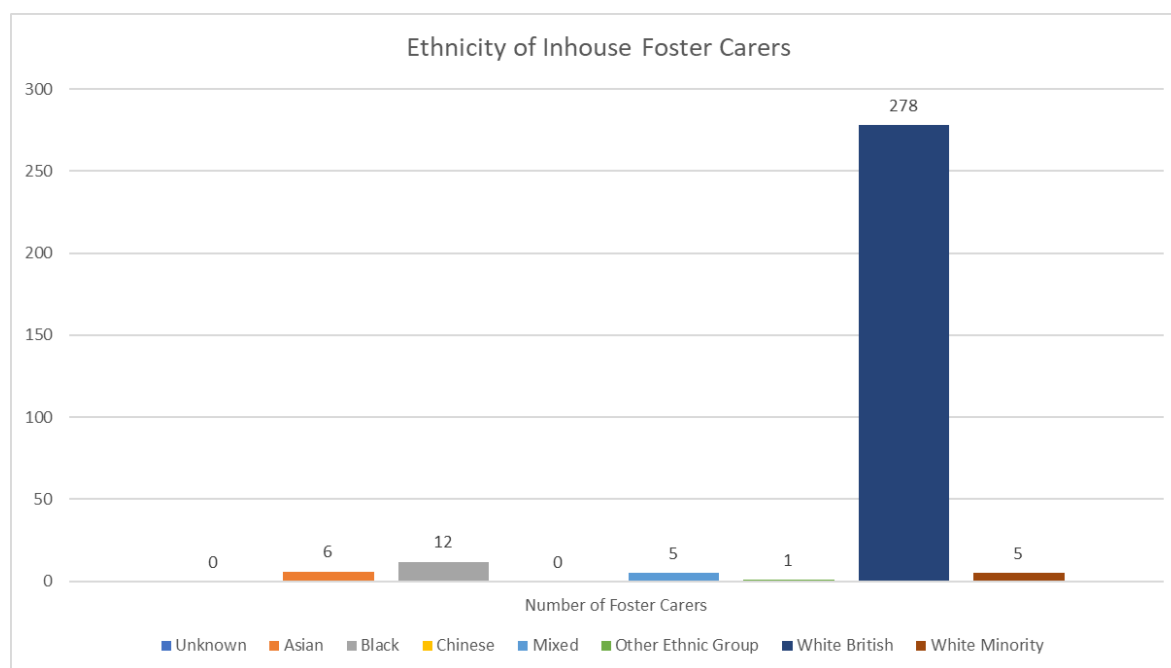
NCT Independent Fostering Agency

As at end of August 22, there were:

- 122 approved friends and family carers
- 207 approved foster carer households, providing up to 392 places, including:
 - o 44 long term specific
 - o 149 long term/ short term
 - o 5 emergency
 - o 5 resilience (for children with more complex needs / stepping down from residential)
 - o 2 parent and child
 - o 3 respite only

As at August 22, the NCT foster carer utilisation rate was 67% , with 27% of places not currently available (for example due to awaiting child moving in, carer holiday or to meet needs of a child). This doesn't include friends and family carers.

Ethnicity of NCT foster carers (including family and friends foster carers)



* Ethnicity of Carer 1

89% of NCT foster carers are White British with the second largest group of Black Ethnicity, followed by Asian and then Mixed Ethnicity. **This suggests it would be beneficial to recruit more carers from global majority backgrounds to provide more options of a cultural match for our children.**

Ethnicity	% Of inhouse Foster Carers	% Of Children in Care
White British	91%	73%
Black	4%	6%
Mixed	2%	10%

Gender of NCT foster carers

Carer 1	
Gender	
Female	274
Male	33

Carer 2	
Gender	
Female	30
Male	185

This data suggests it would be beneficial to increase our number of male carers particularly as the proportion of boys in care is higher than girls.

Location of NCT foster carers

Area Breakdown	
North	159
Out of County	29
West	119

This data suggests it would be beneficial to have additional carers in the West as the proportion of children in care from North and West is around 50/50

Ages of NCT foster carers

Age of Carer 1 (years)	Number of foster carers
21-30	6
31-40	36
41-50	84
51-60	111
61-70	60
71-80	9
81-90	1

59% of our foster carers are aged 51+ and 22% are aged 61+ so our recruitment plans need to take into account the likelihood of retirement for these carers

External Independent Fostering Agencies

As at August 22, have the following numbers of providers on our IFA framework (NB placements are purchased on an as needed basis according to matching with children and other local authorities also use these providers, so the placements are not guaranteed for NCT)

- Standard: 41
- Specialist: 8

The vast majority of our external fostering placements are made with providers on our framework (live placements as at 15/8/22). Making placements with providers on our frameworks can mean we are able to achieve better value for money and already have assurance of the quality of provision.

	No. of Framework placements	% of Framework placements	No. of Non-Framework placements	% of Non-Framework placements	Total number
External IFAs	320	87%	48	13%	368

Children's Homes

NCT have 5 Children's Homes, with capacity for up to 21 children. In August 22 our children's homes were at 76% occupancy. The statements of purpose have been reviewed to ensure that the needs of our population of children in care are met and help us to operate at a higher rate of occupancy.

NCT also has a strong partnership through a **Block Contract arrangement** where we work closely with a provider to deliver high quality homes for children. This provides homes for 32 children across 9 Northamptonshire locations which we have sole use of. Utilisation rate was 91% at end of Aug 22. In addition:

- During Q3 of 22/23 a further out of county home, providing up to 5 places will be operational within the block contract.
- During Q3 of 22/23 2 new emergency children's homes will be operational (one in West, one in North) providing up to 6 places as a block contract

NCT Children's Home Framework

As at August 22, we have the following numbers of providers on our Children's Home framework (NB placements are purchased on an as needed basis according to matching with children and other local authorities also use these providers, so the placements are not guaranteed for NCT):

- Standard: 46
- Specialist – Children with complex social emotional and mental health needs and low-level disability: 30
- Specialist – Children with a disability and complex health needs: 12

52.5% of our external children's homes placements are made with providers on our framework (live placements as at 15/8/22). Making placements with providers on our frameworks can mean we are able to achieve better value for money and already have assurance of the quality of provision. **This data suggests our children's home framework provision is not able to meet the needs of our children or provide places as much as we would like.**

	No. of Framework placements	% of Framework placements	No. of Non-Framework placements	% of Non-Framework placements	Total number
External Children's Homes	53	52.5%	48	47.5%	101

Independent Supported Accommodation

Independent Supported Accommodation is suitable for children aged 16+ where this meets their needs to develop independent living skills and they no longer require care. All our commissioned ISA provision works to enable young people to achieve independent living outcomes

Training Flats

We have a block contract for 19 training flats in Northampton for up to 21 care leavers who need additional support to develop independent living skills. Capacity as at August 22 was 100%. At the end of Q4 21/22, only 2 care leavers living here were NEET. All young people who moved out did so in a planned way, however some young people have lived here for longer than intended suggesting there has been difficulty in securing them move on accommodation.

From summer 2023 we will have an additional 9 training flats for care leavers with additional needs in Northampton.

Other ISA placements

As at August 2022, we have the following numbers of providers on our ISA framework:

- Semi Supported Accommodation with 24 hour staffing (Accommodation Manager) and a minimum of 2 hours of 1:1 support per young person per week: 68
- Semi Independent Accommodation (solo or shared) with 2 hours of 1:1 Support per young person per week: 68
- Standard Additional Support hours: 71
- Specialist Additional Support hours: 36

The vast majority of our ISA placements are made with providers on our framework (live placements as at 15/8/22). Making placements with providers on our frameworks can mean we are able to achieve better value for money and already have assurance of the quality of provision.

	No. of Framework placements	% of Framework placements	No. of Non-Framework placements	% of Non-Framework placements	Total number
Independent Supported Accommodation	296	90%	32	10%	328

Independent supported accommodation **will become subject to Ofsted registration** from April 2023 and the first inspections are expected from April 2024. This will benefit young people and commissioners through external scrutiny of quality of provision. There could however be an adverse impact on sufficiency if providers choose not to register or fail to meet requirements.

In August / September 2022 we surveyed ISA providers that are currently supporting our 16-17 year olds. Of the 39 that responded, 59% indicated they are likely to register, 39% would like support to know more. Only 2 providers said they are unlikely / will definitely not register. We are planning to deliver support during Q3 and Q4 22/23.

There is a risk that landlords may not be willing to apply for this type of planning permission, if one is required, due to impact on neighbours and locality, and this may impact on provider's ability to source appropriate properties for this effect.

The final version of the national standards have not yet having been published, so it is currently unknown what costs will be associated with providers registering with Ofsted. This may present a challenge in growing the market and therefore drive costs up. When the government's response was first published, it was thought that at a regional level it could increase prices by up to 30%. This will require careful monitoring.

Staying Put

Care leavers people can remain with their foster carers until they are 21 years-old, through a staying put agreement between NCT, foster carers and the young person. As at Aug 22, there are 58 care leavers under this arrangement. This is a good outcome for young people as it allows them to remain where they live for longer while learning to prepare for independence. However, this scheme has a slight impact in the sufficiency of foster carers for children in care.

Shared Lives

Is a CQC (Care Quality Commission) registered scheme, where young people with complex needs, such as learning disabilities or mental health difficulties, live with approved carers. As at Aug 22, there are 7 care leavers in this arrangement.

Houses of Multiple Occupancy (HMOs)

As at August 22, we have use of 3x HMO properties providing places for up to 16 care leavers in Northampton. These are suitable for care leavers who do not require support, particularly previously separated children. We have decided not to renew the lease of 1 of the properties in accordance with current needs and are considering future use of the HMOs in line with staying close proposals.

5. External review – Key messages

In 2022 we commissioned an external review of our placements commissioning to identify areas for improvement and inform the refresh of our Sufficiency Strategy. The review completed by People Too in February 2022, found:

- NCT has a good understanding of demand, sufficiency, and its key challenges and opportunities relating to children in care placements.
- In some areas, NCT is managing and meeting need as effectively as comparators. Despite this, some intractable issues are present that require creative and innovative solutions
- The provider market is not operating effectively to meet NCT's needs. Whilst some changes can be made to commissioning processes, this will still be insufficient. To make the step-change that NCT wishes to, in line with its strategic ambition, there are opportunities for a significant return on investment programme relating to internal fostering and residential services to increase capacity and their ability to support those with the most complex needs.
- There are also opportunities to streamline and increase the efficiency of placement sourcing processes, alongside a re-balancing of senior management and practitioner accountability, to reduce the delay in sourcing placements.
- Progress has been made to strengthen arrangements relating to joint funding of packages and this is evidenced in additional funding contributions; however, there are opportunities to embed this further and re-balance the proportionate contributions from different agencies, accompanied by clearer representation and accountability at decision-making panels.

- NCT should also consider opportunities to enhance its offer to reduce demand for placements, through a strengthened early help partnership offer, high quality social work practice, and edge of care services.

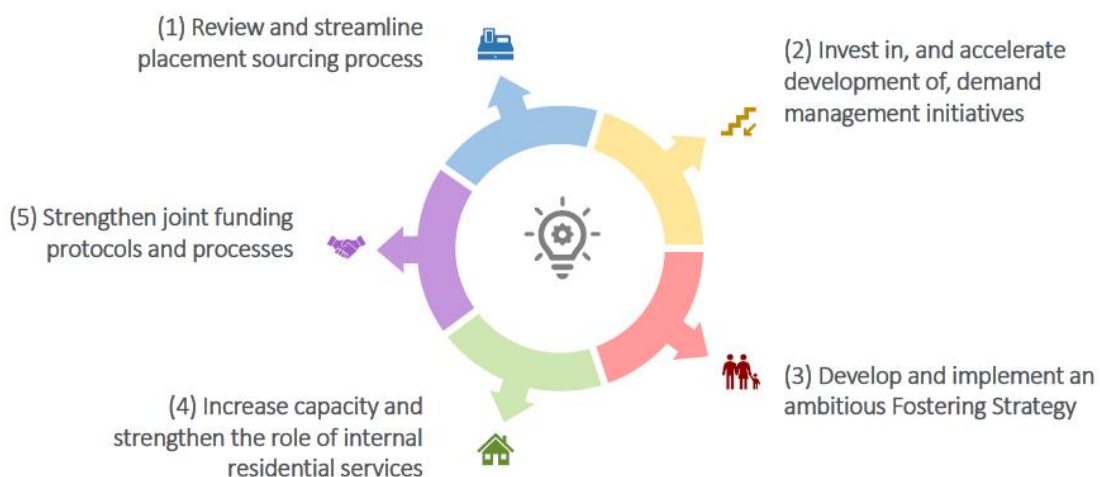
STRENGTHS

Peopletoo
it works better with you



MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

Peopletoo
it works better with you



We have progressed actions to deliver these recommendations during 2022 (see Appendix 1) and will continue through the 2022-25 Sufficiency Strategy priorities and action plan.

6. What does our data tell us? – Key messages for our sufficiency plans:

Based on linear forecasts to 2024:

- We expect an increase in the total number of children in care between August 2022 – August 2024 of approx. 23 children and we continue to have a higher rate of children in care than our statistical neighbours and the national average. **We will need to continue to improve early intervention and practice to enable children to remain within or return to their families if this in their best interests.**
- We expect we will continue to see a higher proportion of boys in care and therefore will need placements that can meet their needs – **including more male foster carers**
- Of those likely to require a placement, we expect to see the number of babies reduce slightly, the numbers of 1-4 year olds and 16-18 year olds reduce and an increase in numbers of children aged 5-15. **We are therefore likely to need more placements for the 5 -15 age group and expect a high proportion will have a plan for long term fostering. We will need to improve likelihood of matching by recruiting and retaining and commissioning carers who reflect the demographics of our children (more from global majority backgrounds), and increase family finding activities.**
- Based on linear projections we expect our need for foster care to increase by approx. 14 places, however we are aware that currently we have not been able to identify suitable foster carers for some children whose plan is for foster care (approx. 70 places based on current patterns). **Therefore approx. 85 additional foster care placements are required to 2024, as well as replacing any NCT carers who retire. This includes those that can support children with more complex needs and those that can care for children in an emergency**
- We expect our need for residential placements to remain steady/ decrease slightly, however we are aware that currently we have not been able to identify suitable care homes for some children whose plan is residential care (approx. 20 places based on current patterns). **We will have an additional 11 places available in Q3 22/24, including 6 emergency places and are seeking capital funding and properties for additional NCT provision**
- In addition, given the current challenges in finding the right residential care for children with more complex needs we know we need to increase access to residential care that can support:
 - Children who need to access care in an emergency/ crisis situation
 - Children who require a solo or dual placement
 - Children with Social Emotional Mental Health (SEMH) needs
 - Children with disabilities including behaviour that challenges others
 - Children with disabilities with complex health needs
 - Children at risk of or experiencing violence, gangs, exploitation, including those returning from custody, secure remand, secure welfare
 - Children requiring step down or prevention from hospital with needs including trauma, suicide attempts/ ideation, self-harm, eating disorders, gender dysmorphia

We have plans in place to secure capital funding to increase NCT and external provision to meet this need and will need to review plans if this is not forthcoming.

- We do not want to continue being in the situation where we have to use unregulated/ unregistered provision for under 16s or over 16s where this is not in line with their care plan. In addition to increasing access to places that can meet the needs of children that we struggle to find regulated places for, **we need to continue to work across the system to reduce placement breakdowns and emergency / crisis (same day) placement requests**
- We expect our need for supported accommodation for 16 and 17 year olds to decrease by approx. 19 places, however our number of care leavers is expected to increase by approx. 127 by March 2024 and it is expected a proportion will continue to require supported accommodation, including those providing pathways to independence / training
- We will need to continue to support ISA providers to prepare for Ofsted registration (from April 23) and closely monitor the impact on sufficiency and costs of regulation, adjusting plans accordingly.
- We need to continue to work with colleagues in Housing to ensure there is suitable housing available for our care leavers to move on to their own tenancies
- We need to continue to improve our commissioning (understand, plan, do and review) to ensure we are making the best use of our total resources to improve outcomes for children and families in the most equitable, efficient, effective and sustainable way.

7. Sufficiency Strategy 2022 – 2025 Our 4 Priorities



Strengthening Families

Key Outcome: Children are able to remain within the care of their families and/ or network where this is in their best interests



Finding a Place Called Home

Key Outcome: Children are able to live in a setting that meets their needs and they benefit from improved outcomes



Promoting Stability & Permanence

Key Outcome: Children feel safe and secure in their home and their placement is stable



Pathways to independence

Key Outcome: Children and young people thrive and are on track to becoming independent

The delivery of our 4 key priorities will be enabled by:



Improved commissioning

We will use the total resources available for children, young people and families in order to improve outcomes in the most equitable, efficient, effective and sustainable way⁵



Strengthening Families

Key Outcome: Children are able to remain within the care of or return to their families and/ or network where this is in their best interests

What we will do:

This priority will be delivered through activity already identified in:

- NSCP's Early Help Strategy & action plan
- NSCP's Neglect Strategy & action plan
- NSCP's Exploitation Strategy & action plan
- NCT's Business Plan: *Strong, relationship based practice & Healthy Partnerships*
- NCT's Children in Care and Care Leavers Strategy Live Safe, Be Safe priority

In addition, we will:

- Continue to review the impact of the Pause programme in enabling women who have previously had children removed to improve their outcomes, and seek continuation of funding to continue beyond 2025 if it continues to have successful impact on preventing children from coming into care

⁵ Commissioning Support Programme, 2010

- Continue to review the impact of our commissioned targeted safeguarding support in achieving positive impact for children who are subject of children in need and child protection plans, and re-commission if it continues to have successful impact (current contract ends 31 Mar 24).
- Continue to review the impact of our commissioned targeted family support/ early intervention for children under 5 in Corby and re-commission if it continues to have successful impact (current contract ends 31 Mar 24).
- Implement re-designed model of short breaks and respite from children with disabilities from Apr 23 to improve access to impact of support for children with disabilities to remain within the care of their families or current placement.
- Commission respite care, particularly for teenagers, to prevent the need for children to come into care if a family is in crisis

How will we know if we've made a difference?

- Feedback from children, young people and families
- Our rate of children in care will reduce to reflect national / statistical neighbour averages – *NB we expect this will take place after a period as we know that strengthening early help is likely to lead to an initial increase in numbers of children in care*
- The need for emergency and crisis placements will continue to reduce from 2022 level



Finding a Place Called Home

Key Outcome: Children are able to live in a setting that meets their needs and they benefit from improved outcomes

What we will do:

Fostering:

- Deliver the NCT Fostering Improvement Plan with the aim of securing a 'good' Ofsted judgement
- Work with WNC and NNC to implement capital programme for NCT foster carers' homes to increase number of placements / placements for siblings and / or children with disabilities
- **Recruit NCT foster carers** in line with annually set targets. For 2022/23 this is 40 new households (specifically targeting carers for children aged 8+ and seeking to increase proportion of male and global majority carers) including:
 - 5 resilience carers
 - 3 households that can care for sibling groups
 - 5 households that can provide short breaks for children with disabilities
 - 3 households that can provide parent and child placements
 - 4 households who can offer emergency provision
- Improve the retention rate of **NCT foster carers**. Plans to be delivered in 22/23 include:
 - Review of financial allowances and enhanced payment scheme
 - Deliver revised training package
 - Introduce specific out of hours support

- Propose council tax reduced payment scheme
- Increase support for carers who are 'on hold'
- Expand therapeutic support to deliver proactive intervention
- Commission **external IFA emergency carer provision** in 22/23
- **Build and improve relationships with external IFAs** so that they are more aware of the needs of our children and so that we become a commissioner of choice
- Re-open our **IFA framework** on an annual basis and commission new framework for April 2025

Children's Homes:

- Work with WNC and NNC to open min. of 3 new NCT children's homes by 2025 to support children with more complex needs (children with disabilities and behaviour that challenges, mental health needs, those subject of exploitation)
- Review impact of additional block contract out of county and emergency homes – due to be operational in Q3 22/23
- Secure capital funding to open one externally delivered home by 2024
- **Build and improve relationships with external children's homes providers** so that they are more aware of the needs of our children and so that we become a commissioner of choice
- Re-open our **children's home framework** on an annual basis and commission new framework for April 2025
- Develop long term sustainable partnership in the re-commissioning of our **children's homes block contract**
- We will continually improve oversight of any unregulated/ unregistered placements that have had to be made for under 16s or over 16s where this is not in line with their care plan
- Support local providers of unregistered / unregulated provision to apply for Ofsted registration for children's homes.

Accommodation for Care Leavers:

- Continue to review impact and re-commission our 19 training flats for April 2024
- Open additional commissioned training flats in Summer 2023
- Review use of HMOs by Apr 23
- Support providers to be able to register with Ofsted by Apr 23, monitor likely impact on sufficiency and cost and take appropriate mitigating action

How will we know if we've made a difference?

- Feedback from children, young people and families
- All children will be able to live in the same type of placement as per the type requested, in line with their care plan
- We will not have to use unregulated/ unregistered provision for under 16s and over 16s where this is not in line with their care plan
- The % of children in care with 3+ moves in previous 12 months will reduce from Aug 22 figure of 13.1%
- We will reduce the number of high cost placements



Promoting Stability & Permanence

Key Outcome: Children feel safe and secure in their home and their placement is stable

What we will do:

- Continue to work across the system to intervene earlier and reduce need for police protection orders and crisis (same day) placement requests
- Taking actions to reduce placement breakdowns and need for emergency placements, informed by analysis completed on this in 2021 and 2022 (effective earlier intervention with families, effective multi disciplinary team and placement stability meetings, more effective and efficient placement request and brokerage processes, additional capacity to support NCT IFA and external placement stability)
- Monitor the impact of additional family support capacity intended to improve placement stability of NCT fostering and external placements (operational from Q3 22/23)
- Regular reviewing the impact of placement support packages
- Continue to monitor impact of public health funded therapeutic interventions for children in NCT foster care and identify means of mainstreaming this support if it continues to have positive impact
- Improving our understanding of the impact for children of therapeutic support within placements

How will we know if we've made a difference?

- Feedback from children, young people and families
- % of children in care for 2.5+ years who have been in the same placement for for 2+ years/ placed for adoption will increase from Aug 22 figure of 68.1% and remain in line or reach above comparators
- The % of children in care with 3+ moves in previous 12 months will reduce from Aug 22 figure of 13.1%



Pathways to independence

Key Outcome: Children and young people thrive and are on track to becoming independent

What we will do:

- Develop our leaving care data set to inform a needs analysis for the care leavers population
- Further analyse young people's needs and co-design commissioning models to further develop care leavers accommodation based on pathways; including development of supported lodgings

- Working with social housing providers to develop stages of supported accommodation from stage 1 working with young people to develop resilience and improve health and wellbeing, stage 2 training flats for independence to stage 3 young people moving onto their own tenancy with floating support.
- Develop our staying close offer to provide additional support for young people moving on from children’s homes.
- Developing the current ISA model for 18+ with the DWP (Department for Work and Pensions) and ISA providers so that young people are able to develop independence skills through being supported to claim benefits and seek work.
- Explore review of Staying Put arrangements to become ‘opt in’; Pre-tenancy agreements with private landlords, guarantor schemes (recommendation from Independent review of children’s social care)
- Further develop strategic relationships with the West and North Northamptonshire Housing departments to plan for the future and ensure sufficient housing for young people to move onto; and review the impact of the joint protocol for Care Leavers Housing
- Continue to develop our Mental Health Support Offer for Care Leavers, review the impact of public health funded provision and seek mainstreaming of this by 2024 if continues to have impact
- Review our current offer to support care leavers into education, employment or training to inform future commissioning by Apr 23

How will we know if we’ve made a difference?

- Feedback from young people
- The proportion of care leavers in suitable accommodation will maintain or improve upon Aug 22 level of 92.5%; and above statistical neighbour and national averages
- The proportion of care leavers in EET will maintain or improve upon Aug 22 level of 60.6%; and above statistical neighbour and national averages



Improved commissioning

We will use the total resources available for children, young people and families in order to improve outcomes in the most equitable, efficient, effective and sustainable way⁶

What we will do:

We will make improvements at each stage of the cycle, ensuring that we are taking a relationship based approach to commissioning:

Understand

- We will review children in care and care leaver forecasts every 3-6 months
- We will regularly analyse the range of data available within NCT to us to give us to better understanding of demand and use of placements
- We will review our demographic analysis after West and North unitary councils have produced and published their Joint Strategic Needs Assessments

⁶ Commissioning Support Programme, 2010

- We will better understand the views of our children and young people through a broader and deeper range of engagement with them; including consideration of any variation for those with protected characteristics, and co-develop commissioning projects with them
- We will work to develop information on protected characteristics by using data available on Care First and estimates based on census data to create a better understanding of our children in care population beyond age, gender and ethnicity which will enable us to better understand and consider what type of support we need to provide and commission for our children

Plan

- Our Sufficiency action plan will remain a live document, adapted over the course of the strategy as needs and/ or markets change, with progress overseen by the Sufficiency Board
- We will review NCT foster carer recruitment targets on an annual basis
- We will allow sufficient time to undertake commissioning projects
- We will produce market position statements and engage with the market prior to commissioning / re-opening frameworks to help providers plan for the needs of our children
- We will plan for any changes regarding regional commissioning and provision of placements that is introduced by government in response to the Independent Review of children's social care

Do

- We will fully implement improvements to our placements brokerage processes and review the impact
- We will commission a digital brokerage solution to improve the efficiency of our systems and reporting, reducing waste and enabling brokerage team to spend more time with providers
- We will focus on developing and improving relationships with external providers
- We will implement the revised joint funding protocol for placements

Review

- We will improve our understanding of experiences and outcomes for children in placements
- We will continue to utilise national and regional information to benchmark our progress and develop plans
- We will continue to regularly review packages to ensure provision meets the needs of children and young people and achieves the best value for money

How will we know if we've made a difference?

- Improved commissioning will enable us to achieve the four priorities for children and young people
- We will improve the value for money achieved in placements
- The proportion of partner contributions to placements will be in line with other areas

Appendix 1 – Summary of our delivery of 2020-2022 Sufficiency Strategy and impact for children

Improved Placement Stability	
<p>Compared with 2020/21, a higher proportion of children who have been in care for 2.5 years or more have been living in the same placement for 2+ years or placed for adoption (68% YTD at August 2022 compared with 63% in 2020/21), bringing us in line with our statistical neighbours.</p> <p>13% of children leaving NCT's care obtained permanence through a special guardianship order between Jan – June 22, this compares with the latest available data (2020/21) of 14% statistical neighbour and national averages</p> <p>This means more children have had stability of care which enables them to feel safe, secure and achieve outcomes</p>	
<i>What we did</i>	<i>Impact for children and young people</i>
<p>Following an analysis of placement breakdowns, we have identified a range of actions to improve placement stability and reduce the need for emergency placements which are being taken forward by managers across our services</p>	<p>More children will benefit from stability in their care</p>
<p>Created additional family support worker posts to support stability of NCT fostering placements, and commissioned a pilot to support stability of externally delivered placements</p>	<p>When these initiatives are operational (expected Q3 of 22/23) we expect placement breakdowns and emergency placement requests to reduce, this will improve stability for children</p>
<p>We implemented our Public Health funded project to support the mental health of children in NCT foster care which has had a positive impact on placement stability, and have secured funding to continue this to Dec 2023</p>	<p>Of 65 children who had received therapeutic support directly/via carer at end June 22, 6 (9%) had experienced a placement breakdown in comparison with the pre-project baseline of 30%<.</p>

Improved outcomes for children and young people	
<i>What we did</i>	<i>Impact for children and young people</i>
<p>Implemented an improved early help assessment tool. Early Help Strategy, board and networks developed across the multi-agency partnership.</p>	<p>Families are more likely to receive the right support at the right time, to prevent issues from escalating and enabling children to remain in the care of their families</p>

Improved outcomes for children and young people	
Reviewed the 16 – 17 Homelessness Joint Protocol to improve joint working and clarified responsibilities to young people	Once implemented, we expect more young people will receive the support they require, when they require it and the voice of the young person will be clearer in decision making about their future and legal status
We developed the Family Solutions (edge of care) service as part of our Children and Family Support Services (CFSS) to support families to stay together and we have supported the reunification of children to their families where this is in the best interests of the child.	<p>More children are being supported to remain with their families or return to their families after a period of being in care where this is in their best interests</p> <p>Between June 21 and June 22 CFSS worked with 93 children who were specifically identified as risk of care. 79 (85%) were able to remain in the care of their families.</p> <p>In 2020/21, the % of children returning to parents was 8%. This has doubled from 4% in 2018/19. The England average in 2020/21 was 7% and the regional average was 6%. As a the end of June 22, 74 children had left care in the last 6 months to return to their parents/ relatives, this was 37% of all children whose care episode ceased in the period</p>
<p>The Pause programme, funded by Big Lottery via Public Health until 2025, has worked with 24 women who have had 89 children removed into care, this equates to 3.7 removals per women. 35 women are being worked with from Q1 22/23</p> <p>14 women have completed the programme with 0 live births and 0 children taken into care.</p>	Women who have previously had children taken into care have been able to take a pause and improve their outcomes before having another child
Positive outcomes have been achieved for children and families supported by our commissioned targeted services: targeted family support/ early intervention for children under 5 in Corby and family support and MST for families known to safeguarding services	<p>Over 70% families accessing support at Corby Children’s Centre reported reduction in isolation, increased understanding of child development and relationship with their child, greater level of support from community services (Q1 22/23)</p> <p>96.5% of children supported by MST remained living at home at the end of the intervention</p>

Improved outcomes for children and young people	
	12 month follow up of families supported by Action for Children: 84% of children remained in the family home; 75% were no longer under a Social Care plan
<p>Family and friends fostering is always considered when case planning to enable a child to remain within their existing network where possible.</p> <p>At the end of July, there were 175 children in Family and Friends placements, which is a total of 38.8% of all fostering placements.</p>	<p>Children and young people who stay within their family or friends network have better outcomes than those in other placements and stability of these placements is good if not better than other foster placements (Family and friends foster care (England) The Fostering Network, 2022).</p>
<p>We reviewed foster care provision that can support step down from residential and children with more complex needs and have mainstreamed our NCT Resilience Foster Carer scheme as this has shown positive outcomes for children</p>	<p>In utilising our NCT Resilience foster care scheme for children and young people with more complex needs children's outcomes are more likely to improve</p>
<p>We have improved procedures for when unregulated placements absolutely have to be used, improved risk management, quality assurance and senior management oversight.</p>	<p>Children and young people living in unregulated/ unregistered provision where this is not in line with their care place are safe</p>
<p>We partnered with an external organisation, to provide an objective review of our commissioning and brokerage and are implementing a range of improvements to make our processes more effective and efficient.</p> <p>We have implemented a weekly Placements Planning Forum to review and prioritise the week's placement searches</p>	<p>The right placements for children will be found in a more timely manner</p>
<p>We have focused on establishing and improving relationships with local and specialist external providers that can support the needs of our children. Through 1-2-1 commissioner / provider relationships, regular communications and provider forums covering local and specialist topics</p>	<p>We are more likely to secure placements that can meet the needs of our children</p>

Improved outcomes for children and young people	
Our partnership with Homes to Inspire (H2I) and Prospects (both part of Shaw Trust) is enabling better co-ordination of support to improve outcomes for children living in our block contract homes	This is a relatively new initiative and we expect the education, employment and training outcomes of the children receiving this support will be maintained at a good level or improved
<p>In addition to Ofsted inspections,</p> <p>Regular monitoring of the external Residential Children's Homes, Fostering and Independent Supported Accommodation frameworks demonstrates positive outcomes for our children and young people. ISAs are being supported to prepare for Ofsted registration from 2023</p> <p>We have improved performance monitoring within NCT's IFA. Performance of NCT homes are monitored through an external regulation 44 visitor who provides monthly reports with recommendations/ actions and internal monitoring</p>	<p>Children's outcomes are supported as any concerns relating to provision is addressed in a timely manner and improvements achieved</p> <p>The ISAs we commission work towards the same set of key performance indicators and outcomes for care leavers which help the young person develop independence skills.</p>
<p>To support pathways to independence for care leavers we have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Resumed NCT's Independent Living Programme in July 22 following the pandemic - Established West and North Unitary Council Accommodation and Transitions Panels to ensure good advanced planning so that the right permanent homes are found - Agreed the Care Leavers Joint Housing protocol July 22. 	<p>Between July – Sept 22, 8 young people successfully completed the Independent living course and said that they felt more prepared for independence into adulthood as a result</p> <p>We expect the impact of the accommodation and transitions panel and Care Leavers Joint Housing protocol will enable more care leavers to move on to independence in a time that suits their needs, homelessness to be prevented and more effective management of housing crises for young people where they occur</p>

Improved Sufficiency of NCT Fostering	
<i>What we did</i>	<i>Impact for children and young people</i>
We have implemented our NCT fostering marketing and recruitment campaign including resilience, mainstream, Family Link, emergency, and short-term carers.	More children and young people can be cared for by NCT foster carers where this in line with their care plan and matching

Improved Sufficiency of NCT Fostering	
<p>At the end of August 22 there were 207 approved 'mainstream' fostering households as part of NCT's IFA. There has been a net gain of 9 additional households over the previous 2 years which has seen a national trend of carers leaving the profession post pandemic. In addition, there are 122 approved Family and Friend Carers</p> <p>A review of the approval status to maximise more internal foster homes for children has resulted in 15 additional placements</p> <p>We have also developed plans to increase the retention rate of NCT carers, which will be implemented during the second half of 2022/23</p>	
<p>Increasing the skills and number of NCT foster carers able to support children with more complex needs through our Resilience foster carers scheme. By end of Mar 22, 5 children were being cared for by 5 resilience carer households.</p>	<p>More children and young people with more complex needs are able to be cared for in a family setting where this is in line with their care plan</p>

Improved Sufficiency of Placements	
<p>73% of our children in care were placed in foster care at end June 22, in comparison with 71% in 20/21. The latest comparator data is 20/21 when 71% of both statistical neighbour and England averages were 71% children in foster care. The proportion of children living in residential care has remained consistently below statistical neighbour and England averages since 20/21</p>	
<i>What we did</i>	<i>Impact for children and young people</i>
<p>Reviewed the statements of purpose of NCT and block contract homes to better meet needs of our children.</p>	<p>Children and young people's needs can be better supported in local provision that is solely available for NCT children in care</p>
<p>Northamptonshire's Framework for Children's Homes and Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA) was established in 2020 and has been opened twice for additional providers to join. We have 48 children's home</p>	<p>More providers provide more placement options for children and young people, so they can be placed in homes that match their needs.</p>

Improved Sufficiency of Placements	
providers and 43 IFA providers currently on our framework following the reopening of the framework in July 22.	
As at Sept 22, we have secured an additional 11 residential care beds for the sole use of NCT by the end of 2022, including in emergency/ urgent situations (by commissioning 2 new emergency homes within the county and adding an additional out of county home to the block contract)	Once operational, we will have better access to residential care that can meet the needs of our children and young people
Submitted a partnership bid to the 2022 DfE Capital funding to provide a home for children with mental health / behavioural needs. We are working with NNC and WNC to secure capital funding and additional council owned properties to create additional NCT residential care and care leaver accommodation that will meet needs	If successful in securing funding, we will have increased access to local residential care and independent supported accommodation that can meet the needs of our children and young people
We have revised the criteria for our commissioned training flats for care leavers so that the referral process is more accessible to young people. This has resulted in higher levels of utilisation	More care leavers are able to live in our training flats which help them to achieve positive outcomes
We have commissioned an external provider to deliver supported accommodation for care leavers with additional needs. This will provide a steps to independence providing more intensive support to develop skills to move onto training flats and then to own tenancies. In development for delivery from summer 2023	Once operational, more care leavers with additional needs will receive support that helps them to achieve independence

Reduction of Placement Costs	
Achieving better value for money and appropriate contributions from partner agencies has helped mitigate some of the financial pressures experienced due to rising costs, inflation and a highly competitive market. This means we have been in a better position to manage the financial impact of increased demand for placements.	
<i>What we did</i>	<i>Impact for children and young people</i>
Children and young people's placements have been reviewed to ensure they are receiving the right level of support/care at the right time and their needs are supported as they change and develop in their placement.	Children and young people are receiving the right care/ support for their needs.

Renegotiation of packages achieved savings of £1.2m in 21/22 and £480k Apr – Aug 22.	
We commissioned an external review joint funding arrangements to ensure appropriate shared financial responsibility for placements	Children and young people are receiving the right care/ support for their needs.

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Northamptonshire
Children's Trust

Northamptonshire Children's Trust

Commissioning Strategy & Framework 2021/25

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1. Introduction

At Northamptonshire Children's Trust we are dedicated to ensuring children, young people and families are at the heart of all we do – in every action we take and every decision we make. We know that what we do today affects children and young people's tomorrows and we are focused on helping children and young people to live safe, be safe; fulfil potential; develop resilience and enjoy good health and wellbeing.

Alongside the Early Help, Youth Offending & Social Care services that we deliver to achieve these outcomes, we also commission other organisations to work alongside us, to deliver support and achieve outcomes for children, young people and families on our behalf. We also commission 'enabling' goods and services that help our staff to work well with children, young people and families.

Northamptonshire Children's Trust's Commissioning Strategy and Framework sets out our overall vision and plan to use commissioning to contribute to the delivery of our Business Plan, and to improve outcomes for children, young people and families and to support our staff to do their work effectively and efficiently.

The Commissioning Strategy and Framework is also intended to inform our Board, stakeholders, partners and our staff of the purpose of our commissioning; our expectations of commissioned services; how they align with and support our service delivery function; our approach to commissioning; what good commissioning looks like; what we intend to commission over the next four years and how we will know what difference we have made for children, young people and families in Northamptonshire as a result.

In delivering this Strategy & Framework we will contribute to the achievement of the Trust Business Plan – to improve and sustain the experiences and outcomes for children, young people and families who need our support, and to make the best use of our resources.

What is commissioning?

Commissioning is the process for deciding how to use the total resources available for children, young people and families in order to improve outcomes in the most equitable, efficient, effective and sustainable way¹

Commissioning provides a framework to understand the outcomes, needs and experiences of a child or group of children; to plan the best approach to improve or sustain good outcomes; to do something to improve or sustain outcomes; and to review what impact has been achieved. However, like everything we do in the Trust, we know the best results are achieved by taking a strengths based, relationship based, collaborative approach with children, young people and families at the heart of all we do – in every action we take and every decision we make.

When we commission we follow the 4 stage cycle shown below. Effective commissioning absolutely needs to be led by voices of children, young people and families and by the practitioners who work with them, supported side by side by skilled commissioners who have children, young people and families at the heart of all they are doing.

¹ Commissioning Support Programme, 2010

1. Introduction (cont)

Our Commissioning Cycle



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2. Northamptonshire Children's Trust Strategic Framework



Strategic Framework

Vision

**Children, Young People and Families at the heart of all we do
- in every action we take and every decision we make.**

Our Commitment

(co-produced with children
and young people)

**What we do today affects your tomorrow, we promise to
walk side by side with you**

Outcomes Framework



Conditions for Success



Like everything we do in the Trust, our commissioning activity needs to align with our Vision and our Commitment and focused on achieving the outcomes identified in our Strategic Framework.

2. Northamptonshire Children's Trust Strategic Framework (cont)

Our **Values** underpin all of our commissioning activity:

- Be child focused and work with the whole family
- Make a difference with trust and integrity
- Concentrate on the best solution
- Act with respect, kindness and compassion
- Communicate well
- Do the best job of your life every single day

To meet the challenges faced by communities, we will have a relentless focus on our impact and outcomes for children and young people based on local needs and priorities. Our Business Plan states that to achieve this, we will:

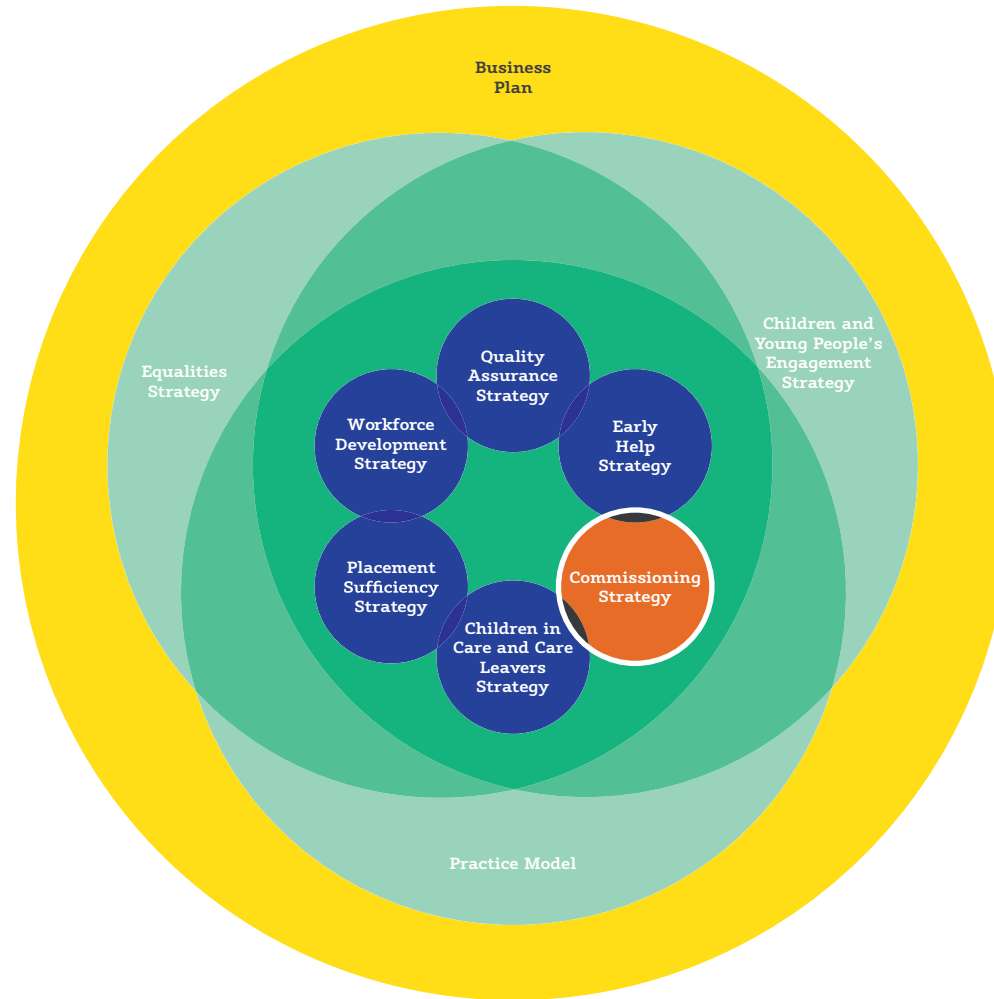
- Ensure that the voice of children and young people drives all of our practice.
- Strengthen relationships with parents and carers, and our service offer will be shaped by them and by the direct involvement of children and young people. The co-production of effective solutions to local priorities, including financial challenges, will be evident in our successful delivery of the business plan, as well as our response to emerging issues.
- Focus our early help services on building resilience in families so that they are better able to help, support and protect their children without the need for statutory interventions.
- Consistently use reflective, collaborative and strengths-based approaches to working with the whole family so that parents are able to make positive and lasting changes to the care they provide to their children.
- Invest in integrated services and joint commissioning with our partners, bringing together our collective ideas, talent and resources to better meet the needs of children and young people, especially those with the most complex needs.
- Promote strong and meaningful relationships with our partner organisations and our whole-system approach to improving services and outcomes for children and young people.
- Have established strong and financially stable foundations.

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And we are focused on contributing to our **Strategic Priorities** through our commissioning activity:



2. Northamptonshire Children's Trust Strategic Framework (cont)

Our Commissioning Strategy and Framework is one of our core strategies to deliver the aims of our business plan.



3. Achieving Effective Commissioning

The purpose of our commissioning activity is to achieve and sustain the best outcomes and experiences for children, young people and families, and to support our workforce to do their work effectively and efficiently. We want to achieve the best use of the resources available to us and achieve excellent value for money.

Our commissioning activity relates to the children, young people and families who we work with at different points within the statutory framework; as well as enablers – these are goods or services that support staff to work effectively and efficiently. As such, our commissioners will be working alongside practitioners and partners with expertise in these areas to ensure that what we commission is in line with, complementary and adding value and is embedded within our practice so that the best use is made of our resources.

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We will achieve effective commissioning by ensuring:

Throughout the Commissioning Cycle:

- Our commissioning is led by the voice of children, young people, families and the practitioners who work with them; facilitated and supported by skilled commissioners
- We work collaboratively with children, young people, families, practitioners, partners and providers throughout the commissioning cycle, co-producing and jointly designing services to maximise creativity and innovation whilst ensuring that services are fit for purpose and delivered through the most effective means to achieve results.
- We make full use of the commissioning cycle (understand, plan, do and review). We will forward plan and build in sufficient time for each stage so that we do this effectively and with partners, where applicable.
- We draw not only on our strengths and assets but also on those of children and families, our partners, providers and the community to work together to make things better for children, young people and families and enabling them to thrive.

3. Achieving Effective Commissioning (cont)

In the 'Understand' Stage

- We develop our understanding of the assets and needs of children, young people and their families and also consider what these may be in the future.
- We seek to ensure families can access the right support at the right time ensuring support is provided as soon as a problem emerges so that it does not get worse.

In the 'Plan' Stage

- We always explore whether it is better to collaborate with partners to achieve greater impact and better value for money. We will create joined up services with partners where this makes sense for families and we will seek to pool funding to work together for greater effect.
- We evaluate all options to identify the most suitable means of improving outcomes.

In the 'Do' Stage

- We work proactively with potential providers in the market place to help them develop skills for bidding, capacity, capability and innovation that will deliver the most benefit to children, young people and families.
- Where our commissioning involves delivery of services by external organisations, we will work collaboratively and in partnership. We will ensure that there are smooth processes in place so families receive the right support at the right time, and that commissioned and in house services work side by side as part of the Northamptonshire

Children's Trust family.

- We consider how further social value can be built into service delivery to provide additional economic, social or environmental benefit.
- We will be transparent and fair in commissioning decisions. We ensure that we meet legal and policy requirements and we use reasonable procurement processes and timescales.

In the 'Review' Stage

- We will use a variety of ways to understand the impact and what difference it has made (see our 'Commissioning Cycle Activities' on page 13 for more details).
- We ensure that, not only are our commissioned providers meeting their legal obligations with regard to Equalities, but that they are committed to ensuring that everyone is included, has a voice and is respected. This includes their own staff, the professionals that they work alongside and the children, young people and families that they support.
- We will use the review stage to inform future commissioning. We will stop doing things that aren't having an impact and seek new solutions.

4. Expectations of our Commissioned Services

We have the same expectation for services whether they are delivered from within the Trust or by a commissioned provider.



Making a difference

All activity is focused on making a difference for children and achieving the outcomes and ambitions of our Vision.



Collaboration

Services will work collaboratively as part of the Children's Trust family to improve lives of our children, young people and families.

Children, young people and parents/ carers are treated as partners and are involved actively in the planning, delivery and evaluation of support.

Providers contribute to relevant partnership groups and panels and share information and intelligence appropriately to improve practice and outcomes for children.



Safeguarding

Children are safeguarded effectively, Working Together to Safeguard Children statutory guidance and Northamptonshire's Safeguarding Children Partnership (NSCP) policies and procedures are followed.

4. Expectations of our Commissioned Services (cont)

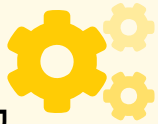


Equality & Diversity

Equality and diversity policies and procedures are implemented.

Equal opportunities are advanced, discrimination tackled and good relations are fostered between people of different characteristics and backgrounds.

Services and support are easily accessible from a child and/ or parent/ carer perspective and adapts to meet special needs of children and parents/ carers.



Doing what works

Work is designed and delivered in line with evidence of what works.

Support builds on children's and families' strengths and assets and enables them to develop positive connections in their community, resilience and sustained outcomes.

Services working with families will use the Signs of Safety practice model.

Assessments, planning and progress reviews are good quality and timely and children and their parents/ carers are involved actively in them



Knowing what difference we've made

Accurate performance and impact information is used to track progress of children and to develop and improve the service; and relevant information is shared with commissioners.

Providers and commissioners will work together to creatively identify solutions to any challenges in achieving outcomes and delivering good value for money.

Providers and commissioners will jointly quality assure activity.

The best use is made of resources.

5. How We Commission

The Commissioning and Strategy Service provides commissioning support and expertise in the Trust, co-ordinating commissioning projects and undertaking work at all stages of the commissioning cycle, working with partners where applicable. Commissioners will work side by side with practice leads for each commission; they are the expert practitioners with responsibility for ensuring that all stages are informed by professional and operational expertise and that commissioned services are embedded within the system. We will support our commissioners and service leads to continually develop skills and expertise in commissioning, leadership and change management. Equally important are the children, young people and families we work with; they are also key partners throughout the commissioning process and will be supported and enabled to contribute and participate alongside us. Decisions regarding procurement, grant funding and contract awards are taken in line with the Trust's scheme of delegation.

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Our commissioning takes place at different levels:

- **Individual** child or family (i.e. care packages)
- **Groups** of children or families in similar circumstances or with similar needs - this can vary from relatively small in number or spend to high (ie mental health support for care leavers to foster placements for children in care)
- Goods or Services that **enable** our staff to get on with their work and do their work well

The figure on page 13 shows the commissioning cycle and the range of activities at each stage; which will vary according to the nature and size of the commission. 'Enabling' Goods or Services may only require a procurement (purchasing) process rather than a full commissioning process.



Sometimes, our commissioning at the individual level is reactionary. This can be for a variety of reasons, such as changes in demand, circumstances, or emergency situations. By its nature this means we are not always able to undertake work at the understand and plan stages, and our choices can be more limited when responding quickly. As part of our strategy we will closely monitor our reactionary commissioning to identify themes and patterns and identify how a more strategic and planned approach can be applied.

5. How We Commission (cont)

Commissioning Cycle Activities as a single organisation or with partners



5. How We Commission (cont)

Throughout the cycle we also consider the six stages identified by the Commissioning Academy (2013)

- What's the question?
- Get to know and work with your customers
- Define the outcome and priorities
- What will it look like?
- How will you get there?
- Measuring the impact

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6. What We Commission

We commission services to support children, young people and families with a range of needs, to work alongside our practitioners and in-house services to improve outcomes.

As at April 2021, the following support is commissioned by the Trust:

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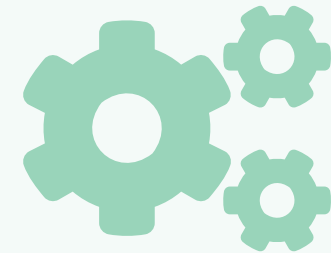
Support commissioned for individual children, young people or families

Support is spot purchased, procured via a framework or bought with a personal budget. Some spot purchasing is done directly by operational teams



Support commissioned for groups of children, young people or families

Support is commissioned via a 'block' contract for an identified number of children and families






Goods or services to enable staff to work effectively and efficiently




Goods or services are spot purchased, procured via a framework or via a block contract

6. What We Commission (cont)

Family Support Services & Youth Justice




Commission	Annual contract value or approximate annual spend	Approximate number of children/ young people/ families supported	What outcomes and activities is this commissioned to achieve?
 <p>Targeted Support for children under 5 and their families in Corby</p> <p>Page 284</p>	£512,000	150	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve outcomes for children and families and prevent more serious issues arising through outreach and early help • Early Help for parents and children during pregnancy and first 2 years of a child's life; regarding domestic abuse/alcohol abuse and mental health; to support Parenting / keeping children safe/ improving the family routines • Identifying and providing access to early years support for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities • Being a hub for the local community, building social capital and community cohesion • Education and Learning outcomes for children and parents
 <p>Employment, education and training support</p>	£975,000	400 young people at any one time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in number of young people who are in education, employment and training. • The percentage of children and young people in Northamptonshire that are not in education, employment or training is now at its lowest level.
 <p>Mentoring for adolescents**</p>	Total funding for this project is £253,370 £35,000 used to commission training and equipping of mentors	300 young people will be supported as mentees or as beneficiaries of our work in schools/colleges.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive impact on mentees' confidence and the enhancement of a range of skills • Reduce risky behaviours, exclusions, offending and victimisation amongst young people

6. What We Commission (cont)

Commission	Annual contract value or approximate annual spend	Approximate number of children/ young people/ families supported	What outcomes and activities is this commissioned to achieve?
 <p>Support for young carers ***</p>	£120,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 330 assessments for young carers • 200 young carers supported through group activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The service aims to give young carers the same life opportunities as their peers and feel supported at school/ college.
 <p>Appropriate Adult Services</p>	£30,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 360 young people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriate Adults safeguard the interest, rights, entitlements and welfare of children who are suspected of a criminal offence.
 <p>Family Support Services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • crisis intervention • medium term support • multi-systemic therapy 	£910,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 250 families 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prevent family breakdown and/ or children needing to come into care • Enable parents or carers of a young person to support positive change in relation to behaviour that challenges - Majority of young people have been able to remain at home and there were no new arrests following intervention • Improved parenting skills and confidence • Enable families to overcome and manage challenges such as domestic abuse, drug misuse, financial difficulties



6. What We Commission (cont)

Children in need and child protection

Commission	Annual contract value or approximate annual spend	Approximate number of children/ young people/ families supported	What outcomes and activities is this commissioned to achieve?
 <p>Family group conferencing</p>	£419,000	Approx. 20 families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To reduce the number of children and young people coming into care at the Public Law Outline (PLO) stage
 <p>Therapeutic support/ assessments</p>	£220,000	120 Assessments 60 Therapeutic support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Informs and supports the care planning process for children and the family
 <p>Support provided under s.17 Children Act 1989</p>	Varies	Varies	Varies




6. What We Commission (cont)

Children in Care, Care Leavers, Adopted Children

Commission	Annual Spend 2019/20 or Annual Contract Value 2020/21	Approximate number of children/ young people/ families supported	What outcomes and activities is this commissioned to achieve?
 <p>Fostering, children's homes and independent supported accommodation*</p>	<p>£58,590,000 (Total value allowed within frameworks. Spend varies) This is broken down as follows: £18m: Framework for Independent Supported Accommodation and spot purchases £35m Children's Home and Fostering Framework and spot purchases £ 5,143,193 Block Contract Children's Homes £ 446,133 Care Leavers Support Service Accommodation Northampton</p>	<p>As of 31.03.2021 there were 730 active external placements</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide care, support and accommodation to Children in Care and Care Leavers.
 <p>Therapeutic support</p>	<p>Please see Therapeutic support/ assessments above</p>		




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6. What We Commission (cont)



Commission	Annual Spend 2019/20 or Annual Contract Value 2020/21	Approximate number of children/ young people/ families supported	What outcomes and activities is this commissioned to achieve?
 <p>Support for NCT foster carers**</p>	<p>£661,000</p>	<p>Tbc – new service starting 21/22</p>	<p>Interventions to support foster children aged 5-12 cope with their experiences of trauma and support their foster carers to best care for them</p> <p>Training and support for Social Workers supporting children and carers</p> <p>Sustained placements</p>
 <p>Mental health and wellbeing support for Care Leavers**</p>	<p>Total funding for this project £430,148</p> <p>A small proportion used for commissioned support</p>	<p>Tbc total for project- new service starting 21/22</p>	<p>Provision of mental health support and services to a cohort of 25 Care Leavers – delivered in partnership through Mental Health and Clinical Psychology practitioners; a Project Lead, 2 new Business Support apprentices (Care Leavers), who will focus on housing support and mental health support respectively; the delivery of Emotion Coaching to all frontline PA staff and their managers, ensuring a holistic and supportive culture is encouraged within this service.</p>
 <p>Adoption Support Fund</p>	<p>£228, 327</p>	<p>69 children</p>	<p>Assessment of need, a support plan will be agreed with the family. This will identify the support and or intervention required and what outcomes are being sought.</p>

6. What We Commission (cont)

Children with Disabilities




Commission	Annual Spend 2019/20 or Annual Contract Value 2020/21	Approximate number of children/ young people/ families supported	What outcomes and activities is this commissioned to achieve?
 <p>Residential Short breaks</p>	£2,150,000 including contribution from NHS	10 beds available at any time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To provide overnight breaks and activities to children and young people who need to receive breaks in a specialist environment To minimise the need for hospital admissions as well as facilitating early discharge from hospital To provide activities that will utilise appropriate venues, equipment and staffing to meet the needs of the children and young people
 <p>Non-residential Short-breaks</p>	£420,000	120 children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To provide a service that offers children and young people a multitude of opportunities for growth and development and give an opportunity to socialise with peers, build confidence, resilience and self-esteem, nurture independence, chance to try and learn new challenges and relax and have fun To work with parents to ensure that the service meets their needs including a sufficient break from caring, confidence that their child is well cared for and respond to needs and assurance that their child is undertaking positive and enjoyable activities.
 <p>Sleep Service</p>	£145,000 including contribution from NHS	510	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To provide family centred sleep advice to identify and address sleep disorders To work directly with parents and carers to ensure that the service suits their family's needs

6. What We Commission (cont)





Commission	Annual Spend 2019/20 or Annual Contract Value 2020/21	Approximate number of children/ young people/ families supported	What outcomes and activities is this commissioned to achieve?
 <p>Personal care and support</p>	£1,500,000	135	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To meet children and young people with disabilities' individual care and support needs in the home and community
 <p>Support for children with visual and hearing impairments</p>	£43,200	<p>Hearing impaired – 650 clients (note: this includes both children and adults)</p> <p>Visual impaired - 166 attendances at children and young people events.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To provide prevention services for deaf, deafened deaf-blind and hard of hearing people to prevent the need for more specialist support To provide advice, help and practical support to overcome emotional and practical challenges of living with sight loss.

6. What We Commission (cont)





Enablers

Commission	Annual Spend 2019/20 or Annual Contract Value 2020/21	Approximate number of children/ young people/ families supported	What outcomes and activities is this commissioned to achieve?
 <p>Language support service</p>	£112,500	4200 requests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To support children young people and families in the care system who speak, communicate or read languages other than English
 <p>Legal support for Independent reviewing Officers</p>	£6,000	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides children's and young people's Independent Reviewing Officers with independent specialist legal advice in regards to Care Proceedings and Looked After Children. This ensures that the child's interests are being represented.
 <p>Youth Offending Service case management system</p>	£38,947	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduced re-offending, reduced risk of harm, improved well-being of young people and their families, effective risk management.


6. What We Commission (cont)

Commission	Annual Spend 2019/20 or Annual Contract Value 2020/21	Approximate number of children/ young people/ families supported	What outcomes and activities is this commissioned to achieve?
 <p>Drug and alcohol testing</p>	£100,000	Approx. 100 requests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supports to understand parents substance usage for assessment, support and decision making
 <p>NA testing</p>	£12,000	Approx. 20 requests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To understand children's parentage
 <p>Social care case management system</p>	Part of overall contract for children's and adults services	All children and Families with Early Help or Social Care involvement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supporting practitioners with recording and case managing for families they are working with, allowing for secure data sharing between professionals.
 <p>Social care procedures manual</p>	£9,200	All children and Families with Early Help or Social Care involvement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The workforce has easy access to well written procedures that reflect current legislation, regulations, Statutory Guidance, and best practice. Improved consistency in practice and support offer to children and families.

6. What We Commission (cont)

Commission	Annual Spend 2019/20 or Annual Contract Value 2020/21	Approximate number of children/ young people/ families supported	What outcomes and activities is this commissioned to achieve?
 <p>Transport for children and families and for NCT children's homes</p>	£1,667,000	Approx. 300 children and young people in 2020/21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enable all children who require social care travel assistance to attend school, have contact with family and respite care.
 <p>Cashless payments</p>	£16,000	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To provide an efficient and low risk payment system to children, young people and families without relying on petty cash payments
 <p>Family Time booking system</p>	£30,000	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To provide efficient and effective appointment booking system, reducing administration
 <p>Equipment for children in the community</p>	£116,000	Varies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing equipment, minor adaptations, and repairs for children with disabilities and their families to promote their independence and equal opportunities.

6. What We Commission (cont)

Commission	Annual Spend 2019/20 or Annual Contract Value 2020/21	Approximate number of children/ young people/ families supported	What outcomes and activities is this commissioned to achieve?
 <p>Software to support children's participation</p>	<p>£60,000 3 years</p>	<p>Available for all children supported by NCT</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased engagement of children and young people • Increased influence of children and young people in developing and improving support • Reduced administration time • Earlier reporting of concerns by children to address any issues at earlier stage

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*Our Sufficiency Strategy informs the commissioning of placements for children in care and care leavers

**Funded by Public Health to achieve public health outcomes

***Funded by Better Care Fund

7. Our Commissioning Plans

The following sets out our plans for 2021/22 and 2022/23. Our plans for 2023/24 are dependent on the outcome of the activity in the first two years of this strategy.

Our contracts register and commissioning forward plan detail the timeline for the understand, plan, do and review stages for each of these commissioning projects, and will be overseen by our Commissioning Board. The Commissioning Board reports to the Trust Senior Leadership Team and Trust Board, making recommendations for in relation to procuring services, awarding contracts and decommissioning. The Board has oversight of all our commissioning activity (including joint commissioning), the commissioning forward plan and the quality and outcomes of commissioned services.

2021/22

We will be working with commissioned providers to ensure we are working collaboratively for families and to monitor the impact of services.

We will work with partners to develop the Integrated Care System for children and young people, including joint commissioning.

We will undertake the following commissioning projects (this includes where current contracts are due to end or be extended this year or next year):

Family Support Services & Youth Justice

- Targeted employment, education and training support
- Support for young carers

Children In Need Of Help & Protection

- Family Group Conference Service
- Drug and alcohol and DNA testing

Children In Care, Care Leavers & Adopted Children

- NCT Fostering Family interventions
- Sufficiency Strategy Action Plan – re-open fostering, children’s homes and independent supported accommodation frameworks and training flats for care leavers; consider options for managed support service accommodation and emergency placements

Children With Disabilities

- Support for children with disabilities and their families

Enablers

- Language support

7. Our Commissioning Plans (cont)

2022/23 and beyond

We will be working with commissioned providers to ensure we are working collaboratively for families and to monitor the impact of services.

We will work with partners to develop the Integrated Care System for children and young people, including joint commissioning'.

We will undertake the following commissioning projects (this includes where current contracts are due to end or be extended this year or next year):

Family Support Services & Youth Justice

- Targeted safeguarding support
- Targeted Support for children under 5 and their families in Corby
- Appropriate Adult Service
- Mentoring for adolescents

Children In Care, Care Leavers & Adopted Children

- Sufficiency Strategy Action Plan – residential care, fostering and independent supported accommodation framework, residential block contract
- Fostering Family Support
- Support for Care Leavers' Mental Health and Wellbeing

Children With Disabilities

- Personal Care and Support framework

- Support for children with disabilities and their families

Enablers

- Legal advice for Independent Reviewing Officers

8. Measuring The Impact Of Our Commissioning Strategy And Framework

To understand the overall impact of our Commissioning Strategy and Framework, it is essential that we understand the difference each of our commissioned services has made. Performance monitoring is agreed with providers for each commissioned service, based on the outcomes and activity agreed in the service specification, and includes a variety of methods to understand activity and impact including quantitative and qualitative data on activity and outcomes, views of children, young people and families, views of practitioners and views of regulators where applicable. Performance monitoring is completed on a quarterly basis and impact reported annually.

All of our performance monitoring aims to answer the four Outcomes Based Accountability (Friedman) questions:

	Quantity	Quality
Effort	How much did we do?	How well did we do it?
Effect	Is anyone better off – what difference did we make to the lives of children and their outcomes? Where do we need to focus our improvement efforts?	

Here is some feedback from parents/ carers and our staff about our commissioned services:

“I have been supported massively by the Family Support Worker. The Family Support Worker has been amazing and supported us through a difficult time. She gave me practical and effective approaches to implementing routines and managing behaviours” (parent/carer)

“The Learning Mentor at the school has shared that child has seemed more settled in school and his behaviour has improved the past few weeks” (school)

“Thank you MST from the bottom of our hearts for helping our family re-think our communication and the way we approach behaviours” (parent/carer)

“You helped me behave better, mum has stopped getting phone calls from school every day because I behave more. The worksheets and bits you gave me on managing my emotions and anger really helped. It was good being able to talk with you. The family rules chart you introduced really help my younger brothers.” (young person)

8. Measuring The Impact Of Our Commissioning Strategy And Framework (cont)

“Family has been supported with relationship and positive discipline and routines for children, they had parenting support and emotional support, and parents reported they appreciated Family Intervention Project’s support” (social worker)

“I feel that without the care offered by short breaks, the young person would have been admitted to a hospital where behaviours would have intensified. In accessing a familiar, safe environment the young person has been able to be supported through this difficult period with positive results for both them and their family” (provider)

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We will know we have achieved the objectives of this **strategy** when all of our commissioning is:

- Led by the voice of children, young people, families and practitioners
- Completed within good time to allow for each stage of the cycle to be undertaken effectively (in accordance with the size or nature of the commission)
- Achieving demonstrable impact and positive experiences for children, young people and families (or our staff in the case of ‘enabler’ goods and services); and best value for money
- Enabling us to achieve the objectives of our Business Plan





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Children in Care Profile and Forecasts to March 2024

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End March 2023 data source, created 13/4/23, version 1



Northamptonshire
Children's Trust

Appendix G

Key Points

- From **1124** CiC at end March 23 (excluding UASC), an increase to **1132** is forecast for March 2024, with lower confidence limit of **1104** and upper **1160**.
- The projected increase is largely due to the younger age groups which are forecast to increase by 2%
- The UASC total is at **104** currently, with the 0.1% threshold level for UASC being 173 for the county, so there is the potential to gain another 69 UASC before that threshold is reached.

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The majority of UASC in 2022/23 are in supported accommodation placements (78%) and 20% in foster placements so it's worth noting that they will add to the demand for those placement types.

- The forecasts in this presentation use a **1 year data trend**, assume no other actions are taken to reduce the care population and all exclude UASC (see "tool accuracy" slides for notes on forecasting with or without UASC)
- When forecasting the March 2023 figures using 2022 data, the total forecast non-UASC care figure was relatively close to the actual (1130 projected v 1124 actual). The harder to forecast elements of how the ages and placement types would be split varied in success, with aged 16+ projected to be much lower than actual and 10-15's predicted to be higher than they were.



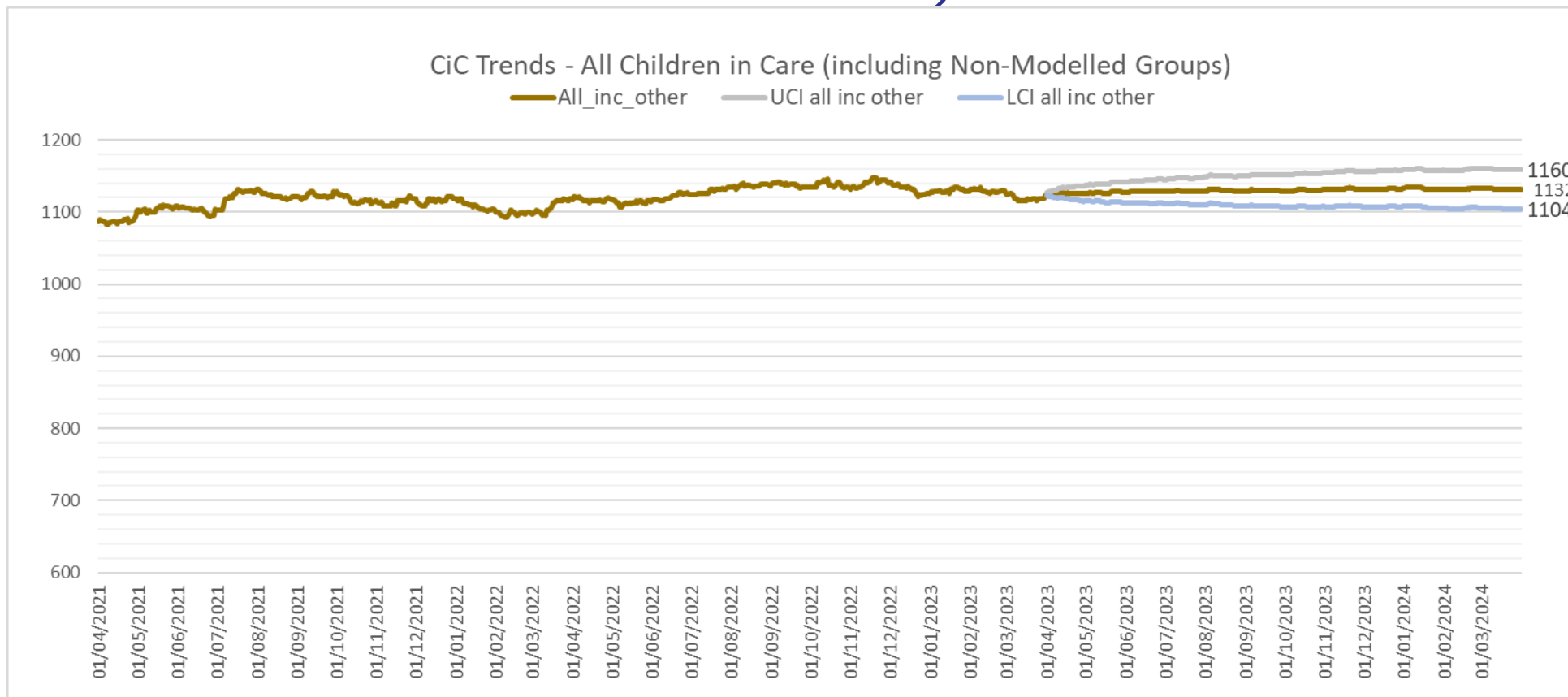
Summary Figures – Excluding UASC

Exc UASC	Total inc Unmodelled	total (Fos, Res, Supp)	Fos	Res	Supp	Age 0	Age 1_4	Age 5_9	Age 10_15	Age 16_18
Actual 31/03/2022	1118	995	823	134	38	57	114	207	436	181
Actual 31/3/2023	1124	996	799	137	60	45	124	205	398	224
Base Forecast 31/03/2024	1132	1004	795	141	68	41	135	201	382	245
Base LCI	1104	976	771	131	59	32	124	190	367	231
Base UCI	1160	1032	819	151	77	50	146	212	397	259
% Change from current to 31/03/24	0.7%	0.8%	-0.5%	2.9%	13.3%	-8.9%	8.9%	-2.0%	-4.0%	9.4%

Projections by age include only the modelled groups. The 'All-Total' include all children in care.



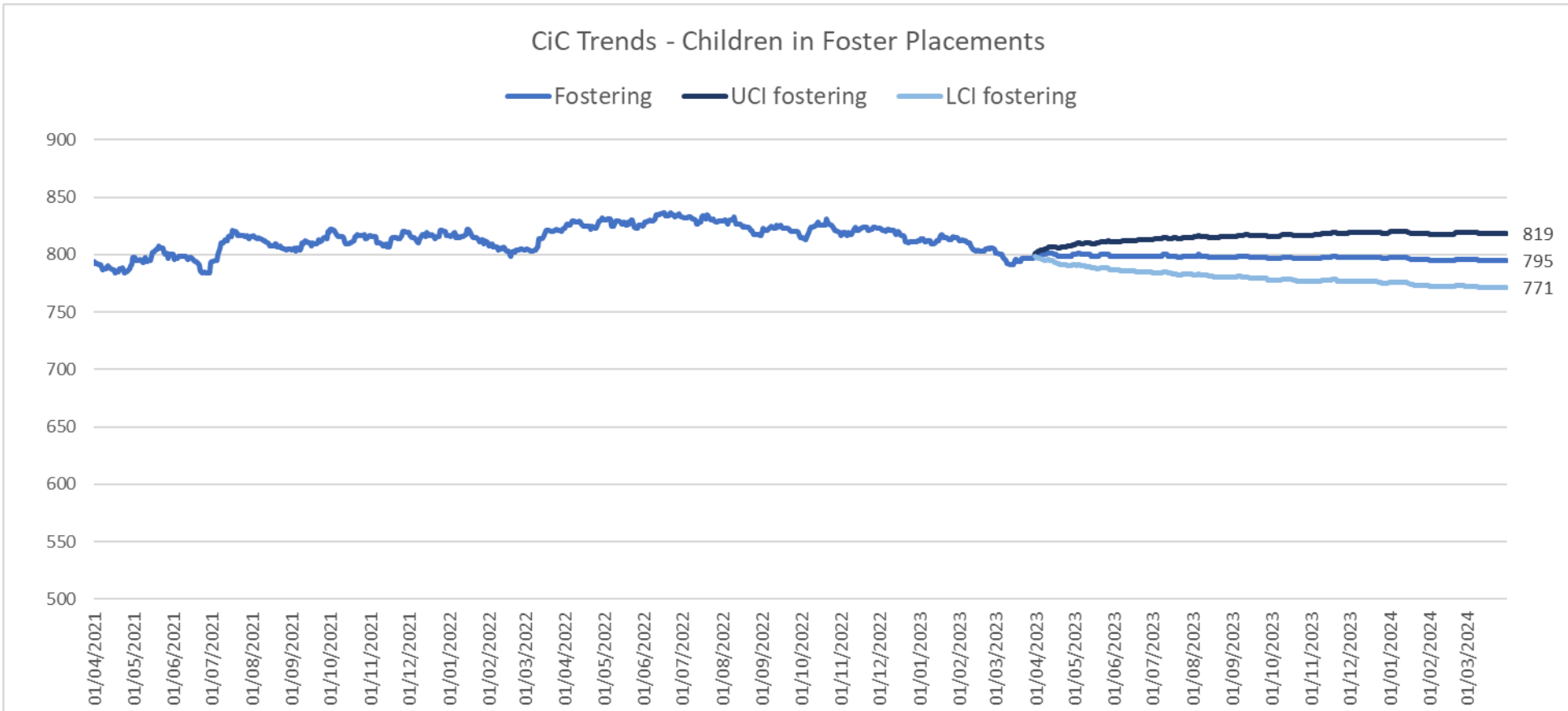
Trend- All Children in Care, Exc UASC



The care population (excluding UASC) has increased **1%** from **1118** at the end of March 2022 to **1124** at the end of March 2023. An increase of **1%** up to **1132** is forecast to March 2024.



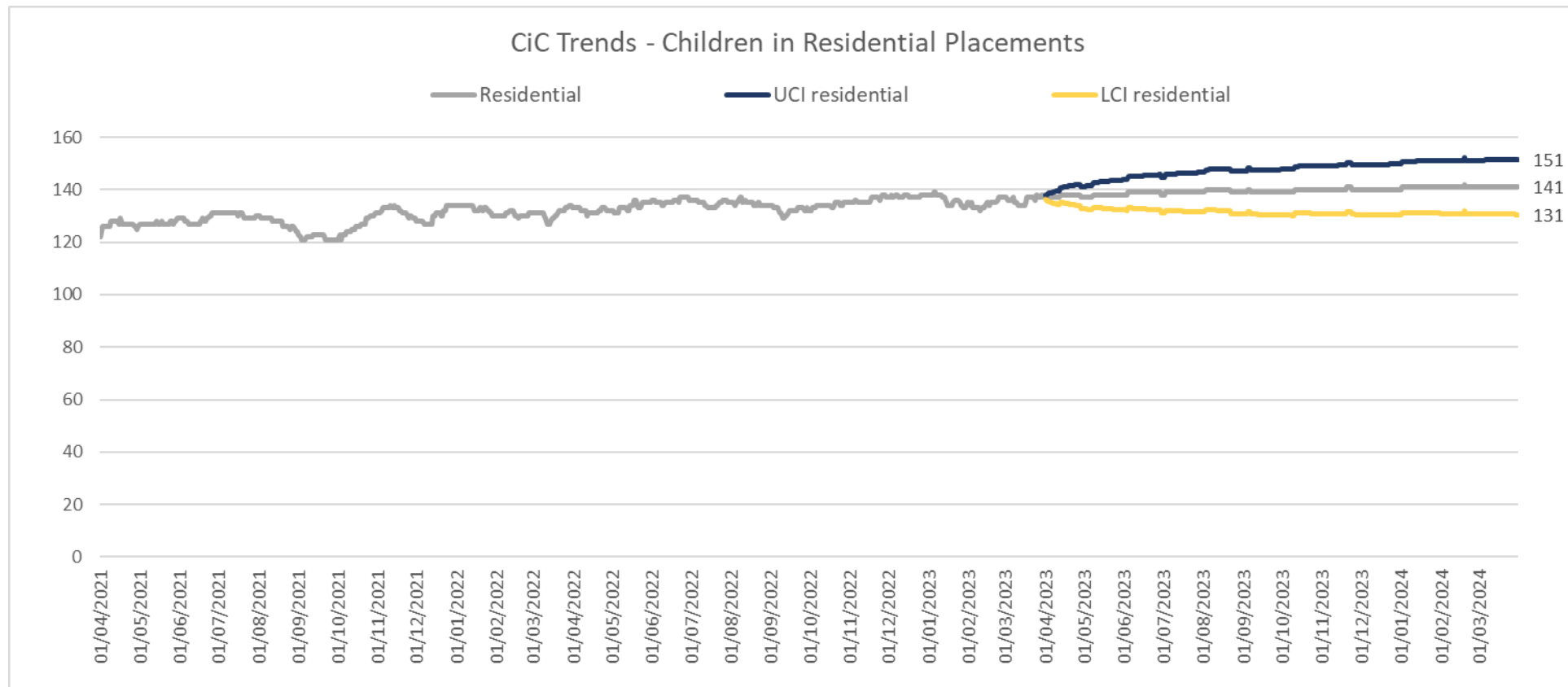
Foster Placements



Foster placements (which includes placements with a connected person) decreased **3%** from **823** children in March 2022, to **799** March 2023. A **0.5%** decrease to **795** is forecast at the end of March 2024.



Residential Placements

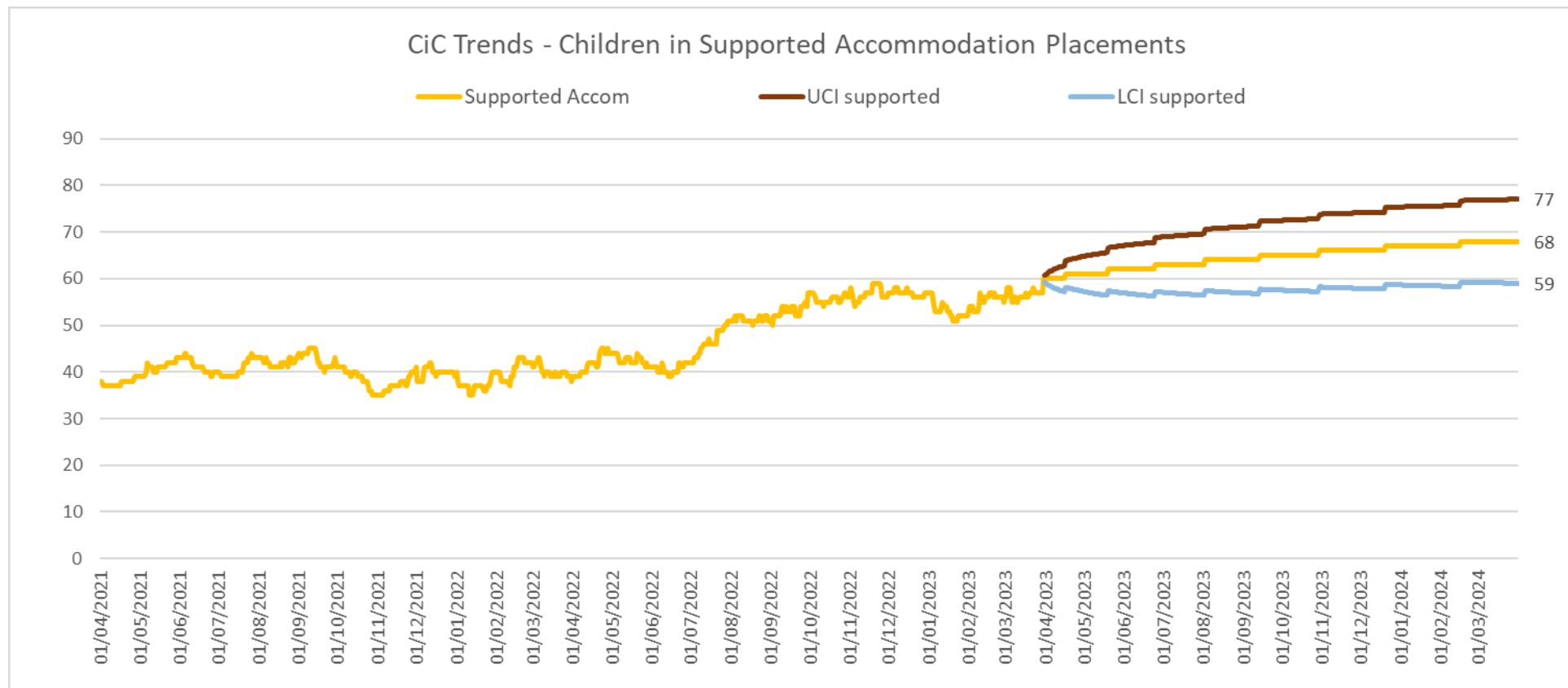


Residential placements was at **134** children at end March 23, and remained relatively consistent at **137** end March 23. This is forecast to increase by 3% at the end of March 2024, to **141**.



Supported Accommodation Placements

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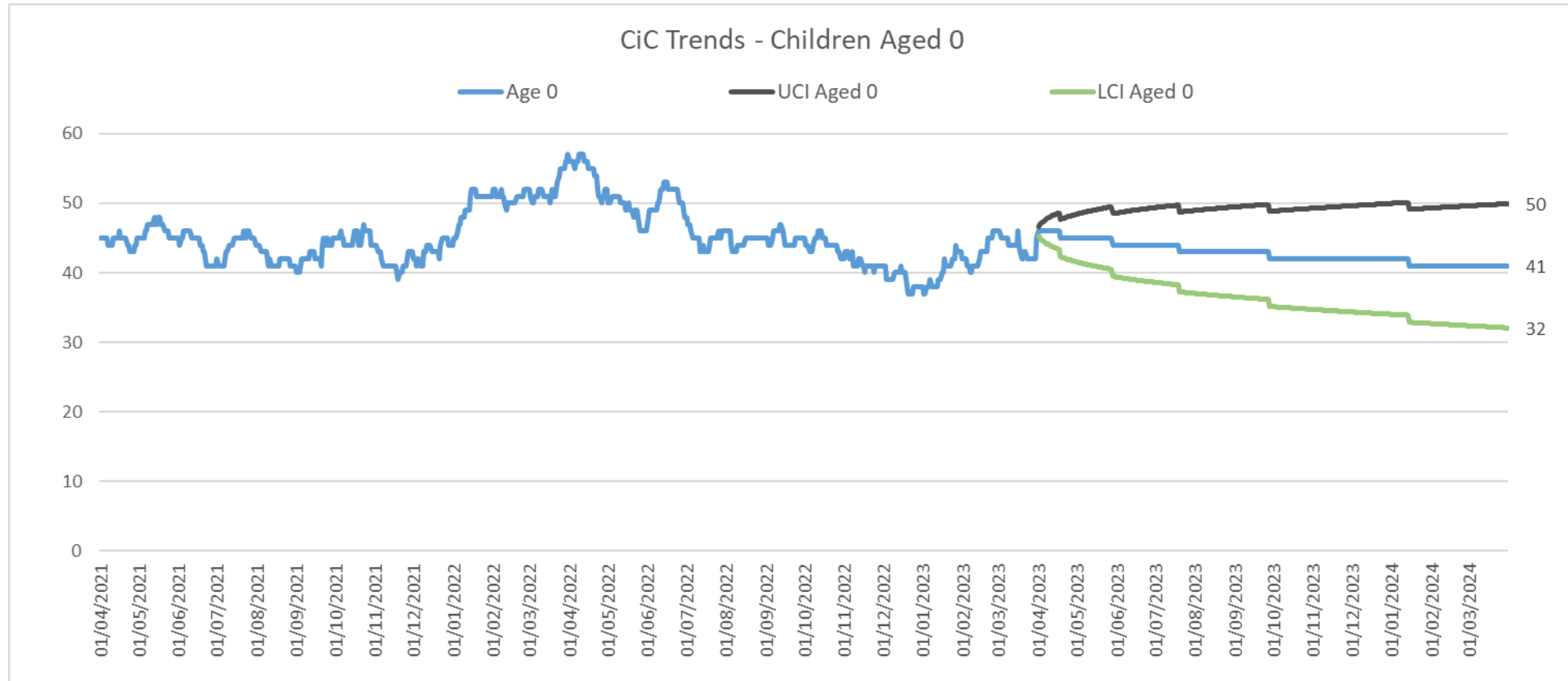


Supported Accommodation placements increased **58%** from **38** children in March 22, to **60** in March 23. A 13% increase to **68** is forecast at the end of March 2024.



**Northamptonshire
Children's Trust**

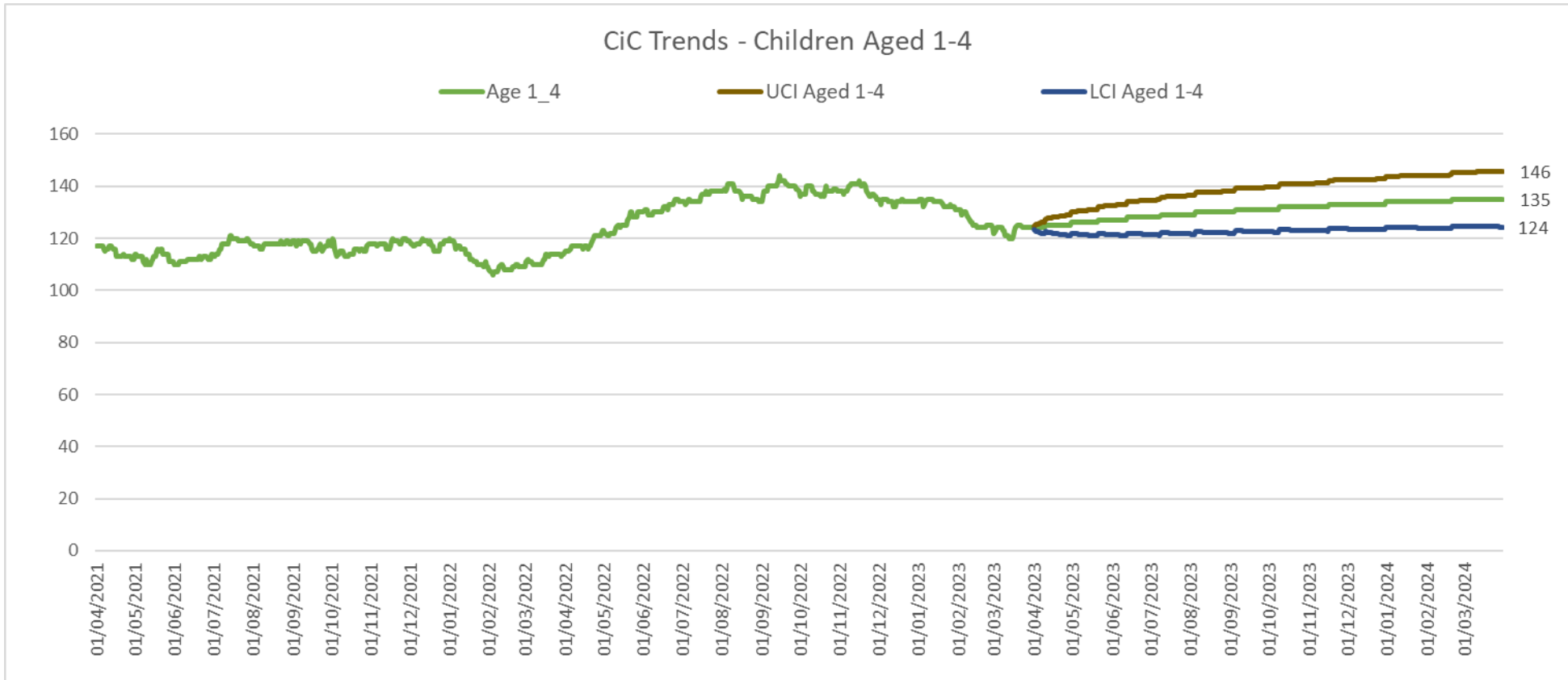
Age Under 1



Children in care aged under 1 has decreased **21%** from **57** in March 22 to **45** in March 23. A 9% decrease is forecast to **41** by March 2024.



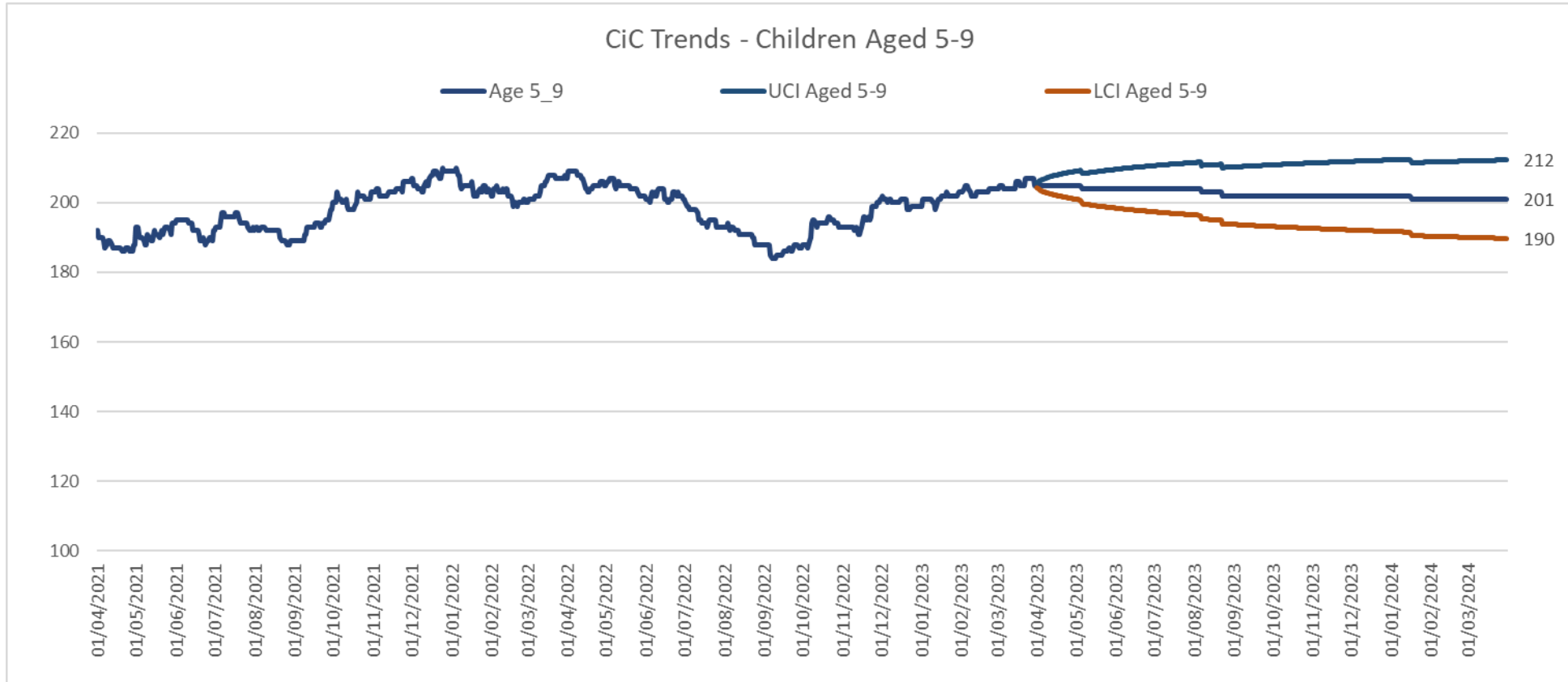
Age 1-4



Children in care aged 1-4 has increased **9%** from **114** on 31/3/22 to **124** on 31/3/23. An increase of **9%** is forecast to **135** by March 2024.



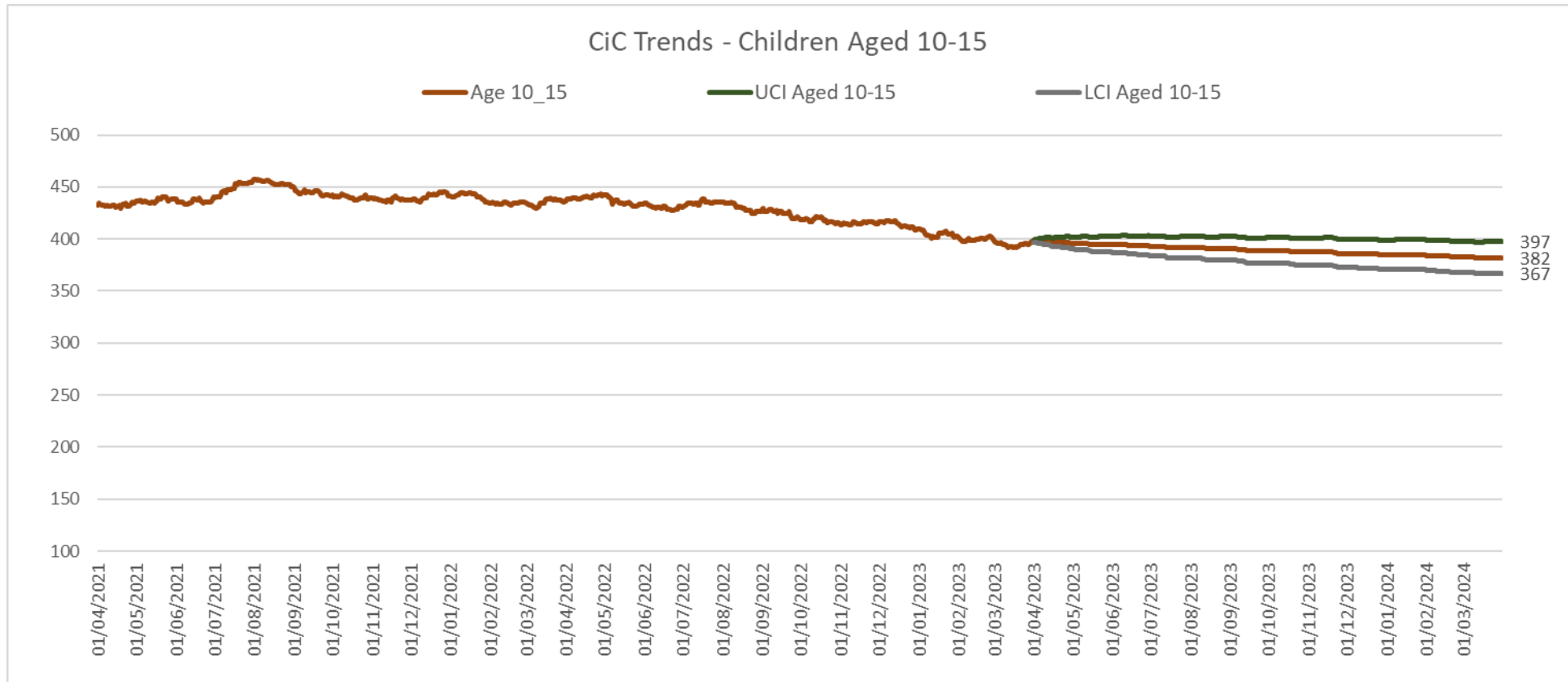
Age 5-9



Children in care aged 5-9 has decreased **1%** from **207** on 31/3/22 to **205** on 31/3/23. There is a **2%** decrease forecast to **201** by March 2024.



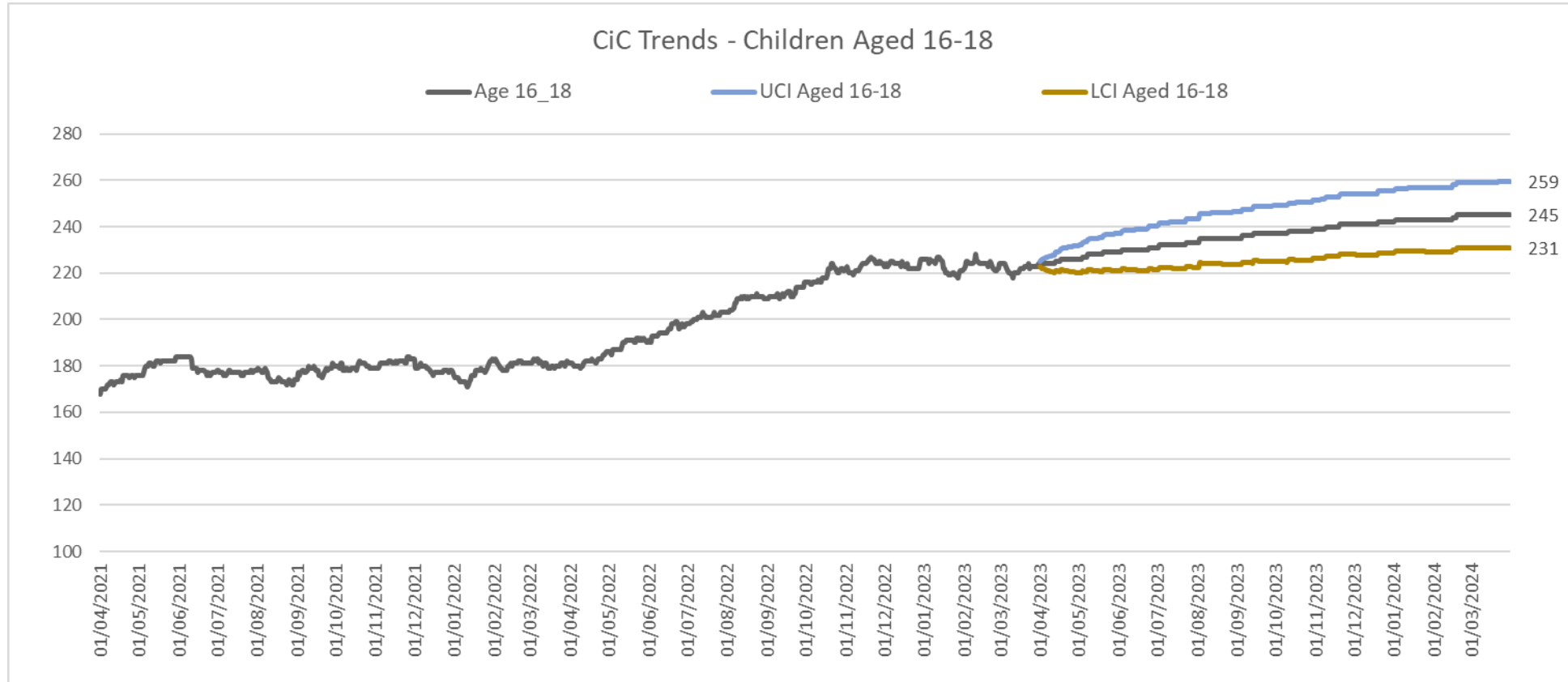
Age 10-15



Children in care aged 10-15 has decreased **11%** from **436** on 31/3/22 to **398** on 31/3/23. There is a 4% decrease forecast to **382** by March 2024.



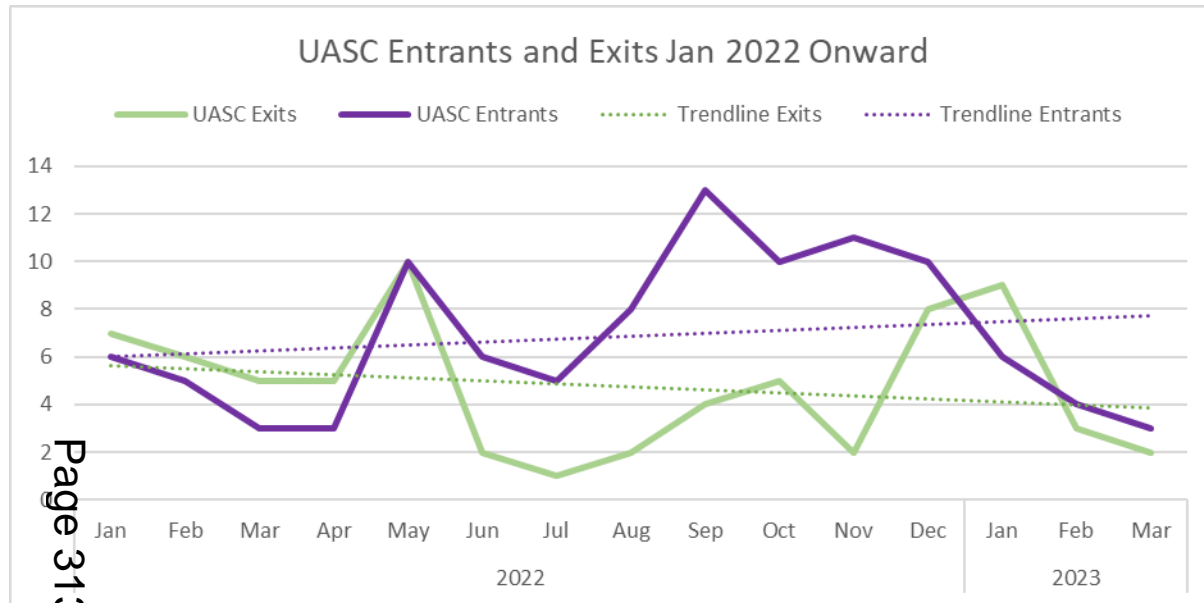
Age 16-18



Children in care aged 16-18 has increased **24%** from **181** on 31/3/22 to **224** on 31/3/23 with a 9% increase forecast to **245** by March 2024.



UASC exits/entrants



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2022/23	UASC Entrants	UASC Exits	Net change
Apr	3	5	-2
May	10	10	0
Jun	6	2	4
Jul	5	1	4
Aug	8	2	6
Sep	13	4	9
Oct	10	5	5
Nov	11	2	9
Dec	10	8	2
Jan 23	6	9	-3
Feb	4	3	1
Mar	3	2	1
Total	89	53	36

UASC entering care since Jan 2022 year up until May 2022 kept a relatively even pace to those exiting care, with 27 entering and 33 exiting, but from June, entrants were significantly higher than those leaving. The last 3 months have seen the UASC numbers stabilise again.



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RAG Criteria	
Red	Major issues identified which may prevent delivered as expected
Amber	Issues identified which may delay the progress and require action but do not threaten overall delivery
Green	On track to deliver as expected
Completed	Successfully completed
Not Started	Not yet started

Partnership improvement priorities are shown in orange

What will good look like	Improvement Priorities	Responsibility	By when	Linked plans	How will we know if we've made a difference? <i>Baselines Jan 23</i>	RAG	Progress Update
1. Excellent Leadership							
Children's experiences and outcomes are improved as a result of consistently good quality management oversight and supervision	1.1 Consistently strong management oversight and supervision Improve the consistency of quality and timeliness of recorded management oversight and reflective case supervision across front line services; which includes trajectory planning, and evidences safety, progress and impact for children	AD Corporate Parenting AD Safeguarding AD CFSS & YOS	Mar 24	NCT Service Plans QAB action log	QA activity shows improved scaling for management oversight and outcomes for children <i>Baseline 68% CRPDs scaled 6 and above out of 10 management oversight; 79% scaled 6 and above out of 10 outcomes</i> Timeliness of supervision <i>Baseline 48%</i>		
	1.2 Impactful quality assurance of management oversight and supervision <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus on quality and impact of management oversight and supervision throughout QA programme Improve robustness of senior management oversight of children in unregistered placements 	AD QA & Commissioning AD Corporate Parenting AD Safeguarding AD CFSS & YOS	Mar 24	NCT Service Plans QAB action log	Increase number of NCT operational managers consistently completing QA activity QA moderation shows improvement in quality of QA activity Senior management oversight of unregistered homes evidenced on child's records		
	1.3 Effective recognition and response to current and emerging national pressures	NCT/ WNC/ NNC Operational Commissioning Group	Mar 24	OCG action log	Children achieve positive outcomes Social workers have manageable caseloads		
Sufficient resources are allocated and							

NCT IMPROVEMENT PLAN

What will good look like	Improvement Priorities	Responsibility	By when	Linked plans	How will we know if we've made a difference? <i>Baselines Jan 23</i>	RAG	Progress Update
managed to enable effective delivery of NCT services	(i.e - increased complexity of need and increased demand on statutory services – Valuing Care - ability of fostering and children's homes market to meet needs - Social care workforce shortages - Increased costs (ie staff, transport, homes for children)						
2 Recruit, retain and develop an awesome workforce							
Children are supported by consistent practitioners who have the capacity and skills to develop effective relationships and undertake good quality work with them	2.1 Increased opportunities into social work posts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Step Up, Frontline, NQSWs, SW Apprentices, Social workers recruited from abroad 	Director of Finance & Resources AD Quality Assurance & Commissioning	Mar 24	NCT Workforce Strategy	Reduced SW vacancies Baseline 17.1%		
	2.2 Excellent CPD offer and conditions of success <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure the effectiveness and capacity of support services and business support to enable frontline practitioners and managers to focus on practice Progress new case management system to meet practice needs Refresh the practice model. Fully embed Signs of Safety and implement systemic practice 	AD Quality Assurance & Commissioning	Apr 23 – Mar 24	NCT Workforce Strategy	QA activity shows improved scaling for outcomes for children <i>Baseline 79% CRPDs scaled 6 and above out of 10 outcomes</i> Training take up and feedback Reduced turnover rate Baseline 17.1% Practitioners report work is manageable and they are well supported (annual social work health check)		
Children and families receive an appropriate response in an emergency out of hours	2.3 Complete disaggregation of EDT and ensure appropriate capacity	NNC/ WNC DCS Director of Finance & Resources AD Safeguarding	Sept 23	OCG action log	EDT will deliver services for children only		

What will good look like	Improvement Priorities	Responsibility	By when	Linked plans	How will we know if we've made a difference? <i>Baselines Jan 23</i>	RAG	Progress Update
3 Strong Relationship based practice							
<p>Children and families receive the right specialist and timely response that meets their needs and improves their outcomes</p>	<p>3.1 Strong assessment of need and appropriate response</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement systemic practice and Valuing Care assessment alongside embedding of Signs of Safety Ensure effective practice in transfer of cases from MASH to DAAT to increase timeliness of response for families Ensure good quality direct work is used to inform assessment and plans for all children, including through increased use of Mind of My Own app Efficient processes and sufficient resource in place to ensure children and young people in care, including those living out of county, receive timely initial and review health assessments. Continued dialogue with region and national NHS leaders regarding the revision of statutory guidance of initial health assessments 	<p>AD Safeguarding AD Corporate Parenting AD CFSS & YOS AD QA & Commissioning</p> <p>ICB Head of Safeguarding/Designated Nurses NHFT AD C&YP</p>	<p>Mar 24</p>	<p>NCT Service Plans</p> <p>CYP Transformation Programme</p>	<p>Appropriate and timely screening, decisions with robust rationale and transfer evidenced via performance data and QA activity (including multi agency practice review).</p> <p>Reduce re-referrals (baseline 29%) Reduce assessments with NFA (baseline 38%)</p> <p>CRPDs scaled 6+ out of 10 for voice of child, identity and culture (baseline 73%)</p> <p>CRPDs scaled 6+ for outcome for children (baseline 79%)</p> <p>Increase in percentage of children who receive IHA and RHA within statutory timeframes IHAs baseline 83.7% RHAs baseline 73.8%</p> <p>QA activity evidences good quality initial and review health assessments.</p>		

What will good look like	Improvement Priorities	Responsibility	By when	Linked plans	How will we know if we've made a difference? <i>Baselines Jan 23</i>	RAG	Progress Update
Children are well cared for in a permanent and safe home at the earliest opportunity	<p>3.2 High quality effective permanency planning at earliest opportunity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve effectiveness of planning for children to come into care, including appropriate use of Police Powers and joint planning • Effective Family network meetings occur in every case where there are concerns about safety and welfare of a child • Clear trajectory and contingency planning • Good quality life story work with all children in care throughout their time of being looked after • All children in care have effective SMART permanence plans which consider all options for permanency 	AD Safeguarding AD Corporate Parenting Ivan Balhatchet – Crime & Justice NPCC Lead		NCT Service Plans LFJB Action Plan	<p>Reduction of emergency admissions to care</p> <p>Increased use of PLO</p> <p>QA activity evidences effective joint planning and families are clear why we are involved and the changes they will be supported to make</p> <p>Families are supported to achieve and sustain change and more children remain in or return to their family's care (Baseline children in care rate 71 Baseline children in care returning home tbc Baseline children leaving care due to permanence 20%)</p>		
Care leavers have access to support that meets their needs and improves their outcomes	<p>3.3 Appropriate out of hours and crisis support for care leavers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review and develop multi-agency local offer for care leavers including provision of an out of hours service and access to crisis support • Explore opportunities to develop a hub for care leavers living in North Northamptonshire 	AD Corporate Parenting NHFT AD CYP WNC & NNC Adults Services & Housing ADs ICB Senior Transformation Manager	Mar 24	Corporate Parenting Board	QA activity and feedback from young people shows access and impact		
4 Insightful quality assurance and learning							
Children's outcomes and experiences are improved as a result of improving practice	<p>4.1 Consistently impactful IRO and CP Chair escalations</p>	AD Quality Assurance & Commissioning AD Safeguarding AD Corporate Parenting	Sept 23	NCT Service Plans	<p>Timely responses to escalations</p> <p>QA activity to evidence impact of escalations</p>		
	<p>4.2 Learning from QA activity makes a difference for children</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actions and learning from individual CRPDs are progressed through 	Director of Social Care All ADs	Mar 24	QAB action log	QA activity to evidence impact		

What will good look like	Improvement Priorities	Responsibility	By when	Linked plans	How will we know if we've made a difference? <i>Baselines Jan 23</i>	RAG	Progress Update
	supervision and evidence on child files of progress made <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Thematic learning from QA activity is shared through training and communications and impact is measured and demonstrated 						
	4.3 Impactful multi agency quality assurance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3x multi agency practice reviews (MAPRs) per year; thematic learning shared through NSCP Implement a process to enable review, learning and improvement of young people detained in police custody 	NSCP Quality and Governance sub group chair Ivan Balhatchet – Crime & Justice NPCC Lead Director of Social Care	Mar 24	NSCP business plan	Impact on practice and outcomes as a result of QA activity QA evidence that needs of children in police custody are closely monitored to ensure decision making conforms to current statutory guidance; good practice shared		
5 Healthy Partnerships that improve outcomes for children							
Risks for children who are experiencing contextual vulnerabilities are effectively managed and the impact on them is minimised	5.1 Improve our partnership response for children who are experiencing contextual vulnerabilities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve our partnership response to domestic abuse Improve our partnership response to exploitation Improve quality and impact of our response (including return home interviews) to children who go missing. 	Director of Social Care AD for CFSS WNC and NNC Community safety ADs Director of Social Care AD Safeguarding AD CFSS Ivan Balhatchet – Crime & Justice NPCC Lead ICB Head of Safeguarding/Designated Nurses representing health as a system	Timescales as per partnership action plans	Domestic abuse strategy West Northamptonshire Council (westnorthants.gov.uk) Domestic abuse strategy North Northamptonshire Council (northnorthants.gov.uk) NSCP exploitation strategy and action plan	Impact on child reduces evidenced by QA activity; supervision and MO. Timely access to DA services including for perpetrators Reduction of children coming into care due to exploitation Reduction in the numbers of children who go missing; and numbers who go repeatedly missing. Children in care have fewer missing episodes. Timely decision making in neglect cases evidenced by QA activity and reduced repeat CP plans for neglect		

What will good look like	Improvement Priorities	Responsibility	By when	Linked plans	How will we know if we've made a difference? <i>Baselines Jan 23</i>	RAG	Progress Update
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve our partnership response to neglect Skilled workforce able to identify neglect factors; Increased use of GPC 2 tool 	<p>WNC and NNC Public Health children's leads</p> <p>NSCP Neglect Sub Group Chair</p> <p>NSCP Strategic Leads</p>		<p>NSCP Neglect Strategy and action plan</p> <p>NCT Service Plans</p>			
Children and families in need of additional help receive the right support at the right time which makes a difference to their lives	5.2 Further strengthen the partnership Early Help offer	<p>Director of Social Care AD CFSS & YOS</p> <p>ICB Head of Safeguarding/Designated Nurses representing health as a system</p> <p>WNC/ NNC ADs for Public Health Commissioning</p>	Timescales as per NSCP Early Help action plan	<p>Early Help Partnership Strategy and action plan</p> <p>CFSS Service Plan</p>	<p>Increased EHA submissions from schools, GPs and Health Visitors</p> <p>Better outcomes for children evidenced in more families receiving help early from a range of professionals</p>		
Children with additional and complex needs receive the right support at the right time which makes a difference to their lives	5.3 Appropriate and timely support for children with additional and complex needs	<p>NCT AD QA & Commissioning; ICB Senior Transformation Manager</p> <p>WNC/ NNC ADs Commissioning</p> <p>AD Corporate Parenting</p> <p>WNC and NNC ADs Adults Social Care</p> <p>WNC and NNC ADs Education</p>	<p>Mar 24</p> <p>Sept 23</p>	<p>West and North SEND Strategies and action plans</p> <p>CYP Transformation Programme</p> <p>CYP transformation programme</p>	<p>Reduction in the number of children with disabilities who become looked after and/or require acute care</p> <p>EHCP and EHC reviews shared in a timely manner with child/ families and considered by professionals involved with the child</p> <p>Pathway for accessing substance misuse, emotional well-being and mental health support is understood by all</p> <p>Swift access to appropriate support for children and support plan developed with family, network and professionals</p> <p>Multi agency QA activity (via NSCP Q&G subgroup) shows multi agency case discussions are used appropriately and have positive impact</p>		

NCT IMPROVEMENT PLAN

What will good look like	Improvement Priorities	Responsibility	By when	Linked plans	How will we know if we've made a difference? <i>Baselines Jan 23</i>	RAG	Progress Update
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Appropriate support and response for children who are exhibiting self injurious behaviour, suicide ideation, disordered eating, gender dysphoria Improve the consistency and quality of multi-agency decision making and ownership for children with complex needs to achieve positive outcomes for children 	<p>ICB Senior Transformation Manager WNC/ NNC AD Public Health Commissioning CYP Transformation Board Healthy Minds Healthy Brains pillar chair</p> <p>AD Corporate Parenting AD Safeguarding ICB Head of Safeguarding/Designated Nurses Ivan Balhatchet – Crime & Justice NPCC Lead</p>		NCT Service Plans			
Children in care and care leavers reach their potential in terms of educational attainment	<p>5.4 Increase access and attendance of small number of children in care currently not in appropriate education</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase sufficiency and quality of in county special school and alternative educational provision Care/Education pathway to be developed for children entering care and when moving placement to ensure that education needs are considered in timely way, prior to and immediately after children become looked after and moving placements Develop range of education, training and employment opportunities for post 16 children in care with additional needs, and care leavers Assessments for specific needs e.g. ASD/ADHD and SEND needs assessments are available to children in care and undertaken in a timely way 	<p>Director of Social Care AD Corporate Parenting</p> <p>NNC & WNC ADs for Education & for Commissioning</p> <p>Head of Virtual School</p> <p>ICB Senior Transformation Manager</p>	Sept 23	<p>Children in Care Strategy</p> <p>NCT Service Plans</p>	<p>Reduce length time in which any child in care is not in receipt of appropriate education</p> <p>Maintain at national average % of young people in care achieving 5 GCSE grade A*-C</p> <p>Maintain above national average care leavers who are EET</p> <p>Increase in numbers of apprenticeships, traineeships and employment opportunities for care leavers within NCT, NNC, WNC and partner agencies</p>		

6. Effective use of resources

NCT IMPROVEMENT PLAN

What will good look like	Improvement Priorities	Responsibility	By when	Linked plans	How will we know if we've made a difference? <i>Baselines Jan 23</i>	RAG	Progress Update
NCT commissioning and performance management has the best possible impact on outcomes for children	6.1 External review of commissioning and QA, performance management and assurance arrangements	NCT Chief Exec	May 23	QAB action log	Positive outcomes and value for money achieved		
Children in care are cared for in a home which meets their needs and improves their outcomes	6.2 Deliver sufficiency strategy action plan ensuring we have the right homes to meet the needs of our children and young people <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children and young people who live within residential care are provided with homes that are registered with a regulator appropriate for their needs Ensure cost of care is met appropriately Our ISA providers are registered with Ofsted (post 1st April 2023) 	Director of Social Care AD Quality Assurance & Commissioning AD Corporate Parenting NNC/WNC DCS NCT CEX	Aug 25 (project timescales in sufficiency strategy action plan)	Sufficiency Strategy and action plan	Increase in number of in house foster placements Increase in occupancy of in house residential homes Reduction in use of unregistered provision Improved placement stability <i>baseline 3+ moves in 12 months: 11%</i> <i>baseline same placement 2+ years / placed for adoption: 64.1%</i> Placement funding contributions are in line with other areas		
Older teenagers receive the right support and accommodation to meet their needs and help transition into adulthood	6.3 Appropriate range of accommodation and support is available and meet the needs of young people 16-25 years old <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work in partnership with Housing Needs to support accommodation requirements of 16/17 Youth Homelessness Views of young people who have experienced the Housing protocol to inform further developments and plans Housing support offer for care leavers 18+ and ensure any gaps in provision have actions to address 	NNC/WNC DCSs Director of Social Care WNC and NNC Housing ADs AD CFSS & YOS AD Corporate Parenting AD QA& Commissioning	September 23	16-17 homeless action plan NCT Service Plans	QA activity shows Care leavers are able to move into their own suitable accommodation at time that meets their needs 16-17 homeless young people receive an appropriate and timely response in accordance with their needs and views		



Northamptonshire Children's Trust

Self-Evaluation September 2022

Progress since Northamptonshire ILACS 2019

Our Vision:

"Children, young people and families at the heart of all we do - in every decision we make and every action we take"

Our Values:

- ❖ Be child focused and work with the whole family.
- ❖ Make a difference with trust and integrity.
- ❖ Concentrate on the best solution.
- ❖ Act with respect, kindness, and compassion.
- ❖ Communicate well.
- ❖ Do the best job of your life every single day.

Our Commitment to children and young people:

"What we do today affects your tomorrow. We promise to walk side by side with you"

Our Ambition:

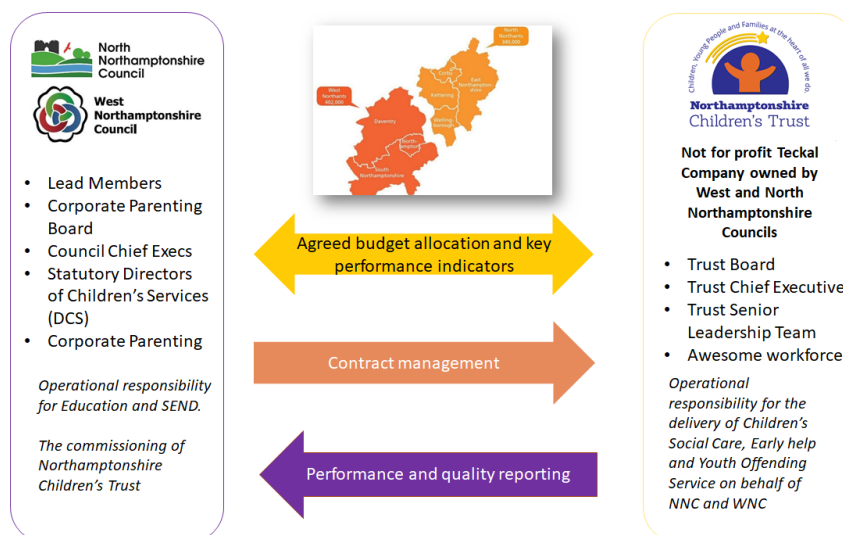
"Our ambition is to make a sustainable improvement to the lives of children, young people and families"

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• Children in Care	
• Care Leavers	

Section 1 – Introduction

Northamptonshire Children’s Trust (NCT) delivers Children’s Early Help, Social Care and Youth Offending Services to West Northamptonshire (WNC) and North Northamptonshire (NNC) councils, serving the whole of Northamptonshire County since November 2020. In April 2021 Northamptonshire County Council was replaced by two unitary councils, WNC and NNC, each with a Lead Member for Children’s Services. The DCS was initially a joint post until summer 2022.



Since our 2019 ILACS we have had the following Ofsted monitoring visits, which document how we are improving experiences and outcomes for children and families:

- **January 2020:** Front door.
- **October 2020:** Focused Visit – delivery of child-centred practice and care within the context of restrictions placed on society during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **February 2021:** Children in Care, Placement Matching and Decision Making and Children with Disabilities who are looked after.
- **July 2021:** Child Protection (CP) and Child in Need (CiN).
- **November 2021:** Children in Care who are 16+, particularly planning for leaving care and Care Leavers.

There have also been the following Ofsted regulatory inspections:

- **November 2021:** Independent Fostering Agency– judged ‘Requires Improvement to be good’.
- **January/February 2022:** Voluntary Adoption Agency– judged ‘Good’
- We have also had inspections of all 5 of our Children's Homes- Grades: 4 x ‘Good’; 1 x ‘Requires Improvement to be Good’

This self-evaluation provides a summary of progress made against the findings of our 2019 ILACS; what we know about the quality and impact of our practice over the last 12 months, how we know it, and what we are doing to further improve.

This assessment reflects our Social Care Improvement Plan and Business Plan, addressing priorities identified following inspections, quality assurance activity and peer reviews. The Improvement Plan is regularly reported to the Northamptonshire Social Care Improvement Board, chaired by a Department for Education (DfE) appointed Independent Chair.

Section 2- Improvement in a challenging context

We are proud to have continued to drive and deliver improvements for children and families in Northamptonshire in a time of significant local, national, and global challenges:

- Global COVID-19 pandemic resulting in societal restrictions unprecedented in our times, and the impact of this on individuals, families, communities.
- Adaptation to virtual and hybrid ways of working as a result of the pandemic.
- War in Ukraine, withdrawal of allied troops from Afghanistan, and the associated impact on migration.
- Massive cost of living increases and impact on family income.
- Continued national shortage of social workers and other key worker professions, and an increasingly competitive labour market.
- A national placements market which is not meeting need – as identified in CMA report on Children’s Social Care¹ (March 22) and Independent Review of Children’s Social Care² (June 22).
- Brexit including the impact on the labour market.
- Local organisational changes – establishment of NCT, WNC and NNC.

During this time, we have achieved:

- **Improved quality of Social Care practice and management oversight**, which is helping to keep children safe, as evidenced in Ofsted visits and inspections, peer reviews and internal quality assurance.
- **More of our social worker posts are filled** 15.8% social worker vacancies in June 2022 (England average 17%) compared with 22.28% in October 2019 and no unallocated cases.
- **Improved working with our partners and a stronger strategic approach to early help, neglect and exploitation**; improved early help assessment, step down process and timeliness of support from NCT Children and Family Support Services.
- **An embedded quality assurance framework** working alongside practitioners to collaboratively reflect on practice, celebrate good practice and identify learning, which is ‘improving children’s experiences’³.
- **A permanent senior leadership team who ‘know the services well and are committed to improving the lives of children and young people’**⁴ bringing stability, positive culture change and sustained drive for continuous improvement.

In November 2021, the Children’s Commissioner for Northamptonshire advised the Minister ‘*Given the progress secured and trajectory the service is on, I still believe that a continuing commissioner presence with the statutory powers entailed is more than is necessary as things stand.*’

In January 2022, the DfE issued a revised statutory direction which included the appointment of an independent chair of the Council’s Children’s Service Improvement Board at the end of the Children’s Commissioner’s tenure.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/childrens-social-care-market-study-final-report/final-report>

² [Final Report - The Independent Review of Children's Social Care \(childrensocialcare.independent-review.uk\)](https://www.childrensocialcare.independent-review.uk)

³ Ofsted monitoring visits November 2021 and July 2021

⁴ Ofsted monitoring visit November 2021

Section 3 - Self-Evaluation at a glance

What difference have we made to Northamptonshire children since 2019?

- Children are safe and are experiencing better quality support and outcomes.
- Children and families now receive more effective help at an earlier stage, which is making a positive difference to their lives.
- Children and families receive a swifter, more appropriate and co-ordinated response to vulnerabilities, concerns and risks.
- Children's needs are now better understood and supported.
- The majority of our children are cared for in a stable placement that meets their needs and achieves good outcomes.
- More children have been supported to safely return home to their families.
- Care leavers and those who support them are now more likely to be clear on what their plans are seeking to achieve.
- Children and families are now more likely to have better experiences as a result of a more stable and sustained Social Care workforce.

What are we proud of?

- The strides we have made in strengthening our partnerships and developing early help.
- The good outcomes achieved by the vast majority of our children
- The achievements of Children in Care, including educational attainment, as celebrated at our first awards ceremony since 2017.
- Our awesome and resilient workforce who have kept children at the heart of all they do through some of the most challenging times in our living memory.
- The recognition of the quality and outcomes achieved by our Adoption Agency and Children's Homes.
- The fact that we know ourselves well and are focused on working together to continually improve.
- The positive, reflective, and empowering culture we have developed together which is making a difference to our practice and our workforce.

What do we want to do next?

- Continue to increase the consistency of good quality strengths-based relationship practice.
- Continue to listen to our children and have their voice at the centre of all we do.
- Enable more children to remain in or return to the care of their families.
- Continue working with partners on consistency in applying thresholds, ensuring proportionate and appropriate support to children and families.
- To continue our work with partners to have a greater impact for children at risk or involved in exploitation.
- To increase our access to good quality homes that can meet the needs and care for our children.
- Continue to work with system partners to ensure we have the best possible support for the mental health, employment, education and training, and accommodation needs of our Children in Care and care leavers.
- Empower more of our workforce, particularly those of diverse backgrounds, to develop their practice and careers in NCT.

Section 4 - Progress against 2019 ILACS Recommendations

We are confident that children are safe in Northamptonshire.

Compared to 2019, the needs of children and families are better understood and supported; their experiences and outcomes have improved. Whilst some children benefit from brilliant support, we know some still experience inconsistencies; we continue to work tirelessly to improve where we need to.

The embedded document provides a summary of the progress we have made against the 2019 ILACS recommendations.



progress on ILACS
2019 recommendatic

Section 5- Progress against our Strategic Priorities for Improvement

These are the areas we are focusing on to achieve our ambition of making a sustainable improvement to the lives of children, young people, and families. They reflect the thematic areas for improvement identified in the 2019 inspection and subsequent monitoring visits:



Our Ofsted Monitoring Visit (November 2021) found:

Senior leaders demonstrate in their recently updated self-assessment that they **know their services well** and are **committed to improving the lives of children and young people**. Improvement plans are realistic and continue to be implemented, with success, despite the ongoing challenges of the pandemic.

Our Ofsted Monitoring Visit (July 2021) found:

'SLT has an impressive energy and relentless commitment to improving the lives of children in Northamptonshire'

Excellent Leadership – Our improvement will be driven by a stable senior leadership team that provides strategic leadership and direction, clarity of the vision for the service and sets clear priorities and expectations. The senior leadership team will be visible to and engage with all staff.

- **Full, permanent NCT senior leadership team (SLT)** in place since April 2021 supported by strong NCT Board. All strategic and most service managers are permanent this provides stability, clarity of vision and relentless drive for improvement.

- In July 2022, we appointed NCT's first **Young Chief Exec**, who is currently in our care and aspires to be a social worker. She and Colin have agreed joint commitments and will develop the role together to ensure it is meaningful and able to have a positive impact on our organisation and practice.
- **Monthly QA board** chaired by NCT Chief Executive giving senior leadership oversight of practice in a systemic and consistent manner.
- **Strong line of sight of NNC/ WNC Lead Members and DCSs** through monthly strategic and operational groups, Social Care Improvement Board, QA assurance meeting, Practitioners Improvement Board.
- **Regular engagement and visibility** of SLT through open door approach, Chief Exec's 58-minute sessions, comms, attending team meetings and QA activity alongside practitioners.
- Senior leaders **championing recognition of good practice**, 'naming the issue', empowering colleagues to make improvements to systems and processes through open communication and collaborative working.
- Our workforce has clarity on **our vision, commitment and priorities**, developed through 58-minute sessions with further refinement by the Practitioners' Improvement Board and Equalities Steering Group.
- 9-month **Leadership Development Programme** completed for all NCT managers (including SLT) with positive impact on practice and culture. This was developed with University of Northampton, Research in Practice and Beyond Behaviour (Functional Fluency) and **focused on enabling managers to empower each other, staff, children, and families and build a positive culture**.
- The Leadership Development Programme consisted of monthly sessions led by the Chief Executive, one to one development sessions and cross organisational learning sets which included an incredibly **well received session designed and delivered by our Care Leaver Apprentices on Empathetic Leadership**. The programme set expectations and provided clarity on a strengths based, collaborative approach. Improvement in leadership skills was reported by delegates.
- Other **leadership development opportunities**, including Research in Practice's Practice Supervisor Development and Practice Leaders Programme, mentoring, coaching, Signs of Safety Practice Champion training, masterclasses and bespoke support from Partners in Practice and Research in Practice.
- Clarity of standards and expectations through **Practice Model, Practice Standards and Supervision Policy** (refreshed and relaunched September 2021) and best practice examples shared on Learning Hub.

Impact

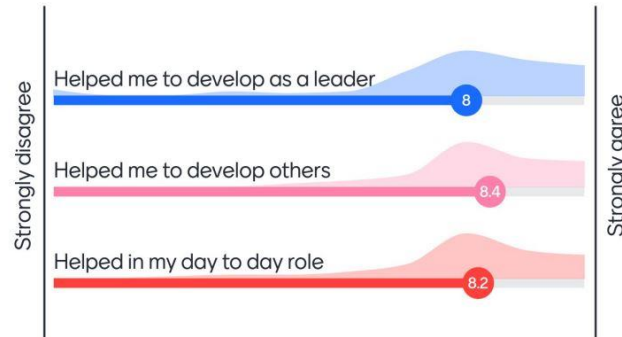
- **Continuing improvement trajectory** evidenced through Ofsted monitoring visits; as a result of strong support, positive challenge and drive for improvement from SLT, Lead Members, DCSs, NCT Board and Social Care Improvement Board
- Positive feedback received from colleagues attending the **Chief Executive's 58 minutes sessions** and via our Practitioners' Improvement Board about **SLT being visible, positive, and inspiring, and that communication has improved**.
- **QA activity shows an improvement in the quality of supervision**, and there is ongoing work with managers to ensure quality is consistently good across the board. Ofsted (July 2021) noted some signs of initial positive impact of revised supervision recording.
- **71% of Collaborative Reflective Practice Discussions (CRPDs) in last 12 months** scaled management oversight and supervision at 6 and above (out of 10)⁵ July 2022. Of this 12% scaled at 9-10; CRPDs since September 2020.

⁵ On a scale of 0-10, where 10 means management oversight is timely, effective and has a positive impact on the direction of work with the child and their family, and 0 means that management oversight is either missing or is ineffective

- **Staff consistently feedback** that they feel supported by managers in QA activity, peer reviews and Ofsted monitoring visits.

February 2022 Leadership Development Programme participant feedback

Leadership Development Programme



'It has helped me be more supportive in supervision. I had found some of the practitioners had a fixed mindset, so I am helping them to develop a growth mindset' - Manager about our Leadership Development Programme

What does this mean for children and families?

- Children and families are more likely to receive better quality, more timely support that meets their needs because our workforce is empowered, well supported, and clear about what is expected of them and what we're aiming to achieve.

Development of the Corporate Parenting Board (CPB)

- Newly elected Unitary councillors were provided with training on corporate parenting, safeguarding and the function of the CPB.
- Further training 'Corporate Parenting Through the Eyes of a Child' delivered in December 2021 to enhance CPB members' understanding of roles and responsibilities and the lived experience of Children in Care.
- Lead Member for WNC and joint chair of CPB has participated in the LGA Leadership of CPB training.
- The NCT performance scorecard is regularly reviewed by the CPB and training of Board members has been provided to help them understand the performance data and enable them to challenge effectively.
- Having two care leavers as members of the CPB provides a helpful perspective to the Board and challenges officers and members to be thinking differently.
- Updated terms of reference written in a young person friendly way.
- CPB is undertaking deep dive sessions on particular topics, led by subject matter experts including children and young people.
- CPB links closely with quarterly health network meetings, Virtual School Advisory Group and Children in Care and Care Leavers' participation groups.
- WNC and NNC Assistant Directors for Housing and Communities are members of the Board.

Impact

- CPB members' understanding of specific issues faced by children and young people in care has been strengthened.
- Council tax discount/ reduction scheme for care leavers in place from April 2021 NNC and WNC.
- Timeliness of Children in Care health reviews escalated within health services.

- An important function of the Board is to celebrate the achievements of children and young people and this is done at each Board meeting
- Young people's participation on the board has led to officers being required to be more specific about what positive outcomes mean and has challenged officers and members' thinking.

'The corporate parenting board has been strengthened recently and is showing some signs of impact in improving services and support for care leavers.' Ofsted Monitoring Visit November 21

What does this mean for children and families?

- The achievements, needs and issues experienced by Children in Care and Care Leavers are better understood by decision makers.

Recruit, Retain and Develop an Awesome Workforce – Improvement for children and families will be delivered by our workforce, who are therefore our most valuable resource

Recruitment

- **Significant improvements have been made since 2019** and as per the national picture, our workforce stability challenges are greater in duty and assessment and safeguarding social work teams. Vacancies, agency staff and caseloads are closely monitored, and managed service teams have been used to mitigate.
- We have **expanded the routes into social work roles** offering student placements, Step Up placements, frontline students (from September 22) who will become our NQSWs, SW apprenticeships and NQSWs.
- **Further 10 practice educators** being trained to support student placements.
- **Dedicated NCT recruitment team** and successful partnership with Opus providing relentless drive. All potential candidates are offered a conversation with the Chief Exec. **Improved processes to ensure social work vacancies** are filled quickly – ideally with permanent staff but utilising agency as required.
- The **partnership between NCT and Opus achieved a 'Highly Commended'** award at the Annual PPMA Excellence in People Management 2022 Awards.

Successes:

- **4 social workers recruited** from outside the UK in 21/22; **6 joined April- July; 3 due to start in September**; 1 due to start in Jan and further 8 in pre- employment checks.
- **26 NQSWs** joined in 21/22 and 15 to date 22/23; 12 NQSWs completed their ASYE in May 22, with 11 more due to complete in September 2022. Positive feedback continues to be received about NQSWs from parents/ carers, children, and colleagues/ partners.
- **8 Step up Graduates** started as NQSWs in May 2021.
- **10 Step Up to Social Work students started** in January 2022, 6 were current NCT employees.
- **3 social work apprentices** in safeguarding service, who are due to qualify in June 2023.

Retention and development

- Improved social worker **career path** with senior social worker posts and increased number of Advanced Practitioner (AP) roles.
- Robust senior oversight on **caseloads**, with action taken to ensure they remain manageable, whilst also ensuring all children have an allocated worker. Including redeployment, managed service teams, temporary assessment (non-case holding) social workers. We have increased the

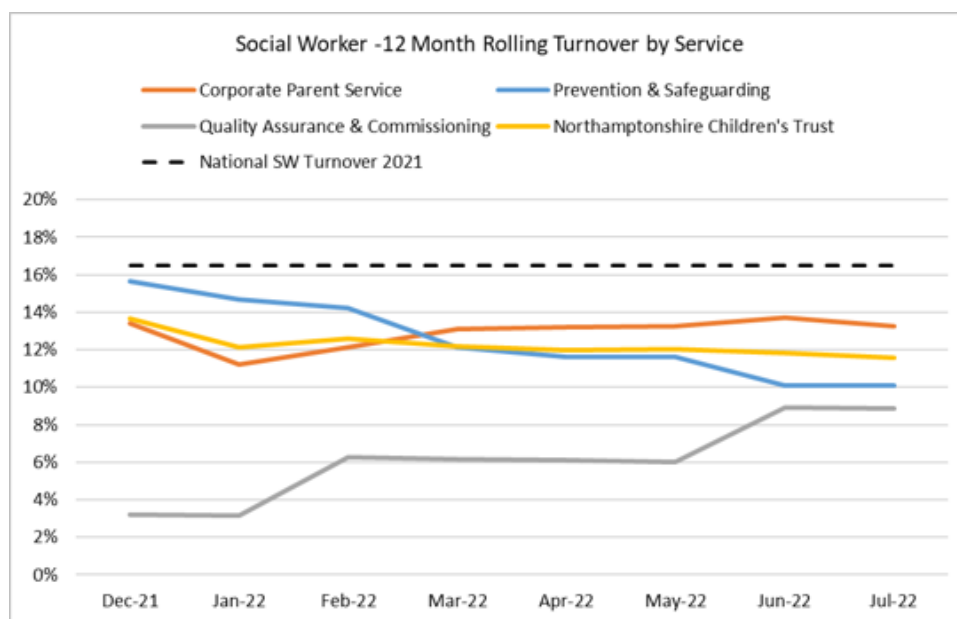
Advanced Practitioner posts to one per team. Social work teams are also each supported by a family support worker and business support colleague.

- **Continuous professional development (CPD)** of our workforce is strengthened via our online learning hub, providing access to NCT specific training programmes, resources, and good practice and **bespoke CPD to meet our needs**, developed by our workforce. Research in Practice and Making Research Count membership provides access to evidence, resources, tools, and training. From November 2022, the transfer of L&D functions from NNC to NCT will provide opportunity for a more flexible, cohesive and bespoke CPD offer for our workforce.
- **Formal Teaching Partnership** progressing following successful DfE bids for 21/22 and 22/23.
- Additional **Signs of Safety Practice Champions** trained and Signs of Safety training available for the whole workforce.
- Approx. **800 nominations** were received for **the inaugural NCT workforce awards** in December 2021.
- **Salary scale pay increments** introduced for all NCT staff on 1st April 2021 and was awarded again in 2022, plus 2% pay award in April 2022.
- From Dec 2021, a **retention bonus** was introduced for social worker posts in priority services, **positively received by staff**.
- Encouraging retention across NCT by **changing our culture to being strengths based and empowering**; improving processes and systems; investing in our staff, through our Leadership Development Programme and professional development opportunities. The implementation of our **'conditions for success'** are expected to improve our retention of staff.
- **Additional Advanced Practitioner (AP)** positions created in front line social work teams, managing a small number of cases as well as supporting less experienced team members to increase knowledge and skills through mentoring, coaching, support, and sharing their practice expertise.
- Further **career development opportunities** through the creation of consultant social worker and deputy consultant social worker roles for our Frontline hubs.



Impact

- 15.8% social worker vacancies in June 2022 (England average 17%) compared with 22.28% in October 2019.
- Our turnover rate of permanent social workers (11.57% 12 month rolling average) is lower than national average 16.6%, across all services (July 2022).



- 65% of agency and permanent social workers have been in post since NCT was formed (November 2020); and 71% of our permanent social workers started prior to November 2020.
- 20% of agency and permanent social workers have moved into more senior roles since November 2020.
- 6 NQSW's have moved into Qualified social worker positions in DAAT since January 2022.
- 15 previous NQSWs have now progressed into management roles.
- No unallocated cases in July 2022 compared with 199 in June 2019.
- Number of social workers above caseload targets⁶ has reduced across the board: June 2019 DAAT 25 above, safeguarding 37 above, Children in Care 7 above. Compared with July 2022 DAAT 12 above, safeguarding 18 above, Children in Care 3 above.

What does this mean for children and families?

- Children and families are now more likely to have better experiences as a result of a more stable and sustained Social Care workforce.

Equalities, Diversity, Inclusion & Equity

- Our **Equalities Forum** was set up at the request of colleagues, to inform, educate and support each other and provide a safe space to share experiences and views. **Open for the whole workforce** and attendance has been up to 110. A real success of the forum are sessions designed and delivered by colleagues based on lived experiences, including My Gender and Me; My Prejudice and Me; My Life in a Bubble (living with Autism); My Identity, Heritage and Me.
- **Dyslexia network** was set up following My Dyslexia and Me session .
- **Equalities week** (Nov 2021) ran **12 sessions** open for all to attend; Practice related training with a focus on equalities; 'Me and My...' lived experience sessions; fun session on learning sign

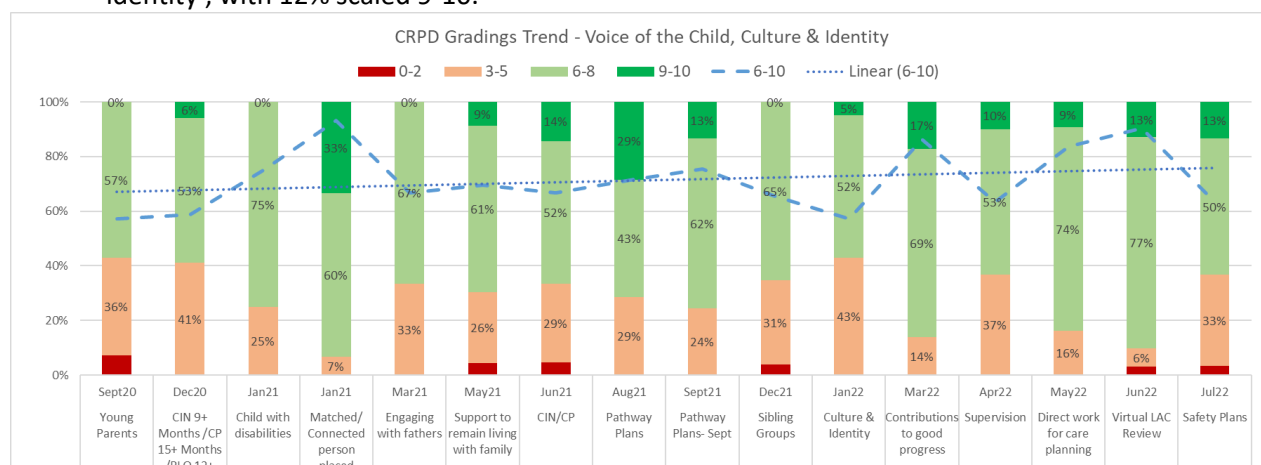
⁶ Caseload targets are DAAT: 35; Safeguarding: 22; Children in Care: 20

language. The week also included a virtual exhibition of our culture and identity, a map of NCT’s heritage, equalities conversations in teams and sharing of resources. Good level of engagement from workforce and positive feedback received. **Equalities Week 2022** is taking place again in September with a greater range of sessions being delivered by practitioners and foster carers.

- **Equalities Influencers** throughout NCT to **champion equalities issues**, share resources and best practice, signpost colleagues and listen to any concerns. Equalities Influencers in place across service and role description agreed.
- **Culturally sensitive practice training** developed by members of steering group with young people, available for all practitioners.
- **Workforce communications** increasingly sharing and celebrating a more diverse range of events and festivals.
- **‘Leading in Colour’** session held as part of Leadership Development Programme in March 2022 – positive feedback received.
- 3 managers successfully applied **Black and Asian Leadership Initiative (BALI)** programme in 22/23.
- NCT asked to be part of **Research in Practice anti-racist practice resources and conference**.
- We have recently established an **over-representation steering group** to specifically look at children who are overrepresented in matters of concern e.g.: violent crime, CSE, CCE, Children in Care, exclusions. We will reflect on our current approaches and determine what needs to change to ensure any support is tailored to the cultural, diverse and inclusion needs of each individual child and their family.

Impact

- 77% feel equality, diversity and inclusion has become more of a priority since we became NCT.
- 66% feel supported to progress their career in NCT.
- Membership of the forum is building confidence to work with diverse families.
- Since the forum started, it has been found that E & D is not just an overlooked agenda item / afterthought, it is becoming more prominent as a discussion topic.
- Collaborative Reflective Practice Discussions (CRPDs) since September 2020 show an improvement trend for voice of the child, culture and identity.
- 74% of CRPDs over last 12 months scaled 6 and above out of 10⁷ for voice of the child, culture and identity ; with 12% scaled 9-10.



⁷ On a scale of 0-10, where 10 means the child's voice is clear throughout their record, their cultural and identity needs are explicitly captured and understood, and these elements are considered and influence our work with the child and their family, and 0 means we cannot hear the child's voice and their cultural and identity needs are not understood, considered or supported

"It's one of the most inspirational, informative meetings I've attended. I am truly humbled to have listened to the experiences of these courageous and awesome people". Member of NCT workforce about the Equalities Forum

What does this mean for children and families?

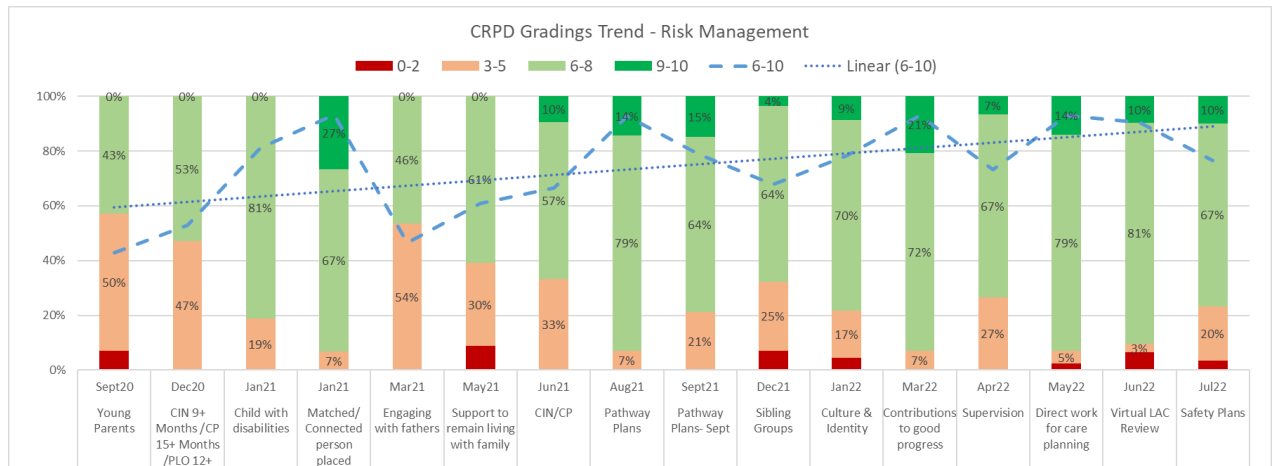
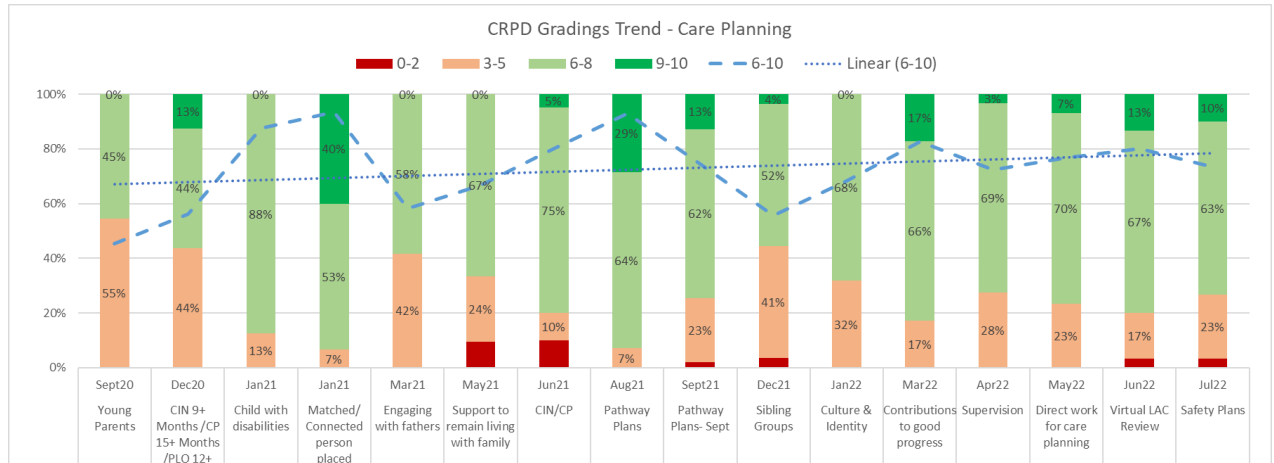
- Children and families' individual needs are now better understood and supported.

Strong Relationship Based Practice- We are focused upon evidence-based practice that works with children, young people, and families to help them achieve positive changes. Our practice model is child-centred at its heart and evidenced through all we do.

- Relentless focus on **improving consistency in the quality of assessments and plans.**
- **Increasing confidence and skills in using Signs of Safety.** Additional Practice Champions trained, resources and best practice on our Learning Hub and Signs of Safety training (including bespoke and bite size) available for all workforce and partners. Following short term funding we have now been able to mainstream SofS AP and Project Manager posts. University of Northampton undertaking 12–18-month research project into the **impact of Signs of Safety in NCT.**
- **Partners in Practice** have provided support alongside services to improve practice, bespoke support from Research in Practice for 7 team managers and 3 service managers. Additional 20 managers supported through this programme from Jan 2022, and coaching/ mentoring from PIP and Social Work Academy. Colleagues identified for Frontline Pathways programme 22/23.
- **Good practice celebrated and shared** through a range of channels such as: Learning Hub, emails from Chief Exec, PSW newsletter, 58 minute sessions.
- **Refreshed and relaunched our Practice Standards, Practice Model and Supervision Policy** to provide clarity of expectations. Ofsted (July 2021) noted some signs of initial positive impact of revised supervision recording.
- We benefit from **strong engagement of children and young people through our formal participation groups** - Children in Care Council, Care Leavers Council and Shooting Stars for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), Young Inspectors, and the recently formed Dynamic Youth (children who are subject of CIN or CP plan) whose voice shape our vision, transformation and review of services.
- Reinforcement that **voice of the child** is considered and recorded by all practitioners. Engagement of children and young people has been expanded through commissioning the **Mind of My Own app** and establishment (from April 2022) of groups for children who are the subject of CIN and CP. Our **CYP Engagement Strategy** is helping us to focus on improving our engagement at individual, service, and strategic levels to improve practice and support.
- We have an excellent **Advocacy service** who support children and young people with plans, meetings, complaints etc. This includes specialist support for children with SEND.
- We have developed '**language that cares**' to assist us in using language that is appropriate and meaningful to children and young people, rather than jargon or labelling language; our QA activity shows more case records are being written to the child which is helping them to be more child and outcome focused.
- **Cultural competency training** developed with input from children and young people, available for all practitioners.
- Further training has been made available to support **working with families to develop safety plans.**
- '**We are NCT...Being great at what we do**' campaign where each month has a focus on particular areas of practice with resources and good practice shared.
- Family Support Workers deliver **direct work opportunities** alongside social workers and offer engagement activities with children forming **positive and meaningful relationships.**
- **APs, now in every front-line team,** are supporting colleagues in strengthening quality of practice.

Impact

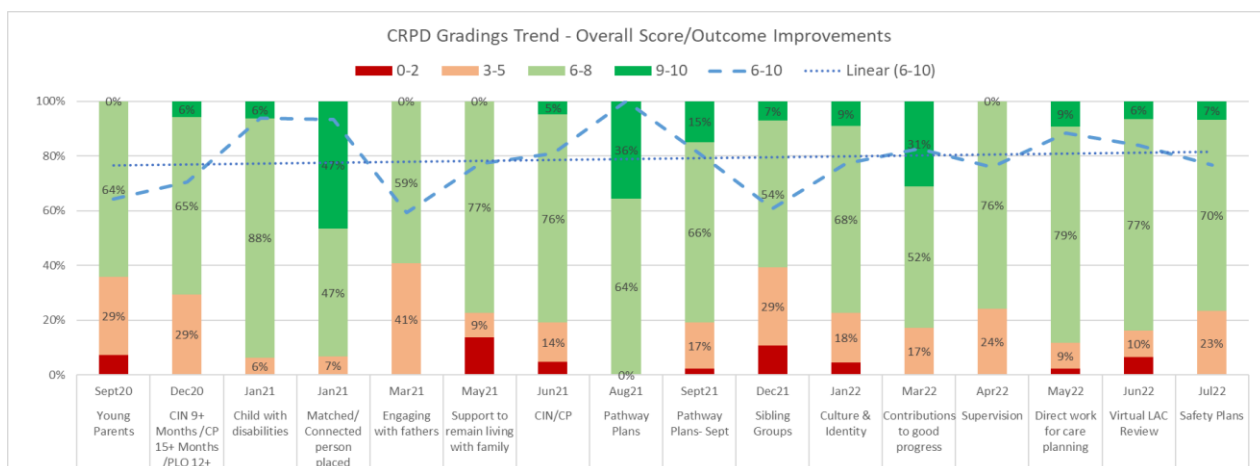
- 75% of CRPDs: audits over last 12 months scaled 6 and above (out of 10)⁸ for care planning quality (July 2022); with 10% scaled at 9-10.
- 81% of CRPDs in last 12 months scaled risk management at 6 and above (out of 10)⁹ July 2022. 11% scaled at 9-10.
- 81% of CRPDs over last 12 months scaled 6 and above (out of 10)¹⁰ for outcomes (July 2022); with 12% scaled at 9-10.
- CRPDs since September 2020 show an improvement trend for outcomes, risk management and care planning.



⁸ On a scale of 0-10 where 10 means the child has a good quality, outcome focused plan which is progressing effectively in a timely way, and 0 means that the child has a plan which is not clear about outcomes, is not progressing quickly enough, and is not of a standard we would expect for the child

⁹ On a scale of 0-10 where 10 means any risks to the child have been identified quickly, responded to in a timely way, we have worked alongside the child's network to manage the risk and the child is safe, and 0 means that we have not identified risk, our response has been too slow, the child's network has not been supported well enough to manage the risk, and the child is at risk of harm

¹⁰ Thinking about the overall experience of the child and the impact of our work with them over the last 6 months; on a scale of 0-10, if 10 means the child is safe and happy, enjoys good health and wellbeing, and their outcomes show they are resilient and fulfilling their potential, and 0 means the child is not safe and healthy, has low resilience, and are not fulfilling their potential



What does this mean for children and families?

- Children are receiving timely support that better meets their needs.

Insightful Quality Assurance and Learning – We know ourselves and our practice well through rigorous quality assurance.

- **Strong and improving Quality Assurance**, which social workers value, with oversight of a monthly Quality Assurance Board, chaired by Chief Exec, which reviews feedback from service led performance clinics, CRPDs, practice weeks, voice of the child, learning from complaints and escalations, and other QA activity.
- **Practice Weeks (including our Young Inspectors and teams drawn from across services)** have been held across the majority of services providing a rich, qualitative picture of practice. Young Inspectors design their methodology and feedback their findings directly to senior leaders, providing valuable insight and ideas for improvement. Action plans have been developed to implement actions.
- Developed our **quality and performance analysis at team level**. This includes continuing to develop managers' skills and confidence in quality assuring work alongside practitioners, focusing on the impact of our work on children's experiences and outcomes.
- We have benefitted from expertise of our **Partners in Practice** and **Regional Improvement and Innovation Alliance** to provide objective views of the quality of our practice and identify improvement actions, which we have implemented
- **Learning from quality assurance** is shared and bespoke continuous professional development delivered to improve practice, for example culturally sensitive practice training. Briefings used to disseminate audit findings.
- The **quality of our quality assurance has improved**, through training, bespoke support, and reflective moderation, meaning we have confidence in what it tells us.
- NCT quality assurance activity generally reflects findings of peer reviews and Ofsted visits and **moderation, reflective discussions and training is helping to increase the quality of QA** activity undertaken by managers.

Impact

- Practitioners report that CRPDs and Practice Weeks provide positive reflective learning experiences.
- Ofsted monitoring visits (July and November 2021) identified our comprehensive quality assurance framework is improving children's experiences.
- CRPDs since September 2020 show an improvement trend for overall outcomes for children.

"I have learnt so much this week and it has been such a pleasure to not only witness great practice, but also the strong relationships the team have with their young people, it was lovely to see! I have definitely taken some ideas back, that we can use in our team"

**Leaving Care Practice week team member.
Sept 22.**

What does this mean for children and families?

- Children and families are experiencing better quality support and outcomes.

Healthy Partnerships – Effective partnership working is essential to good practice

- **Strengthened strategic partnerships** through NSCP, Social Care Improvement Board and CYP Transformation Board (ICS).
- **NSCP Early Help, Neglect and Exploitation strategies** in place and action plans being developed / driven by NSCP sub groups.
- Exploitation strategy and action plan informed by **multi agency Tackling Child Exploitation project** involving Research in Practice, Children's Society and University of Bedfordshire.
- **Early Help Strategy and Action plan** informed by Dept. Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Early Help System Guide and DWP Reducing Parental Conflict Planning Tool.
- **Early Help Strategic Board** and West and North networks established with positive levels of attendance, continuous professional development, and networking.
- Projects supported by Public Health (PH) funding improving **mental health and wellbeing** of care leavers and children in NCT foster care.
- **Partner SofS, EHA and thresholds training** being delivered.
- **2 education posts** in place in the MASH to provide additional support to schools.
- **Closer working relationships between DCT and Adult Social Care** and processes and timescales for children referred to Adult Social care have been strengthened.
- **Improved working with unitary Housing leads** – NCT CFSS has led on 16/17-year-olds Housing Options / Homelessness establishing a steering group, action plan informed by colleagues at Department for Levelling up, Housing and Communities and joint protocol for 16/17-year-olds refreshed.
- **Improved multi agency working and co-ordination** through establishment of partnership missing steering group.
- **Multi agency resource panel** and improving use of multi-disciplinary teams have improved shared responsibilities for children's placements.
- **Strong partnership with Homes 2 Inspire**, provider of our residential care block contract, and focus on strengthening partnerships with other local and specialist placement providers.

Impact

- Working together to develop and agree strategies has led to a shared understanding of issues facing children, young people, and families, what we are collectively seeking to achieve and shared responsibilities for doing so.
- Strengthened relationships means any issues are identified and resolved more quickly, and good practice and learning is shared.

- Improved co-ordination of work to support children and families across agencies.

What does this mean for children and families?

- Children and families receive a swifter and more appropriate response to concerns and risks; and children now receive a more co-ordinated and appropriate response to their vulnerabilities.

Robust and Effective Resource Management – We understand the key drivers of the budget and budget managers understand the financial impact of their decisions. Budget managers are equipped with support and systems to effectively monitor and forecast.

- We are dealing with the **national placement sufficiency challenge to improve experiences and outcomes for children** and achieve better value for money. With success to date in increasing NCT mainstream and resilience foster carers in 21/22; increasing number of external providers on our frameworks; improved quality of our NCT fostering agency; delivering 5 NCT Children’s Homes; adding an additional home to our block contract; commissioning of two new emergency Children’s Homes and YMCA supported accommodation; bidding for DfE capital funding in partnership with trusted and ethical partner; improving support to sustain placements.
- **Work to improve the efficiency and effectiveness** of placements, commissioning, and brokerage processes, following external review by People Too.
- NCT Fostering recruitment and marketing strategy with **clear plan of recruitment activity** in 22/23.
- Working with WNC and NNC to secure **additional properties and capital funding** to increase residential care provision.
- **Collaborative redesign** of short breaks provision for children with disabilities to enable more of the right support at the right time.
- Improvements being made to organisational **processes and procedures** to improve efficiencies and experiences for workforce, including freeing up time for practitioners and frontline managers.
- Improvement in **budget oversight and forecasting** supported by Finance and Resources in place from April 2021. Effective use of resources has enabled us to **commission managed service teams** to address capacity issues. Like all areas we are facing significant pressures on placement budgets due to the national sufficiency challenges.
- NCT is considered a **responsible Data Controller** for the purposes of the UK GDPR, following ICO self-assessment, and have met standards required.
- NHS Data Security & Protection **compliance**.
- **98.3% of NCT’s workforce had completed Data Protection Essentials & Cyber Security training** as of June 2022. This meets and exceeds the NHS DSPT compliance requirement of 95% of total workforce.

Impact

- To date we have secured an additional 11 residential care beds for sole use of NCT by the end of 2022, including in emergency/ urgent situations.
- The proportion of Children in Care for 2.5+years in the same placement for 2+years/ placed for adoption has increased from 61% in 2019 to 68.3% in 2022; our focus is on reducing the proportion of children who have had 3+ moves in the last 12 months.
- 94.7% of care leavers are in suitable accommodation (YTD July 22) which is above the England and stat neighbour average.

- Net gain of 2 NCT fostering households in 22/23 despite challenges of the pandemic and national shortage of carers.
- Of 65 children who had received therapeutic support directly/via carer at end of June 6 (9%) had experienced a placement breakdown against a baseline of 30%<.
- NCT foster carers who have completed Therapeutic Parenting with a clinical psychologist reported going from a 70% chance that the placement would end, to a 70% chance it will continue.
- Review and negotiation of existing placements has resulted in better suited support for children and young people's needs and achieved £1.2m savings in 21/22.
- People Too review of placements commissioning and brokerage (February 2022) found:

'In some areas, NCT is managing, and meeting need as effectively as comparators. Despite this, some intractable issues are present that require creative and innovative solutions.

Leadership, insight, and analysis is allowing NCT to focus on the right things, with many plans in flight to address existing deficits.

What does this mean for children and families? The majority of our children are cared for in stable placements that meet their needs and achieve good outcomes.

Section 6- What difference are we making for the children we support?

Children in need of Early Help

What do we know about the quality and impact of our practice?

- Improved partnership approach, driven by NSCP Early Help Strategy as highlighted above, is enabling a more co-ordinated and effective early help offer across Northamptonshire.
- A simplified, more accessible EHA and Support Plan, developed with partners, was launched in February 2022.
- Permanent Children & Family Support Services (CFSS) AD has strengthened leadership, providing a clear and robust framework for overseeing the quality and impact of the service, ensuring it is child-centred from the moment we start working with a child.
- One referral pathway for external partners through Partnership Coordinators, integrated into the MASH and simplified step-down process has enabled children and families to receive the support they need more quickly.
- The strengthened and enhanced Partnership co-ordinator roles in MASH enables more children and families to be supported early with the right level of intervention that meets their needs promoting right support, right time, right service principles.
- All children worked with are seen alone at least once per month, their voice is heard and lived experience is incorporated into support plans. This is monitored by team managers and supervisors and progressed in team meetings and regular peer support/group supervision sessions.
- We understand that strong anti-discriminatory practice has a positive impact on children and young people, strengthening their positive sense of identity, and that they can participate fully when their diverse needs are understood and met. This practice is promoted through case reflection in supervision, group supervision activities and team meetings.
- Significant improvement in number of families achieving outcomes via Supporting Families Programme in 21/22 compared with previous years.
- All CFSS staff are fully Signs of Safety trained and complete annual safeguarding training; and senior practitioners and managers are Signs of Safety Practice Champions. The use of Graded Care Profile resources is encouraged to support practitioners to identify and evidence neglect.
- We've implemented a CFSS performance scorecard and QA activity to better understand activity and impact.
- Families in Corby (area of high deprivation) are able to access additional targeted commissioned support through Corby Children's Centres, which achieves positive impact for families.
- Since its inception in June 2021, CFSS' Family Solutions team has improved children's lives by working in partnership with families and other agencies to strengthen family resilience and achieve sustainable change, and enabled children/young people to remain within their own family.

CFSS

<u>Partnership Co-ordinator</u>	<u>Strengthening Families</u>	<u>Young People's Service</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole Family Working • Drive EHA • Community Connectors • Support Network VCSE • Partnership Collaboration • Training • Events / Programme Delivery • MASH Contribution • Initial support to families 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole Family Working • Shared delivery with partners • Children Centre Activity • Parenting Programmes • Domestic abuse support groups • Children with additional needs - SEND Support • Domestic abuse support groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole Family Working • Contextual safeguarding -Exploitation • Missing RHI • Attendance & Exclusions • Gangs / Crime • Youth Homelessness • Family Solutions – Edge of Care • Mentoring Support Team

“I have had a lot of troubles this year with my mental health and wellbeing, also K my daughter has had a lot of struggles this year, but Jo has been there to help and support both of us. We are sad that your involvement is finishing but like all good things they have to end, we cannot thank you enough for your time effort patience and understanding it means so much to all of us.”

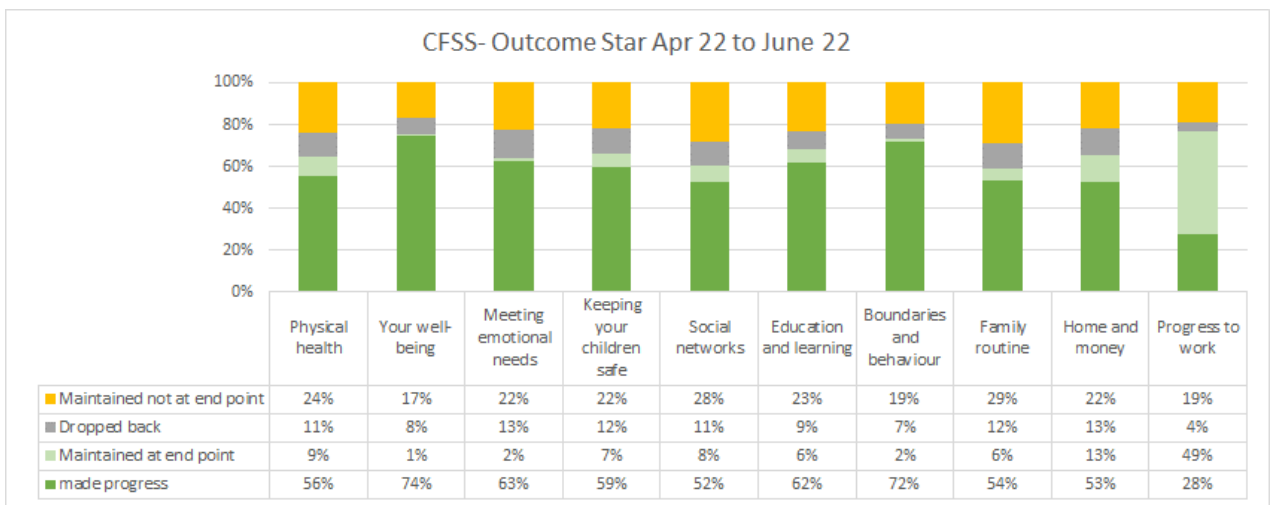
Letter from a parent to CFSS

How do we know?

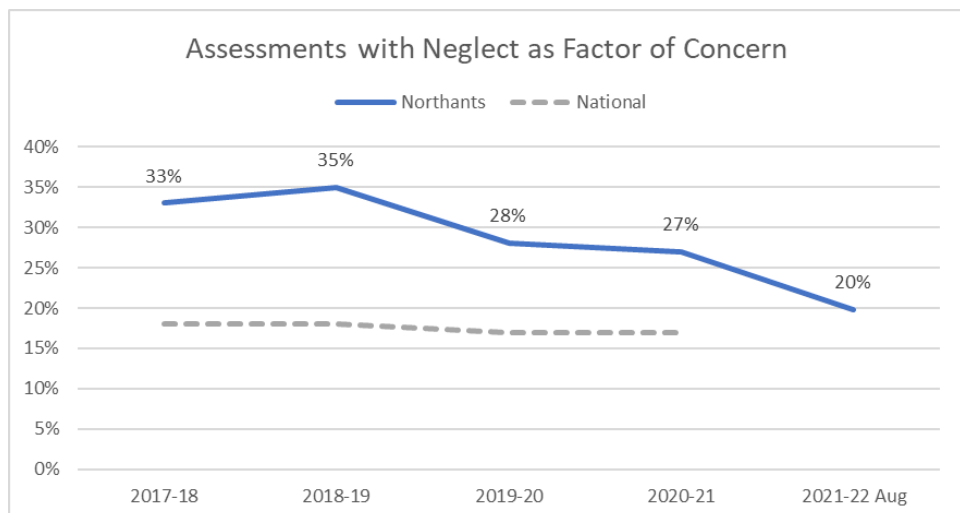
- More timely intervention with 82% of families allocated a CFSS worker within 2 days of receipt (YTD July 2022).
- 100% Strengthening Families payment by results target achieved 21/22 and on target to reach 100% for 22/23.
- 63% families as successful closure to CFSS (July 2022).
- Only 4% of children escalated to CP and 4% to CiN with 12 months of CFSS EHA (YTD June 2022).
- 63% of children (n. 79) at risk of care remained at home following support from the Family Solutions team (July 2022).
- 66% of young people and families supported by Family Solutions Team (edge of care) reported improvements (July 2022).
- **Partners in Practice Review (January 2022)** found that Partnership Coordinators are “*very experienced and passionate about the role of EH and the impact that this level of support and intervention can have on children and families.*”
- **CFSS Practice Week (February 2022)** findings included:
 - 67% of children considered were scaled 7, 8, or 9 which shows that these children have assessments and plans which demonstrate good multi agency support is in place.
 - Children’s assessments and plans evidence good multi agency working. CFSS workers are motivated, dedicated, and skilled at building relationships; they are working alongside partners with some complex families, and consent is managed appropriately.
 - A CFSS strength is finding support in the community for families – alongside this there needs to be more focused work exploring the family network, finding the safety there, and engaging family members in safety planning; this will help families be their own resource to sustain change.
 - Practitioners work in an open, honest way and children and families told the Practice Week team they appreciated this; they trusted the workers because of this. In every

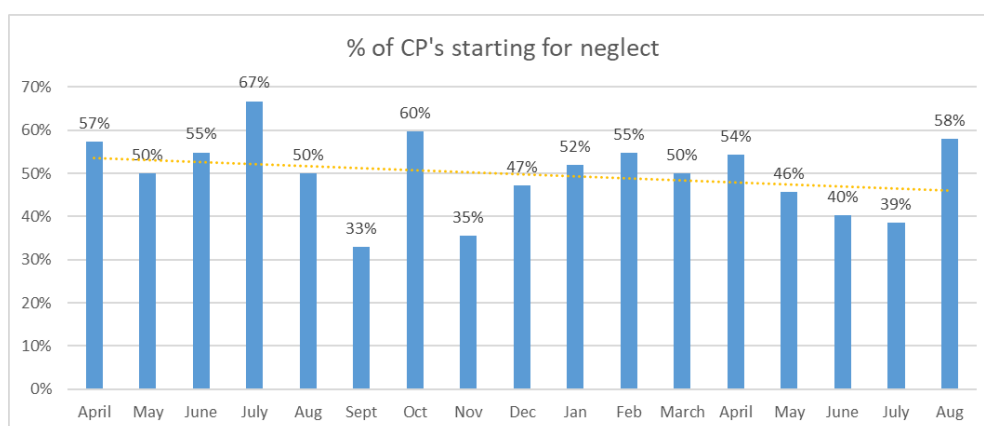
piece of work the Practice Week Team looked at, practitioners knew and understood the individual needs of each child in the family.

- The timeliness and quality of supervision and management oversight was variable on the children’s records reviewed and discussed. Managers are knowledgeable about children’s circumstances and always available for case discussions; sometimes these are not captured on the child’s record.
- The Practice Week Team saw multiagency practice in CFSS that supported better outcomes for children and young people and examples of outstanding CFSS practice were seen.
- Over 70% of families accessing support at Corby Children’s Centres reported reduction in isolation, increased understanding of child development and relationships with their child, greater level of support from community services.
- Over 50% of families supported by CFSS in Q1 22/23 made progress in all outcome star domains, except progress to work where 28% made progress and 49% maintained (see graph below).



Earlier and better identification of neglect means we have made some headway with closing the gap between Northamptonshire and National data, and know there is a way to go (graphs below)





What does this mean for children and families?

- Children and families now receive appropriate help at an earlier stage, which is making a difference to their lives.

What are we doing to further improve?

- CFSS Service Plan shows key performance indicators for the service, with timescales to ensure the momentum for improvement is maintained.
- Management oversight on casework was identified in Practice Week as an area for improvement. This will be managed through case supervision observation as part of CFSS QA Activity.
- Strengthening of communication, safety planning, documented family stories at step down to avoid families telling stories again and to help CFSS to pick up quickly.
- Increase use of Family Network Meetings to work with the child's networks to help build the safety plan.
- Improve age-appropriate engagement in team around the family meetings.
- Improve how we use the voice of the child and families to inform changes in service delivery.
- CFSS Staff will be offered Level 4 Accreditation in Working with Complex Families to improve their competence and capabilities for improving outcomes for children.
- Solution Focused Practice training is planned for Autumn 2022.
- Developing closer working relationships between councils' school attendance support teams and the Strengthening Families team to facilitate a seamless approach to addressing school attendance and behaviour issues, including increasing use of EHAs by school attendance.

Children and young people experiencing risks from outside of the home and exploitation

What do we know about the quality and impact of our practice?

- **Improved partnership approach**, driven by NSCP Exploitation Strategy as highlighted above, is enabling a more co-ordinated and effective response across Northamptonshire.
- RISE (Reducing Incidents of Sexual Exploitation) and Missing Teams moved into the NCT Young People's Service (September 2020) to ensure a **continuum of support across tiers**, meaning our response to missing and exploitation can target both high and medium risk. This will enable **high level contextual support** right through to prevention work.
- All children assessed as high risk of sexual exploitation receive a **health, police and allocated NCT practitioner as a minimum**.

- **Multi agency RISE school's prevention package** commenced in September 2021 including staff training, and Sarah's story (CSE survivor) shared from year 7 and a parent's event. Schools are using this for lesson plans and 3 schools have requested additional support re groups of children where there are emerging exploitation concerns at a lower level.
- **Exploitation / Missing training tailored for Children's Homes** delivered to 2 NCT homes and 54 external placement providers in Q1 22/23. This has been beneficial for relationship building and indirectly supporting our children in care.
- **Northamptonshire Police are leading Operation Makesafe**, supported by partners and local businesses, which aims to **raise awareness of Child Sexual Exploitation within the business community** including hotels, taxi companies, fast food outlets and licensed premises. Operation HOTELWATCH has also been set up to ensure that hoteliers are both aware of and proactive in tackling CSE/CCE and potential linked offences that criminals may either carry out or seek to facilitate on their premises. Additional training targeted at hotels that fail test purchases or where there are other concerns.
- **CE Specialist Nurse continues to act as a source of expertise** for health agencies across the county. Including a **liaison line for advice and support to practitioners**, dissemination of relevant research and resources to health agencies and provision of safeguarding supervision and training to health practitioners across the health economy. Also representing NHFT/RISE at the Vulnerable Adolescent Panel to give health advice and recommendations for the lead professionals as appropriate.
- **Young people** supported by RISE **receive an up-to-date, in-depth health assessment** offered either face to face in school/clinic or via telephone/video. Emerging and unmet health needs are addressed quickly.
- **Good communication is evident between the Young People's Service, RISE case workers and health professionals** to identify any emerging needs including sexual health, emotional health, trauma, physical health, drug and alcohol, smoking cessation, sleep, eating disorders, bereavement, ADHD/ASD referrals.
- We take a **"whole family approach"** to support the young person and we offer support to families in mitigating risks that their child faces, such as by increased supervision, or supporting the CYP into alternative peer networks.
- **Trained all Young People's Service and Family Solutions practitioners** in exploitation, RISE, and to conduct home return interviews.
- **Implemented partnership Vulnerable Adolescents Panel (VAP)** and a co-ordinator who triangulates our missing, exploitation and vulnerable adolescent data.
- NYOS have developed a **vulnerability screening tool**, alongside asset+ to identify needs and required referrals.
- NYOS and police gang and violent crime pilot project in Wellingborough has identified several young people that are suspects of multiple offences that have never been in receipt of a positive intervention or formal outcome. NYOS are working with these young people through prevention and diversion to provide **positive interventions to reduce the likelihood of further offending**.
- **Close work with Barnardo's** to ensure that professionals understand the National Referral Mechanism (NRM), the Independent Child Trafficking Guardianship Service (IGVA) and what reasonable and conclusive grounds mean. This will **ensure professionals will have a full understanding** of the referral process into NRM and the support that Barnardo's can offer to us. It will ensure that all professionals will be able to recognise the signs of exploitation. NYOS and CYPSS have developed a group of NRM champions who are receiving additional training and support in this area that can assist practitioners in and across NCT to make referrals.
- Established a missing steering group reviewing end to end processes and top 10 missing children. **Support from CFSS offered at every HRI** to any top 10 missing children who do not have an allocated worker.
- **Home return interview (HRI) format changed to reflect SoS model**, outlining worries and what is working well, for the professional and the young person. There is an **emphasis on the voice of the child** and asking individually tailored questions to each child, young person and family to establish individual cultural, ethnicity and identity needs and support offers. By doing so, we can make accurate recommendations and actions from this.

- In the past 6 months, 13% of children in care have had a missing episode, a slight rise from the previous year. Work is required to understand the reasons for this, but hypotheses include an increase in the number of young people being accommodated who are at risk of criminal exploitation and the **increasing needs of young people relating to their emotional well-being exacerbated by the pandemic.**
- Outcome Star tool and the RISE risk wheel allows practitioners to effectively risk assess families and young people, while **capturing their voice and understanding their strengths and needs.**
- **Multi agency review** of the Adolescent Risk Management (ARM) process dealing with exploitation and extra familial harm in June 2022 has identified key areas for improvement now being taken forward.
- **Increased use of multi-disciplinary teams/ complex case discussions** to oversee and manage risks for Children in Care.
- Participation of the MASH decision makers in Channel Panel enable informed decisions to be made
- **Positive partnership working** between the separated children's team and relevant agencies has led to better decision making when considering the safety and welfare of young people who might be at risk of or have been identified as being trafficked and/or are likely to go missing.
- The use of NRPF Connect identifies unaccompanied young people who present to or from another local authority which **helps to identify missing young people quickly.**
- **Missing episodes for separated children have been reduced** by consistently listening to young people's wishes and feelings. Where appropriate changes have been made, this has contributed towards overall stability and safety.

How do we know?

- Increase in referrals seen and an increase in knowledge of the local picture as a result of school's prevention package.
- 80% of home return interviews were completed within 72 hours of being found in 21/22.
- ARM Review (June 2022) found that all agencies found the VAP valuable and felt that it was able to progress and accelerate a multi-agency response for young people at risk of exploitation.
- ARM Review (June 2022) found the current process is not well understood by partners; risk assessments and plans can be more consistently and effectively used and there is opportunity to improve trusted relationships with young people.
- All agencies working closer together to improve response to exploitation e.g., improved information sharing to ensure effective joint decision making and planning.
- Increased knowledge and expertise in practice.
- Police arrested 14 men in Q1 21/22 for child sexual exploitation related offences, with a further 43 live investigations; 34 arrests for online offences and 43 children safeguarded online.

What does this mean for children and families?

- **Children now receive a more co-ordinated and appropriate response to their vulnerabilities.**

What are we doing to further improve?

- Implement actions arising from ARM review recommendations, including a new operating model, exploitation guidance and toolkit (developed by University of Bedfordshire and Hackney and aligned to Signs of Safety), and scoping development of a multi-agency team for criminal and sexual exploitation. Timescales and leads to be agreed by NSCP exploitation subgroup in September 2022.
- Continue mapping of young people, and their associates via monitoring of missing episodes, community incidents, and referrals into RISE function and / or the Young People's Service. We continue to monitor themes, places, and people of concern and share these across the partnership to improve the joint approaches to combatting issues where we anticipate they may arise.

- As a result of learning from the Wellingborough pilot we are implanting a countywide Prevention Partnership Panel - multiagency triage approach that will mobilise services to respond and support children suspected to be involved in violence at the earliest opportunity
- Broaden our community response by continuing to offer training packages and bespoke resources to a wide variety of organisations across Northamptonshire and strengthen work across hospitals, CFSS, residential homes, Children in Care teams and leaving care to support vulnerable children and young people. Also, to identify an accessible training package for adults services who support over 18s.
- RISE plan to develop a more preventative, contextual approach to working with groups of young people in their own places and spaces and address current gaps in police capacity.
- NYOS are looking to gain a further understanding of the use of section 45 defence in court in relation to exploited children, to enable a more appropriate response for them.
- Risk register for Children in Care where concerns of significant harm exist in relation to missing, criminal and sexual exploitation and offending behaviours to improve oversight and risk management.
- Whilst Children in Care and Leaving Care services are working more closely with YOS when young people are remanded or sentenced to custody and keeping more in touch with the young people themselves through visits and calls, the increase in gang cultures within Northamptonshire is meaning further work is needed to divert young people from crime. This has been recognised by the Children Safeguarding Partnership and work is planned between the services to better understand the situation and action needed.

Children in need of help and protection

Robust Front door - MASH & EDT

What do we know about the quality and impact of our practice?

- **Threshold and Pathways multi-agency training is improving partnership knowledge** of thresholds and awareness of pathways to early help support; quality of referrals is improving.
- **Revised operating model to enable a better management of the contacts and referrals** in the MASH and achieve more consistency in decision making together with better application of thresholds by all professionals was introduced in 2021.
- **A professional consultation line** is in place and any young people calling the general number are transferred to a specific line providing prompt access to a social worker who they can talk to about their worries.
- **RAG rating system used and all cases meeting threshold for a Social Care assessment are allocated timely to a social worker**, with a 4-hour window to progress red rated cases for strategy meeting where appropriate.
- All contacts relating to child **safeguarding concerns have social work oversight.**
- Through **screening domestic abuse notifications daily**, we ensure that risks are understood, and safety plans are implemented in a timely manner.
- **Re-referral audit completed by service managers in May 2022.** We now only record concerns relating to an individual child for the specific child only. DAAT consider strategy discussions being held in cases where there have been multiple closures due to non-engagement and the concerns remain evident.
- **EDT workers are confident in applying a threshold decision** for new referrals.
- **EDT has positive relationships with partners** meaning children in need of immediate protection are responded to promptly and interim safety plans are agreed and implemented.
- **The Golden Hour policy** (designed by EDT and the custody inspector) ensures that on every occasion a child is arrested and taken to custody, Social Care is informed and within the first hour share information with custody officers. This provides police with a social perspective of a child's needs and feeds into the wider police policy of ensuring that their custody suites are 'trauma

informed' and each communication with the child is mindful of their history, and seeks a way to divert them from offending.

"She is so excellent just want to say how well she handled today and helped me & my children. I could not have asked for a nicer and professional worker lovely person thank "you TK. And this country needs more people like her."

Feedback on our MASH

How do we know?

- 683 partners participated in thresholds and pathways training in 21/22 and gave it an average rating of 4.7 out of 5.
- Rate of referrals to MASH is now in line with stat neighbour and England averages.
- MASH referrals given an outcome within 2 working days has been strong (95% in April 2022) but currently impacted by police dealing with backlogs- close joint working and plans in place to address this.
- PIP review Jan 2022 found '*evidence of substantial improvements in the systems and process and good progress across the front door in relation to the improvement journey*'.
- PIP review May 2022 found '*Cases dip sampled by the review team, thresholds for Early Help were appropriate and observations of calls demonstrated that time and care is taken to discuss the worries with the caller*'.
- PIP found evidence of more consistent application of thresholds surrounding cases being progressed for assessment.
- In May 2022, PIP identified improvements made following their first review in Jan 2022.
- Whilst we still have further to go to bring in line with statistical neighbour and England averages, re-referrals have reduced from 35.6% in 21/22 to 30.3% July 2022.
- Complaints received by the MASH regarding threshold and feedback have reduced significantly and compliments have increased.

What does this mean for children and young people?

- Children and families receive a swifter and more appropriate response to concerns and risks.

What are we doing to further improve?

- Supporting partners to further improve quality of referrals, including through provision of clear analysis and recommendations lined to threshold document to referrers.
- We continue to focus on improving quality of danger statements (analysis of assessments) in MASH and EDT; better use of signs of safety in strategy discussions in EDT; and group supervision and voice of the child in MASH; helping to further improve the quality of our practice.
- Consistency of threshold application for strategy discussions.
- Outcomes of NFA remain higher than we would like, and it remains an area of priority focus; although % of s.47s leading to ICPC is in line with statistical neighbour and England averages.

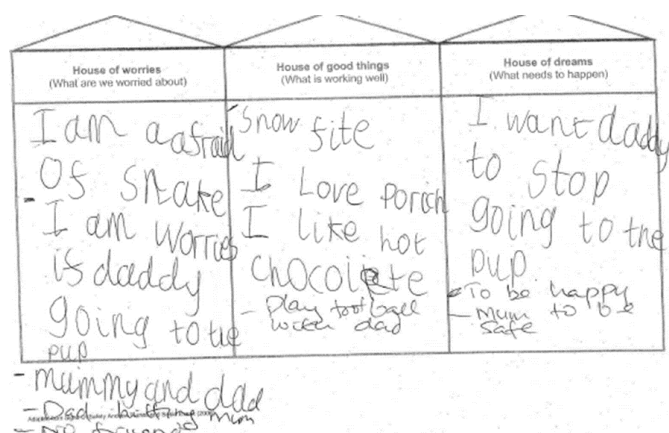
Children in need of help and protection

Robust Front door – Duty and Assessment (DAAT)

What do we know about the quality and impact of our practice?

- Leadership capacity has been strengthened with a second permanent service manager post enabling better support for social work teams
- The increase of AP positions has increased experienced social work capacity within the teams.

- DAAT social workers have more manageable caseloads than previously, allowing them to spend time with children to understand and better assess their needs and better identify risks.
- Buddy system is effective in offering support to the team on duty. This ensures that strategy meetings are timely, children are seen promptly, and responses are proportionate to the presenting issues.
- Learning and reflections from group supervisions and audits are contributing to an improvement in practice in DAAT.
- Individualised actions for each child at the end of a section 47 enquiry.
- Family Support Workers and other professionals known to the child completing direct work in DAAT to inform assessments and plans.
- All families supported by DAAT have an initial safety plan.
- Section 47 NFA Audit (February 2022) found sufficient identification of risks in 90% of the cases audited. In the 10% where risks were not sufficiently identified, birth parents not living in the family home were not always consulted as part of the assessment; history had not been robustly considered, whilst for some, the voice of the child was not consistently evident on the child's file. Subsequently, there were reflective learning sessions held across the service which has contributed to an improvement in this area of practice.



"Just wanted to thank you for your contribution and very good presentation during ICPC for XX family. I really appreciated you getting in touch with me way before the conference to discuss X and X participation. Their attendance made a massive difference to the outcome and quality of the conference. I was so pleased with your practice- safety plan had been completed with the family prior to the conference and saved on the records, genogram and chronology had also been updated before the conference. Well done and keep up the good work"

Feedback on our DAAT

How do we know?

- 78% of DAAT visits happened within 5 days in 21/22 and above 74% in April & May; the recent decrease is seen due to impact of police PPN backlog, increasing complexity, and staff change.
- 96% of single assessments are completed in timescales (YTD July 2022) compared to 86% in June 2019.
- Management oversight at the point of allocation within DAAT is consistently over 95%.
- 38% of single assessments lead to no further action and 30% to early help/ universal (YTD July 22)
- 36% s.47s leading to an Initial Child Protection Conference (YTD July 22), in line with statistical neighbours and England averages of 37%.
- PIP review, Jan 2022 found Social Care Assessments consider the child's history and there is evidence of them being more child focused.
- PIP review, May 2022 found 'performance is being used to continue to support and drive practice and there is an enhanced understanding of statutory timescales'.

- Audit activity and feedback from the Child Protection Chairs has shown the quality of danger statements is improving.
- 60% of DAAT staff are agency workers. However, 50% of the agency workers have been in the service for over 18 months and some for over five years.

What does this mean for children and families?

- Children are now receiving timely support that better meets their needs.

What are we doing to further improve?

- Continue our relentless drive to achieve a stable workforce in DAAT.
- Ensure good quality and timeliness of all assessments.
- We continue to focus on ensuring that direct work is consistently available on children's records, that plans are SMART and developed with families and work with families is explicitly linked to plans.
- We continue to identify ways to reduce workload pressures for DAAT teams.
- Recording of what is written to children within CareFirst is being expanded to include assessment documents etc and has enhanced child-focused practice.
- Further reflective learning sessions regarding risk identification to further support and improve practice.

Children in need of help and protection

Children subject of a child in need or child protection plan

What do we know about the quality and impact of our practice?

- We are focused on **quality and consistent practice**, relationship based social work that empowers families, whilst maintaining performance and compliance.
- **Decision making is prompt by managers** escalating children's circumstances to strategy meetings and section 47 investigations.
- **Social workers take pride in their work and know their children well.** They show commitment and dedication to supporting children and their families to make and sustain positive changes in their lives.
- **Direct work is used to understand the wishes and feelings of children and young people to achieve positive changes** that are in the best interest of children. We use a strengths-based approach to work purposely, openly, and considerately with the whole family network which includes extended family members in our assessments and planning. All families are encouraged and supported to take the lead in making a safe plan for their child when concerns are identified.
- **The vast majority of children and families have timely visits** providing meaningful contact with a social worker, a plan that is regularly discussed and updated so actions are meaningful, and progress is made.
- **Capturing the voice of the child within visits** has improved and our recording is child focused.
- **Child in Need plans and visits are monitored weekly** to ensure timescales are met and plans progress. Managers have oversight to ensure that plans do not drift, that families are only subject to plans as required and that families step down to CFSS at the appropriate stage.
- **Advanced Practitioners support individual social workers** and deliver SoS support to the teams as a group. This has had a positive impact on plans and danger statements and there is noticeable improvement, however it is not yet consistent across all the teams which is the outcome we are striving for.
- As part of our Leadership Development Programme action learning, our **SoS AP led an initiative with the Corby Safeguarding teams during Q4 21/22, focused on implementing safety plans devised with families and children**, with the aim of reducing subsequent re-referrals. Through this,

other areas of development were also achieved, such as increased use and confidence in SofS mapping. Learning from this project has been implemented across other parts of the service.

- The Child Protection Chairs duty system **enables social workers to discuss and reflect on need** for ICPC, this is valued by social workers.
- Having Child Protection Chairs allocated to a 'linked' DAAT or safeguarding team and sharing good practice **has significantly improved relationships and enhanced the common and shared goals we all hold towards those we work with, and for.** Case escalations are dealt with in a more collaborative way which has positive impact for the child and family and supports our learning.
- Reviews of CP cases at 9 and 15 months (then quarterly) by Service Managers ensure **there is a clear trajectory for the case** to either step down from a child protection plan or to progress into PLO.
- Additional consideration by Service Managers for appropriateness of repeat CP plans in chronic neglect cases **is enabling improved decision making.**
- **Action for Children provide valuable additional support** to families known to safeguarding services through short or medium-term interventions and multi systemic therapy which has a positive impact for children and families, enabling families to stay together. Additional value is brought through partnership with Aldi to distribute surplus and essential food and clothing to families in need.
- When the councils receive new elective home education requests, a check is made if the child has a CIN or CP plan, or are known on other reporting systems (ie domestic abuse or missing persons), discussions with partners are held to review the suitability of the EHE request. For those children who are known to the Children's Trust who want to reintegrate back into school, officers work closely with admissions and with families/social worker to support school placement and successful transitions. **All new EHE requests are offered a home visit from an Inclusion officer who will also seek the voice of the child.**
- **Council CME Tracking Officers keep in direct contact with the child's social worker** until it is known where the child is living and confirmed as attending the school allocated. MASH are also informed of a new address and new school if the case has been open to NCT during the past 12 months (but currently closed).
- **13 of our children known to safeguarding services took part in a camping trip in Summer 2022,** helping to increase self-esteem, kindness, patience, teamwork, self-awareness, and confidence.

"I would like to thank Brian for the report for today's conference. I like how you write to the girls rather than about them in a very child friendly and simple language. You are explaining clearly the reason and the journey the girls have been through during social care intervention including their views. I am impressed by your child focussed approach. Well done and keep up good work."

CP chair regarding a Safeguarding Social Worker

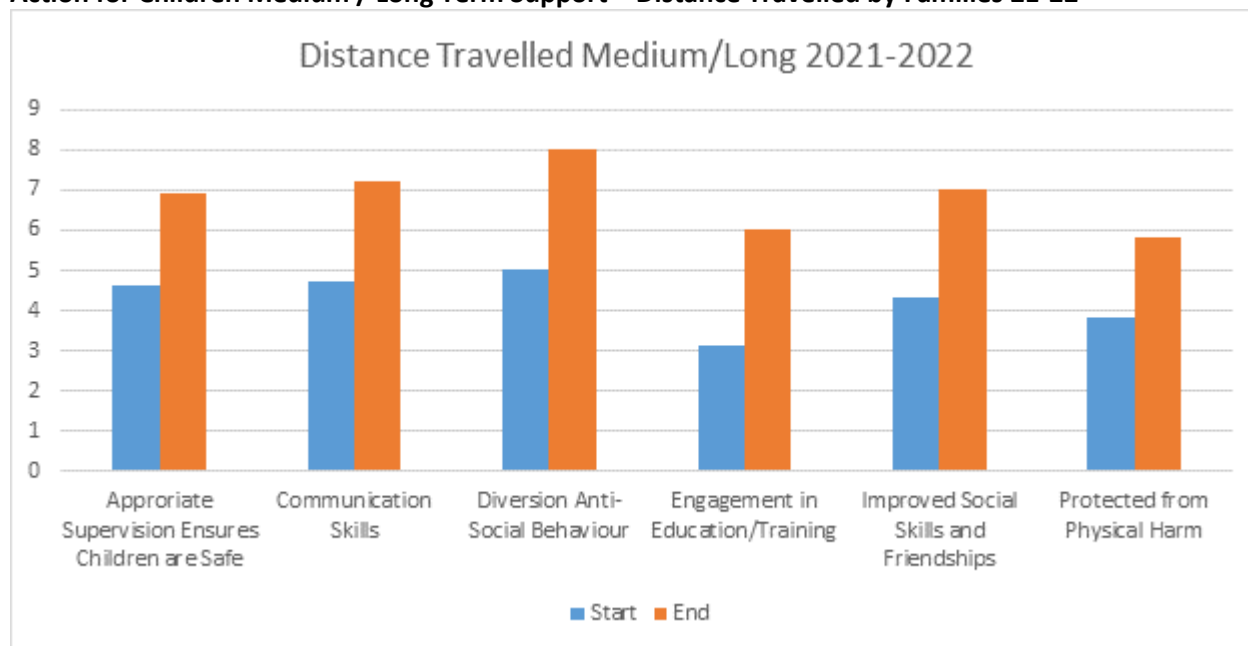
How do we know?

- CIN visits were 79.7% on time; 81.5% up to date CIN plan (YTD July 2022).
- CP visits were 89.4% on time (YTD July 2022).
- 82.7% Initial Child Protection Conferences held on time (July 22); in line with England average of 83%
- 98.9% CP reviews completed within timescale YTD July 2022, above national and stat neighbour averages.
- The proportion of repeat CP plans is higher than we would like at 32%, above comparators.

Timeframe	September 2020	January 2022	March 2022
CP plans 9+ months	269	190	166
CP plans above that were 15+ months	78 (29%)	50 (26%)	57 (34%)

- The proportion of neglect CP plans open for more than 15 months reduced by more than a half, from 23% to 11% between January 2021 and August 2022.
- Neglect audit (August 2022) found there is more progress to be made in consistent use of Graded Care Profile, up to date chronologies to provide full picture, greater focus on unique characteristics of a child and their family to appropriately address concerns, focus on neglect in supervision. Strengths were evidenced in practitioners' commitment to building positive, effective working relationships with those children and young people they are supporting, involvement of partners, detailed plans which are being regularly reviewed, the actions on plans are mostly SMART.
- The proportion of children subject of a CP plan for 2+ years has been below comparators for some time, however, there have been higher proportions in a couple of months this year, likely due to sibling groups.
- Since last year, there has been an increase in children of longer-term child protection plans to progress to PLO from 16% to 40%.
- 35% of the children reviewed subject to long term child protection plans were also subject to PLO or legal proceedings which is a significant increase on the previous year (May 2022).
- CP Conference Practice Week (June/July 2022) findings included:
 - Child Protection Chairs support clear planning with SMART actions so everyone understands their roles and responsibilities; check that parents understand and enable their participation and ensure meetings stay focused on the child and impact for the child.
 - Diversity, culture, and language are considered but it would be even better if we explored how this linked to engagement and progress for our young people.
 - Whilst training for DSLs to advocate for children in conferences has taken place, we are yet to see this result in increased advocacy for children by someone with an existing relationship with them; and wider use of Mind of My Own could also help more young people to participate.
- Reduction in formal escalations by CP Chairs down to 6 in the last quarter compared to 15 in the previous quarter. 89% of all issue raised were resolved within 5 working days.
- The number of complaints about Safeguarding services has reduced.
- 29 families receiving medium/ long term interventions or MST from Action for Children in 21/22 de-escalated from CIN or CP plan; further 8 de-escalated in Q1 22/23, 3 escalated and 21 maintained their status. Two further cases due to be de-escalated within 1 month of intervention closure.
- 96.5% of children supported by MST remained living at home at the end of the intervention
- 12 month follow up of families supported by Action for Children: 84% of children remained in the family home; 75% were no longer under a Social Care plan

Action for Children Medium / Long Term Support – Distance Travelled by Families 21-22



What does this mean for children and families?

- Children and families are receiving better quality support that is improving their experiences and outcomes.

What are we doing to further improve?

- Continuing our relentless drive to achieve a stable workforce to reduce likelihood of families having changes of workers and plans drifting. As well as continuing to recruit NQSWs, our two new Frontline hubs in the Safeguarding Service from Sep 2022 will provide another means of 'growing our own' social workers.
- Continue to encourage better use of chronologies to demonstrate and evidence neglectful parenting. An action plan is also being developed in response to neglect audit (August 2022) findings.
- Continuing to focus on ensuring all visits are purposeful and drive planning for the child.
- Further development work in respect of safety plans and ensuring that the voice of the child strongly influences the plan and what is needed to ensure the child feels safe within the family environment. The plan is agreed with parents and the extended family and is regularly reviewed.
- Continue to improve the quality of plans across the teams, and ensure we evidence within the plans the impact and outcomes for children, the voice of the child is prevalent and informs and influences the plan.
- AP's will continue to work with individual social workers and the teams to consistently incorporate signs of safety.
- To continue to improve and sustain key performance indicators and ensure that children are seen in a timely manner, visits are recorded promptly, and CiN meetings are held in timescale.
- Using feedback from our young inspectors see how we can make venues for our child protection conferences more child friendly.
- Reduce the likelihood of repeat CP Plans by ensuring safety plans are robust and have been tested when stepping cases down.
- We will continue to develop and grow our 'Dynamic Youth' group for children known to safeguarding services, whose input will help us further improve our practice and support.

Children with Disabilities

What do we know about the quality and impact of our practice?

- **DCT social workers now have more manageable caseloads of 11-21**; this has led to greater quality in practice for children and families, as they are more able to deliver high quality relationship-based practice and direct work.
- Children who are assessed as requiring a small package of support to meet their needs well with no other support needs identified now have an annual review and updated assessment where the child and family are seen. **This means that families receive an appropriate level of intervention and SW capacity can be focused on children with the highest levels of needs.**
- **Assessments are signed off by managers** to ensure quality and any actions completed as necessary.
- **Performance is generally good** with children being seen regularly and having up to date CiN. All Children in Care have and up to date care plan.
- Whilst there have been challenges with health assessments being completed in timescale, **this has been much more positive for disabled children who are in care** with the figure for Children in Care allocated to the Disabled Children's Teams sitting at 71.4% (DCT 1) and 82.4% (DCT 2).
- **Supervision and management oversight is notable area of improvement** and has been a focus area having previously been identified as an area for improvement in CRPDs. Managers have undertaken the Research in Practice PSDP programme which has enhanced their supervision and management skills in terms of quality supervision which understands and promotes equality diversity and inclusion for families and also our workforce.
- **Writing to the child has shifted the focus and lens through which we view children and families** and how we work in partnership with children and families. Children and young people and their lived experiences are at the centre of the work completed. Their records now reflect this more. There is evidence that young people are increasingly attending their meetings, how and where appropriate, and this ensures that children are at the centre of everything that we do.
- **Social stories are well used within the Disabled Children's Team** with some key practitioners being very skilled in doing this. These will often be used to support young people to understand their plans, what is happening next and changes and transitions.
- **Commissioned short breaks continued to be highly valued by families.** However, we know families could be better supported and less reliant on overnight short breaks through a more comprehensive and appropriate offer of non-residential short breaks.
- **There are a small number of children with disabilities living in unregistered placements** due to sufficiency challenges in residential care / residential schools to meet these children's specific and complex needs.
- Children and young people are referred to Adult Social Care when they are 16 years old, to improve co-working and smooth transitions, with children's social workers retaining case responsibility. Team Managers **track this is being completed within their teams.**
- **Adult Social Care allocate a social worker as soon as possible**, at least by the age of 17 years, and the Care Act assessment will commence, usually jointly with the allocated social worker in DCT.
- **North and West Transitions Managers are now in post in Adults Social Care** in the councils – reviewing 16 and 17 year olds to ensure they are on track for assessment and planning in adults – this will allow issues to be identified more proactively.
- **Monthly meeting between DCT Service Manager and Transitions Managers**, quarterly meetings with DCT and Adult Social Care team managers being established for North and West.
- **Transitions Managers are also members of Multi-Agency Resource and Residential Short Breaks Panels** which provides early notification of young people who may require continued services from Adult Social Care.

How do we know?

- Children in Care with an up-to-date health assessment stood at 71.4% (DCT 1) and 82.4% (DCT 2) (July 2022).
- 61% of children have an up-to-date assessment (July 2022).
- NCT QA September 2021 found outcomes improving for the majority of children reviewed.
- DCT are currently supporting 86 16- and 17-year-olds (August 2022). Of these, 63 (73%) have been referred to Adult Social Care. Of those not yet referred, 3 are 17 years old and high priority; and 18 are 16-year-olds (of whom 8 turned 16 in the last 3 months). 1 of these children is a Child in Care who turned 16 in the last 3 months and a referral is in progress. 4 of the children who have not yet been referred receive resource only support from DCT so have fewer complex needs.
- 70.8% of families receiving support from the sleep service said there had been changes in the quality of family life.
- Complaints have significantly reduced within DCT.
- Compliments for DCT often highlight the 'above and beyond' work that many social workers do and also the strength and importance of relationships with parents/carers and children and young people and the difference this makes.
- Ofsted monitoring visit (November 2021) found '*when disabled children in care reach 16, they benefit from pathway plans that identify their strengths and needs for the future*'; and '*some disabled children experience delay in transition to adults services*'

What does this mean for children and families?

- Children with disabilities and their families are receiving better quality social work support that is improving their experiences and outcomes.

What are we doing to improve?

- Continuing with our focus on ensuring children have an up to date, quality assessment.
- Increase the recording of management oversight and supervision.
- Following decision of NNC and WNC to have their own transition managers in Adults Social Care services, we will develop transition strategies with each council.
- Transitions guide for parents in development, to be co-produced with Northamptonshire Parent Forum Group.
- Implement redesign of our short breaks and respite services, which has been developed in conjunction with parents and practitioners.
- Continue to work with providers and explore all options to address challenges faced as result of workforce shortages in the personal care sector and placement sufficiency for children with complex needs. This includes supporting unregistered providers to apply for Ofsted registration.
- Expand the membership of our 'Shooting Stars' participation group to include more children and young people supported by DCT. Also, develop a short and long-term plan for this group to shape developments overseen by the SEND Accountability Board and the CYP Transformation Board as well as NCT services and support.

Children in Care

What do we know about the quality and impact of our practice?

- **Staffing within the Children in Care service remains predominantly stable** with permanent & agency social workers who report being well supported by their teams and managers.
- **We held our first celebration event since May 2017** for our children and young people in care to receive awards that recognise their achievements, thanks to sponsorship secured by the Chief Exec. The feedback from children and carers was overwhelmingly positive, with areas for improvement relating to administrative and logistical points. 175 children attended along with 177 carers **“Look at our kids just being kids 😊”**
- Summer 2022 also **saw NCT’s first camping trip for 20 of our Children in Care**, helping to increase self-esteem, kindness, patience, teamwork, self-awareness, and confidence.
- **Our Children in Care Council helped the DfE by providing feedback on their report to UNCRC on how the UK is addressing Children’s Rights** and helped create a young person’s version and 3 videos that can be found at [How we are working with the United Nations to protect children’s rights - The Education Hub \(blog.gov.uk\)](#)
- **Strong senior management oversight** on all new admissions into care through either AD agreement or presentation at a weekly gateway panel.
- Legal Gateway Panel and Case Progression Team enable a lean process, **ensuring the right cases are escalated into PLO and legal proceedings**, and their progression and outcomes are closely monitored and reviewed. Our work during the PLO process means we are better prepared going into court, resulting in fewer independent assessments being completed during proceedings, and children achieving permanence in a timelier way.
- To ensure the correct level of support prior to birth, **we are now encouraging consideration for unborn children to become subject to the PLO processes earlier in the pregnancy** where appropriate, to allow for purposeful partnership with parents to effect change and support earlier permanence.
- By working with families within pre-proceedings, **around half of the children who met threshold have stepped down from pre-proceedings without going to court.**
- **There has been a rise in the number of children subject to interim care orders** over the last 12 months (from 258 to 280). This included a number of large sibling groups. A Public Law Court subgroup review of children subject to care proceedings for an extended period of time found the unavailability of judicial capacity to timetable final hearings and the instruction of experts were the main cause for the longest delay. Other factors included complexities where there are international issues, such as assessing family members who live abroad.
- The Director of Children’s Social Care is the chair of the Local Family Justice board and has monthly meetings with the Designated Family Judge, alongside meetings with the Assistant Director of CAFCASS. This **provides an opportunity for discussion around strategic opportunities, learning, any issue of concern or challenges, and ensures open and positive communication and continued progress is made.**
- Since its inception in June 2021, **CFSS’ Family Solutions team has improved children’s lives** by working in partnership with families and other agencies to strengthen family resilience and achieve sustainable change. This has enabled children to return to their family after a period in care, provided it is safe and, in the child /young person’s best interests to do so.
- Since the launch in January 2021, the Separated Children’s Team has been working under the auspices of Operation Innerste. This means that **children and young people are no longer detained by the police which has helped to eliminate any unnecessary trauma.** This has provided a much slicker process for admitting the young person into s20 care with the bonus of resource savings which instead can be invested in the young person.

- **We have introduced clear reunification assessment tools** (adopting NSPCC framework) to support the safe return home for children, trained champions and the Family Time Service now positively supports reunification plans.
- **We have strengthened the SGO pathway** through improved joint working, information and training for prospective SGO carers and training for staff to enable families to make informed decisions.
- Strong performance management has **maintained regular visits to our children** with those in more fragile care arrangements benefiting from more regular visits and contact.
- In January 2022, we introduced a more **child friendly format for ‘My Care Plan’** combined with social work assessment, designed to be completed with children. It outlines the overarching aims and steps needed to achieve them. This has been received positively by children as easier to use.
- **IRO service is now tangibly (seen in young people’s records) overseeing and driving plans with increased focus on timely responsive actions** that make tangible improvement to children’s lives. The introduction of ‘Link’ IROs has led to improved relationships, communication, and sharing of good practice between IRO and Children in Care services. Targeted escalations in June 2022 as a result of feedback from children about co-producing care plans have had a positive impact, with an increase in plans being completed with children.
- **Children’s reviews are usually only held outside of timescales if it is deemed to be in the best interest** of the child or young person, and action is taken if there are any administrative delays.
- The IV service facilitates special and long-lasting friendships for young people and their IV’s. Many of our matches **last into the young person’s adulthood as a consistent & trusted friend**, outside of professional roles / responsibilities.
- Targeted signs of safety training for Corporate Parenting Service on priority areas to have **greater impact for Children in Care**.
- **Greater support and modelling from corporate parenting management** and experienced staff to improve depth and analysis within social work assessments.
- Introduction of corporate parenting service permanency tracking arrangements providing **both oversight and drive to ensure timely planning for children**.
- Learning from our time in lockdown, and following feedback from children and young people, the IROs use a variety of methods to conduct children’s reviews, (in person, virtual or hybrid), **this is supporting greater attendance of children at their reviews**.
- Children and young people have fed back to IRO’s that they find having the IRO’s one-page profile prior to their first review as it helps to make it feel more informal. The timeliness of first reviews has improved with the timeliness of subsequent reviews remaining stable and positive – **this means the vast majority of our children have their plans reviewed in a timely manner**, and the vast majority participate in their reviews.

“Thank you for just being there for whenever I need you and even when I don’t need you.”

A child in care about their social worker

“The actions you have taken have helped us to stay focused and gave us hope, as all we asked for was a 2nd chance and support, we are proud of the journey we have taken and all the obstacles we had to overcome, and we are so, so grateful for everyone who has supported our children. Be proud of yourself because what u do brings family’s like ours a bit closer and that’s priceless”

Feedback from a parent about an IRO

“I would like to say thank you to A, for keeping me up to date with my children and for treating me with respect and like a mother.” **A parent regarding their child’s social worker**

- The Virtual School (VS) places works with partners to **optimise the quality of children’s personal education plans (PEPs)**. In the best PEPs, there is a golden thread running through, detailing the aspirations and needs of the child, progress made, and the ongoing support professionals are putting in place to help the child realise their ambitions
- The VS helps **children to achieve positive educational outcomes** through regular monitoring of attendance with schools. Regular liaison with Designated Teachers for early identification of attendance issues, ensuring timely Personal Education Plan (PEP) meetings take place, discussing gaps in learning and ensuring SMART targets are in place to address them, including appropriate use of PP+ and recovery funding. **Children’s skills** are increased through a range of VS activities including sports, arts, and outdoor education, with 139 children attending sessions in 2021/22 academic year
- VS Officers’ work is evidence-led, based on analyses of patterns in the cohort’s PEPs to address issues and improve outcomes; eg quality of PEPs
- The VS has a **robust quality assurance and audit process** in place for PEPs and regular training for officers, school staff, parents/ carers which participants say provides a stronger understanding of how to develop and implement strategies for supporting currently and previously looked-after children within the school environment. VS officers are using an increased understanding of the impact of trauma and attachment issues on education achieved through training to support colleagues. Training on exclusions appeals has also enabled VS officers to better advocate for children in care
- WNC/NNC Education colleagues **not commission any unregistered alternative provision** for Children in Care.
- For those Children in Care who are not on a school roll, i.e. children missing education (CME), **the VS has an increased focus on their support** including more frequent PEPs (6 times a year), a single point of contact within the service, increased management oversight, and multi-agency discussions. The VS works with partners to ensure children have access to full time DfE registered school places.
- For those young people in care who are NEET, the VS **hold monthly multi-agency meetings, have a single point of contact, and have regular contact with Prospects** (NCT commissioned careers advice and guidance service).
- **VS’s support ensures that children transitioning to adoptive parents are out of education for the shortest time possible** and fosters relationships between adoptive parents and their children’s school.
- Our partnership with Homes to Inspire (H2I) and Prospects (both part of Shaw Trust) is enabling **more flexible use of resources to improve outcomes for Children in Care**. Prospects Advisers and H2I Education Officer review the plans of young people living in our block contract homes monthly, and co-ordinate support from both organisations, including careers guidance from Yr 9 - 11.

Health

- The vast majority of our Children in Care have a completed **SDQ, with a higher proportion than nationally scoring within the ‘normal’ range**. Our focus is on ensuring they are used effectively within care planning for Children in Care by all agencies. A trial of a new pathway has seen some evidence of SDQs being considered within review health assessments and supervision.
- **A higher proportion of Children in Care have an up-to-date dental assessment so far in 22/23**, in comparison with the previous two years when the pandemic impacted. However, it remains lower than we would like.

- We are worried about the low proportion of our Children in Care who have had an initial health assessment on time, and although there has been some improvement in timeliness of review health assessments, this remains lower than we would like. **We have reviewed and improved our internal processes** to ensure timely referrals are made and understand the issue relates to capacity within health and availability of appointments. We have escalated through NSCP and Social Care Improvement Board.

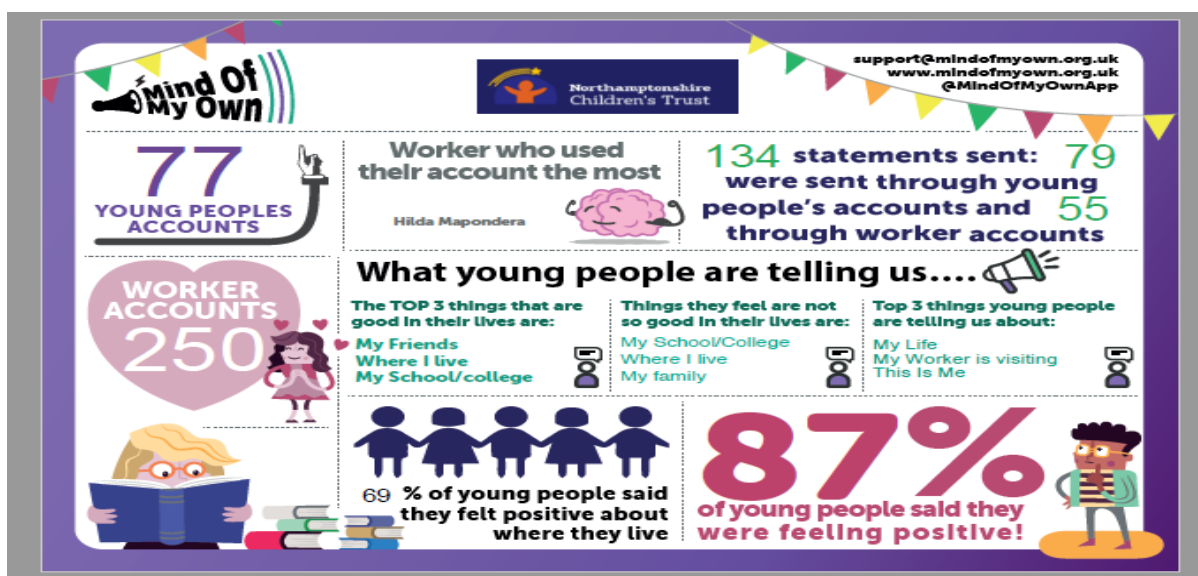
Placements

- **While the majority of our children are living in stable homes** that are meeting their needs and improving their outcomes, we are impacted by the national market which is not meeting the needs of children.
- **The use of emergency unregistered and/or unregulated provision is closely monitored** to ensure they are only used when absolutely necessary. The length of such arrangement is kept to a minimum and are managed through regular review and risk management arrangements. During our Children in Care monitoring visit, it was seen that the rationale for the use of these placements was not clearly explained in the children's records. Now, senior management authorisation is captured on all records. Children in such arrangements are considered at multi-disciplinary meetings where all relevant agencies, the young people and their family are brought together regularly to ensure oversight and dynamic risk management arrangements are in place. All is being done to secure a suitable home for the young person and contingency plans are considered.
- Recent review of the procedures and pathway to the assessment of connected persons which has enabled a more fluid process. **This has resulted in improved communication between the connected persons fostering service and the social work teams.**
- **Our Quality & Outcomes Team provide effective quality assurance of unregulated and unregistered provision** and of placements where concerns have been raised (including seeking the voice of the child). They also support and encourage unregistered providers to register with Ofsted.
- **We are addressing the local impact of a national market** which is not meeting the needs of our children, and a national shortage of foster carers, with the following actions to increase access to homes that can meet the needs of our children:
 - Improved the quality of our NCT fostering agency (now judged RI) and continue to drive improvement.
 - Implemented our NCT fostering marketing and recruitment campaign including resilience, mainstream, Family Link, emergency, and short-term carers.
 - Implemented our Public Health funded project to support the mental health of children in NCT foster care which has had a positive impact on placement stability.
 - Re-opened our Fostering and Children's Homes frameworks in Summer 2022 with 11 additional providers joining.
 - Exploring options with IFAs to increase access to emergency carers.
 - Jointly reviewed the statement of purposes of homes on our block contract so they are better able to meet the needs of our children.
 - Residential homes block contract extended to include an additional out of county children's home – places will start being available from September 2022.
 - Contract for 2x new emergency Children's Homes – planning applications approved, due to be operational December 2022.
 - Work with WNC and NNC on capital funding proposals for additional inhouse residential care provision.
 - Submitted a partnership bid with Homes to Inspire to the 2022 DfE Capital funding, proposing refurbishment of a previous adult group care home to provide a home for children with mental health / behavioural needs.
 - Building stronger relationships with external providers.

- External review of placements, commissioning, and brokerage completed, and improvement actions being taken.
- Improving support to sustain placements through multi-disciplinary teams, placement stability meetings, commissioning action for children to pilot additional support to prevent external placement breakdown (expected to be operational by November 2022); recruitment of 2x FSWs to support stability of NCT foster placements.

How do we know?

- Significant improvement from 2019 inspection to Monitoring Visit in February 2021 when “*too many*” had become “*a few*” children still come into care too late or in an emergency and finding suitable placements for those children remains a challenge. However, the Monitoring Visit in July 2021 raised concerns that “*some*” cases have been subject to drift and delay as a result of the lack of focus on what positive change would look like.
- The number of children subject to pre proceedings has increased from an average of 30 families per month a year ago to an average of 40 families, an increase of 25% over the course of the year (August 2022).
- The improvements in the length of time families are within PLO have been maintained in the last year and have improved further from an average of 19 weeks in February 2022 to 16 weeks in June 2022, with the aim to still have most pre-proceedings within 12 weeks.
- Of those families where the PLO process has ended in 2022, 54% have stepped down.
- The length of care proceedings was 58.9 weeks in October 2020 (a significant rise likely due to the pandemic and unavailability of court time and experts). In January 2021, this reduced to 38.6 weeks and the current average has been consistent at 35 weeks (August 2022).
- Escalations from the court have reduced and there has been a noticeable improvement in the quality of assessments completed in pre-birth, PLO pre-proceedings and in care proceedings.
- 48% (12 children) of children the Family Solutions team have worked who were in a care placement have been able to safely return home (July 2022).
- 74 Children in Care returned home January – June 2022 compared with 48 between November 2019 – April 2020.
- Over the past 6 months, 9% of children leaving care have been adopted, comparable to the national average.
- 83.4% of children have an up-to-date care plan (YTD July 2022).
- During June 2022, IRO escalations raised regarding young people having their care plan completed with them led to an increase of co-produced plans to 65%.
- 86.9% of children had their first review on time (YTD July 2022), an improvement from 78.9% in 21/22.
- 38% increase in the number children attending their reviews in the year 21/22 in comparison to the previous year and a 27% decrease in numbers of young people who did not attend and chose not to convey their views in their review process.
- 92% of children aged 4 and above participated in their reviews, either by attending their review and / or providing views in consultation forms or through IRO and / or social worker.
- 77 young people have Mind of My Own accounts with 134 statements from young people having been received to inform visits and discussions (YTD July 2022).



Education

North Northants:

- Statutory school age PEPs compliance: 90% in 2019-2020, 97% in 2020-2021 and 97% in 2021-2022
- Statutory school age PEPs quality assured as good: 56% in 2019-2020, 64% in 2020-2021 and 79% in 2021-2022
- Early Years PEPs compliance: 82% in 2019-2020, 91% in 2020-2021 and 93% in 2021-2022.
- Early Years PEPs quality assured as good: 77% in 2019-2020, 80% in 2020-2021; 80% 2021-22
- Post 16 PEPs compliance and quality has been more variable over the last 3 years:
 - Post 16 PEPs compliance: 83% in 2019-20, 97% in 2020-21 and 76% in 2021-22
 - Post 16 PEPs quality assured as good: 72% in 2019-20, 63% in 2020-21 and 68% in 2021-22

West Northants:

- Statutory school age PEPs compliance: 90% in 2019-2020, 97% in 2020-2021 and 98% in 2021-2022.
- Statutory school age PEPs quality assured as good: 56% in 2019-2020, 64% in 2020-2021 and 79% in 2021-2022
- Post 16 PEPs compliance and quality has been more variable over the last 3 years:
 - Post 16 PEPs compliance: 83% in 2019-20, 94% in 2020-21 and 82% in 2021-22
 - Post 16 PEPs quality assured as good: 72% in 2019-20, 82% in 2020-21 and 52% in 2021-22.
- In 2018-2019, 25.9% of OC2 Northamptonshire Children in Care achieved a 9-4 pass in English and Maths, compared to 17.8% nationally. For 2019-2020 this rose to 29.2%, compared to 24.4% nationally (figures for 2022 not yet available)
- The percentage of post 16 Children in Care in Education, Employment or Training (EET) 3-year trend of improvement: 74% in 2020, 81% in 2021 and 84% in 2022.

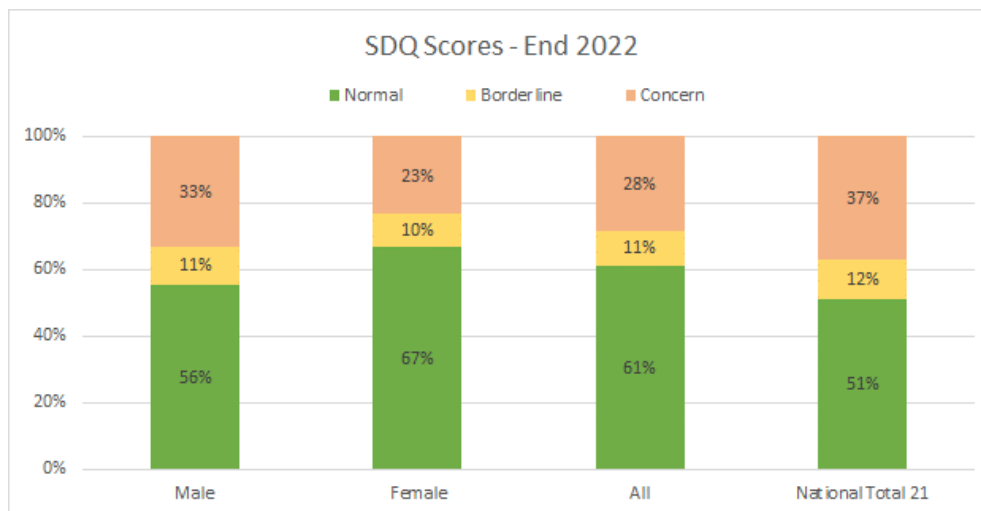
Feedback from VS holiday activities:

"The best, we love them and want more, especially stable mates and adventure ways. Leaders lots of fun. Loads new challenges and activities this year I was living my best life thank you." (child in care)

"Great opportunity for the kids to get out and do some structured activities. Our young person did struggle when first attending these sessions but has now grown in confidence and welcomes the opportunity to get out and mix with others. As carers we really are grateful to be able to have some things in the diary especially over the 6-week holiday to help keep the kids busy." (carer)

Health

- 91% of Children in Care have a completed SDQ (June 2022).

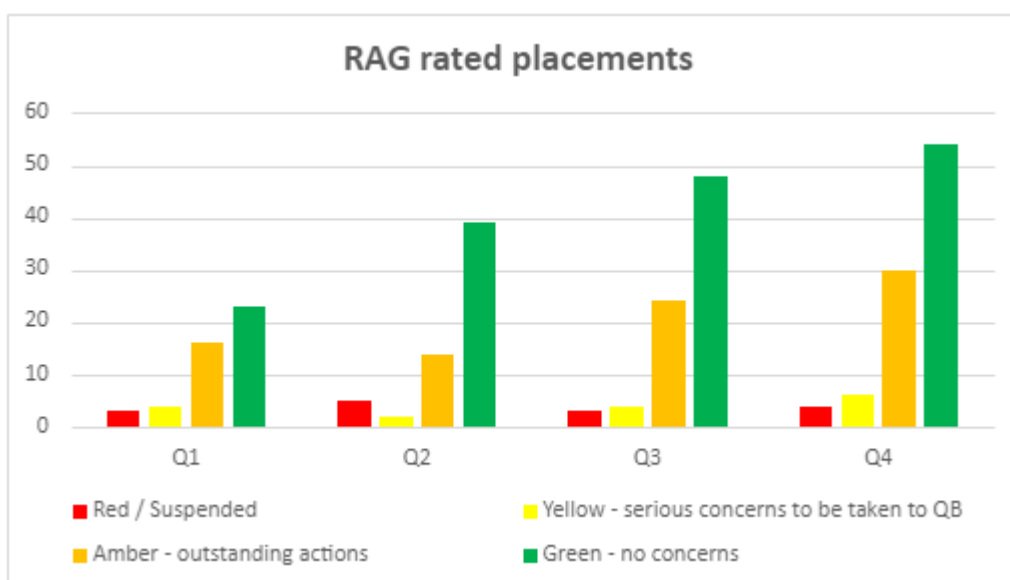


- 62.7% of children have an up-to-date dental assessment, above national and stat neighbour averages (YTD July 2022).
- 33% of Children in Care have had an Initial health assessment on time (YTD July 2022); and 68.8% have an up-to-date review health assessment, an improvement on previous 2 years but below comparators.
- NHFT's audit of IHAs has found the quality of the assessments is good.

Placements

- Proportion of Children in Care for 2.5+years in same placement for 2+years/ placed for adoption has increased from 61% in 2019 to 68.3% in 2022; our focus is on reducing the proportion of children who have had 3+ moves in the last 12 months.
- 58 children are living in 'staying put' arrangements (August 22)
- Net gain of 9 NCT fostering households over last 2 years (to August 22) despite challenges of the pandemic and national trends of carers leaving the profession.
- Of 65 children who had received therapeutic support directly/via carer at end June 2022, 6 (9%) had experienced a placement breakdown against a baseline of 30%<.
- An NCT foster carer who completed Therapeutic Parenting with clinical psychologist reported going from 70% chance that the placement would end, to 70% chance it will continue. Another said: *"Before the sessions I didn't think I would continue with fostering and now I will"*.
- To date, we have secured an additional 11 residential care beds for the sole use of NCT by the end of 2022, including in emergency/ urgent situations.
- People Too review of placements, commissioning, and brokerage (February 2022) found: *'In some areas, NCT is managing, and meeting need as effectively as comparators. Despite this, some intractable issues are present that require creative and innovative solutions.'*

'Leadership, insight, and analysis is allowing NCT to focus on the right things, with many plans in flight to address existing deficits.'



Quality and Outcomes team quality assurance of placements that are unregistered and/ or where concerns have been raised 21/22- Extract from a Quality & Outcomes visit to an unregistered placement:

'CM when I arrived you said you were happy for me to come in and complete my visit. You said you remembered me from my last visit. You told me that you had been at school today and now you were just doing your washing. You said you had had a good day at school and appeared happy. You said I could come see your room and I was amazed at how good it looked – and very bright. You said you liked your room. You showed me the pictures on the wall and told me the people in the photos were your old carers.

You told me you were saving up to buy a gaming PC and laughed at me when I didn't know what this meant. You told me you were going to use it to play fortnight. We talked about how you play on your x-box at the moment and you have 2 hours a day you can play. You said that sometimes you would like more and we talked, with N, about how well you have adhered to this time limit.

I heard you laughing and joking with your support worker and N and you were very pleased to show us all your trick for putting on your duvet cover.'

What does this mean for children and families?

- Our Children in Care are well supported by workers who care about and understand their needs and the majority achieve good outcomes.

What are we doing to further improve?

- We are **part of the Local Family Justice Board** and its subgroups which meets regularly and improves joint working between the NCT and the courts. Priorities include more robust work prior to the first hearing, strengthening processes, better pre-proceedings, more robust case preparation, shorter care duration, less hearings, and more effective hearings.
- We are also **part of a DFE regional project** which has developed a toolkit for all practitioners along the lines of the Essex toolkit but with a local focus. This has been rolled out in NCT and is part of our overall improvement work for the PLO process and for use within the pre-birth procedures.
- **Graded Care Profile 2** training for staff will support our response to chronic neglect at earlier stages. By the time children reach threshold for PLO, Graded Care Profiles could be utilised to review the impact of the support and offer the evidence for the action that needs to be taken.
- We are looking at how to **further strengthen quality of assessments** i.e., training of social workers in specialist models of assessment such as Parent Assess.

- **Improvement actions are in place** to ensure 'My Care Plans' are consistently completed with children that clearly reflect their current and future needs with clear contingency plans, are shared with children in good time before their review, and they are given the choice of how their review is held.
- **We will continue to encourage children's participation in reviews** and the use of the Mind of My Own App to record and represent their wishes and views at reviews.
- **IROs will ensure the Care Plan holistically explores and identifies each child and young person's needs**, particularly focusing on children and young people's cultural and diversity needs.
- IRO and Children in Care Service Managers will continue to **share good practice and identify areas of concern** so we can develop joint plans to address these.
- **Support and encourage IRO's to fully evidence** the direct and indirect contact they have with children and young people and their families.
- **Reduce the number of children having 3+ moves in 12 months** through increased scrutiny on placement planning and stability arrangements, including additional family support for children in NCT foster care and external placements.
- **Developing trauma informed practice** in our Children in Care teams.

Education

For the 2022/23 academic year The VS is focusing on:

- **Improving the compliance and quality of post 16 PEPs** through allocated resource of two Education Officers and an experienced Team Manager
- Addressing drift in the assessment of SEND for some children in care and the securing of special school places for children in care with an Education and Health Care Plan through **new escalation procedures**
- **Enhancing our intervention offer** for education settings to ensure they are best placed to improve the outcomes of children with a social worker.
- Developing **engagement and participation** with Children in Care.
- Supporting schools in responding to the **new exclusions guidance**: in particular, advice on what additional assessment and support needs to be put in place.
- Supporting other services in **discharging their statutory duties towards children in care** with SEND.

We will also:

- **Monitor the impact of and learning from the Prospects/ H2I** joint working to improve EET outcomes for children.
- Exploration of how care experienced young people with an EHCP may be able to **access Supported Internships available via Prospects**.

Health

- **Training and support for practitioners** to improve understanding of SDQ scores and use in care planning.
- From September 2022, dip sample children's records from different agencies to assess how comprehensively SDQ's are used (and triangulated) to **inform practice and care arrangements for young people**. Information is also utilised to better understand and support Children in Care's emotional and mental health needs.
- **Continue to work with health partners** to address and highlight the impact of delays to children's health assessments and reviews.

- **Shaw Trust are funding a new Mental Health and Well-Being Worker** (to be recruited) to provide additional support to young people at H2I homes, with the intention to improve placement stability and achievement for young people.
- **Barnardo's have been commissioned by the ICB to deliver a key worker service** for children / young people aged 0 to 25 with learning disabilities/ autism with complex needs– this includes children who are in care and those who aren't. Key workers will navigate to ensure the appropriate level of support is accessible when needed, manage crisis, and support community living. En-fold (local organisation led by people with autism) will be providing peer support and step-down support. This is expected to go live in Q4 21/22.

Placements

- Our Sufficiency Strategy is being refreshed and we continue progressing the following actions to address the shortage of suitable placements to meet children's needs:
 - Fully implement and monitor the impact of process changes in commissioning and brokerage.
 - Deliver NCT's fostering recruitment and marketing campaign to increase the net number of NCT carers that can support the differing needs of our children.
 - Further PH funding has been secured to provide therapy to <15 additional NCT foster children/ families to sustain placements; and Clinical Psychologist direct work with 10 families and 60 Social Care staff to upskill and embed trauma-informed practice. We are working with ICB to identify how this can be mainstreamed.
 - Work with external IFAs to increase access to emergency foster carers.
 - Continue to build and improve relationships with external providers.
 - Open our 2 new emergency homes by the end of 2022.
 - Work with councils to finalise capital investment in additional NCT Children's Homes.
 - Progress additional externally delivered Children's Home if successful in DfE capital bid.
 - Monitor impact of initiatives to stabilise placements.

Care Leavers

What do we know about the quality and impact of our practice?

- Russell House, our dedicated building for care leavers to drop in and attend groups provides a positive, warm, safe, and supportive space that is valued by young people and practitioners.
- Post pandemic, we have re-established our drop-in day where agencies such as DWP, Housing, Health, Education, Prospects, and CIRV are available to meet with our young people. We are also setting up a similar drop-in centre in the North.
- We were planning to celebrate our care leavers at a festival style event in September, for up to 100 of our young people; most of the performances / acts are by the young people. Unfortunately, this had to be postponed due to the Queen passing away and will be re-arranged.
- 19 of our care leavers took part in a camping trip in Summer 2022, helping to increase self-esteem, kindness, patience, teamwork, self-awareness, and confidence.
- Care Experienced Apprentices within the Leaving Care Team are supportive and creative. They also provide ideas of how to engage our young people so that we have a wider voice to help us shape the service delivery. Both are due to gain their qualifications in November, and one has already secured a permanent role in NCT (finance team).
- Positive relationships between the Separated Children's Team workers and PAs enable consistency of service for young people, particularly when they have been at point of crisis and when transitioning to leaving care services.

- Improved transitions for children into the leaving care service because of joint service events and joint supervisions.
- Since our November 2021 Monitoring Visit, young people have contributed to a survey about the Care Leavers offer and a reviewed offer has been created which is currently being prepared for publication. There will also be a version for young people.
- Financial entitlement changes have been agreed and the new policy has been rolled out within the service. This new financial policy provides a comprehensive offer to young people and guidance to staff and young people of sources of financial and other support.
- The stability of Leaving Care staff means many young people have positive enduring relationships with their personal advisors. Although at times unavoidable, we seek to limit the changes experienced by a young person. Changes in allocation arrangements has meant the 'duty' system is now able to provide a more responsive and person-centred service.
- We have continued to make further improvements in quality of pathway plans. All are reviewed by managers with clear oversight and direction given, which is then captured on the young person's record
- Young people at risk are now managed through the adult risk management arrangements with regular multi-agency team meetings to oversee and manage the risk, chaired by experienced and suitably qualified staff with important key other agencies (police, housing, adult services) routinely in attendance.
- The newly created accommodation and transitions panel allows for all agencies to refer and review young people and has been seen to have a positive impact in building brighter futures for young people.
- While there is pressure on the stock of social housing, care leavers have priority bidding status and practice has now changed to ensure housing applications are made at the earliest opportunity in line with the young person's needs. We have agreed refreshed care leavers housing protocols with WNC and NNC.
- Most young people now receive access to their records within the prescribed timescales and comprehensive chronologies are created for them. Where there is a delay, this is resolved as soon as possible.
- Through a PH funded project, 73% of Leaving Care case-working staff have fully completed Emotion Coaching training; there are 3 EC Champions and feedback shows staff are now working in this informed way: *"I found understanding how the brain develops and at what stages and how that affects behaviour extremely useful."*
- Mental Health Advanced Practitioner (MHAP) role has supported 50 young people intensively and another 50 through other approaches.
- 7/11 Tier 3 care leavers that our MHAP had supported in Q3 and Q4 of 21/22 had been helped so they **had not needed** to access NHS emergency/crisis pathways.

"you're my go to person, you have saved me from myself on so many occasions, without a doubt you're always there for me and you understand me more than anyone. you mean so so so much to me and i want you to know that. i hit the PA jackpot with you!! you're amazing at your job and never ever let any of your new cases or the ones you still have tell you otherwise. i wouldn't be half the woman i am today if it wasn't for you j, thank you so much for being you x"

Care leaver about their PA

Suitable accommodation

- Most of our care leavers are living in suitable accommodation.
- Regular meetings with housing colleagues from WNC and NNC have been effective in moving young people into accommodation where they may previously have been homeless.
- Currently (August 2022) 13 young people have been identified as no permanency address or street homeless. All are carefully monitored with services and plans in place to seek to move them to suitable accommodation if possible:
 - 10 are staying with friends or family.
 - 1 is street homeless and has been presented to the Accommodation & Transitions Panel.
 - 2 are in temporary accommodation.
- Supported accommodation, from Homes to Inspire Belinda Ferrison House, 'Training Flats' continues to support up to 21 care leavers at any one time to achieve good outcomes.
- We have secured more of this kind of supported accommodation package by commissioning YMCA, with a new property for up to 9 care leavers with additional needs due to open in Summer 2023.
- We are working with council colleagues as finding their own tenancy continues to take longer than expected for young people, and there is a back log for the housing teams following the pandemic.
- The newly created Accommodation and Transitions panel allows for all agencies to refer and review young people and has been seen to have a positive impact in building brighter futures for young people.
- Prospects also provide valuable input for young person's education or employment plans.

How do we know?

- QA activity (September 2021) found the majority of Pathway Plans reviewed have a clear exploration of the young person's needs and how they like to be supported, with the voice of the young person present in the majority even when young people are non-verbal.
- Ofsted monitoring visit (November 2021 found) *'the quality and timeliness of written pathway plans have improved since the 2019 inspection'.. 'regularly updated and written collaboratively with care leavers'.. though for 'some care leavers the plan does not address some important aspects of their lives'.*
- Most CRPDs undertaken with the service are seen to be good or better.
- 82.4% of young people have an up-to-date pathway plan (YTD July 2022) this includes 87.4.% of 18 – 21-year-olds.
- 81.4% of 18–21-year-old care leavers have been in contact with the service in the last 8 weeks (August 2022).
- 62.3% in EET (YTD July 2022) above England and stat neighbour averages.
- At the end of June 2022, 50 young adults had been intensively supported (Tiers 2-3) with their mental health and wellbeing by our MHAP and another 50 through light touch/via PA/complex case panel/open days. These young adults have had marked improvements in their range of wellbeing issues.
- 7/11 Tier 3 care leavers our MHAP had supported in Q3 and Q4 of 21/22 had been helped so they **had not needed** to access NHS emergency/crisis pathways.
- 94.7% of care leavers in suitable accommodation (YTD July 2022) which is above England and stat neighbour average.
- Ofsted monitoring visit (November 2021) found *'management oversight of care leavers who have become homeless has improved since 2019, resulting in many of their housing situations being resolved, although some inconsistencies remain'.*
- Feedback from adult's service attendees of the Accommodation and Transitions panel is that it is alerting them much earlier to young people with additional needs and also increasing awareness of the issues facing many care leavers. Alongside the need to develop priority pathways to ensure they can access the help that is needed.

- At the end of Q4, only 2 of the 19 care leavers supported at Belinda Ferrison House ‘Training Flats’ were NEET and there were zero notifiable incidents (no CSE, damage, assaults to staff, police involvement, complaints, episodes of bullying or hospital admissions).

“My time at BFH was largely positive and I received lots of support from all of the staff there especially my support worker J. From the small things such as help with shopping to the much bigger things such as support with my mental health and self-harming issues.

The fact that there is a member of staff 24/7 is also a big positive as it allows for support even in the early hours of the morning, this came as a big help to me when I had a bad incident of self-harm.

Being able to meet other young people living at BFH was also a good experience as it allowed me to mingle with others and get out to exercise and participate in some football which helped me. Workshops and activities such as cooking with the staff here was also lots of fun.

Overall, my time at BFH provided me with lots of help and support with learning how to become independent. The staff were all very friendly and welcoming and I was glad to meet everyone there.”

Initial findings from Practice Week (August/ September 2022) included:

- Leaving Care workers know their young people well, are committed to improving their lives, have good communication skills, offer a good mix of support and challenge, have a focus on outcomes, and are incredibly adept at identifying and engaging the best support services.
- The service is working pro-actively to engage with our harder to reach young people – our Care Experienced Apprentices have supported with new ideas here.
- The Voice group is highly valued by female young people; it provides safe space to have helpful, supportive conversations with skilled practitioners from Health and Social Care.
- The service is making real headway building community networks and engaging partner agencies fully in ongoing support of our young people.
- Multi agency working is a real strength – because of this young people do not have to repeat their stories several times.

My PA is always on my side

I like my worker; she speaks to me about my experience, my family and my identity

Feedback from auditor observing a joint supervision with Children in Care and leaving care

‘The young person’s views, wishes and feelings were clear; their voice had been captured and was shared well by both service areas; K facilitated this discussion well so each service areas views were heard equally. K’s clear focus on the young person, and leading in a strengths focussed way was what made this an awesome piece of work’.

What does this mean for children and families?

- Our care leavers are well supported by workers who care about and understand their needs; and the majority achieve good outcomes.

What are we doing to further improve?

- The drive for all young people to have clear, specific plans and personal advisors to be clear on the action they need to take to support our young people to succeed remains relentless. Recent changes to the team structures have given increased oversight on case work and support to staff which we expect to help achieve this.
- We would like to create a hub similar to Russell House in the North and are having discussions regarding potential properties to progress this.
- Work around transitions into adulthood being seen as part of the young person's "journey" and not a single step is important to the leaving care service. A lot of work to inform and support other service areas is underway; this is part of proactive work to formalise earlier preparation for adulthood.
- Continue to engage partner agencies to ensure networks are built in advance and to share responsibility for supporting young people as they become adults; particularly for those young people who were separated children as services that can meet their specific needs are underdeveloped and not readily available across the county.
- Working with council colleagues to identify potential properties for a 'training flats' style supported accommodation in the North.
- Further PH funding has been secured for MHAP direct work with <35 care experienced young adults and <40 frontline staff to upskill and embed trauma-informed practice and events for an additional 100 care experienced young adults; and we are working with ICB to identify how to mainstream this.
- Through the ICS we are planning a stakeholder event for businesses, services, and relevant organisations in Northamptonshire aiming to further improve the offer to our care leavers.
- We have plans to offer more group work for our young people (beyond our well-being, UASC, Football, Girls Sport, and Your Voice groups) so that young people have many and varied opportunities to engage with the service.
- Working jointly with other services, the *Preparing for Adulthood* programme is being progressed to ensure all care leavers are helped to be ready to live successfully independently.



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CORPORATE RISKS																		
CR 01	01/04/2021	Chief Executive	Long term sustainability	Stakeholder engagement - unitaries and other strategic partners Many of the KPIs are dependent on good partnership working with North Northamptonshire and West Northamptonshire and other agencies including Health (PEPS, educational outcomes, health outcomes, missing from care)	Poorly defined shared objectives Collaborative advantage for working together not clearly defined Policy changes within local authority and / or partner organisations Partnership initiative is incompatible / does not align with other local initiatives	Performance targets are not met. No strategic approach to issues of risks, costs, benefits.	2	5	10	1. Clear vision and conditions for success developed and shared with all partners and colleagues 2. Children's Trust business plan strategy with clear priorities 3. Development of strong relationships with both councils and partner organisations	1. Consultation with staff through 58 minute sessions and additional forums 2. Children's Trust strategy in development through the forums	2	5	10	Maintain strong relationships with workforce, owners and partners	2	5	10
CR 02	01/04/2021	Chief Executive	Quality of services / contractual	Service Delivery Contract: A persistent breach in the provision of the Services persisting for one or more Quarters during the term of the Agreement; Monthly KPI falls outside of Tolerance for three (3) consecutive Months; Quarterly KPI, falls of Tolerance for two (2) consecutive Quarters or more	Insufficient progress made against planned improvements and performance indicators	Step In Notice	2	4	8	1. Regular monitoring against contractual KPIs 2. Improved reporting through OCG and SCG 3. Improvements in Business Intelligence and demand forecasting	1. Baselines agreed, together with reporting templates 2. ILACS Inspection "Requires Improvement" 3. Key focus on local and national	2	4	8	1. Improved business intelligence systems. 2. Continued focus on permanent recruitment 3. Social Care Improvement Board 4. Increased workforce training	2	4	8
SOCIAL CARE RISKS																		
SCR 01	01/04/2021	Director of Children's Social Care	Quality of services / contractual	An emergency occurs that has: - a significant adverse impact on the welfare of, and there is a serious increased risk of harm to, children and/or young people in the county of Northamptonshire; or - has a material adverse effect on the Trust of the Services such that there is, or will be, a long-term increased risk of harm to children and young people in the Northamptonshire if the Trust continues to perform the Services	Business continuity failure in critical services Death or injury to a child or young person under the responsibility of the Trust, through inappropriate care or attention	Step in notice Child Safeguarding Practice Review	2	5	10	1. Regular quality assurance and audit activity along with management supervision and oversight to identify and address any risks in relation to practice	1. There are no cases currently where concerns of this type have been identified	2	5	10	N/A	2	5	10
SCR 02	01/04/2021	Director of Children's Social Care	Inspection / Regulatory	Improvements seen by Ofsted in the ILACS 2022 are not sustained or built on.	Failure to improve services for children	Failure to maintain and build on improvements results in difficulty with future recruitment and retention and have negative impact on outcomes for children, and reputational risk	2	5	10	1. Effective leadership and oversight to ensure services are operated at an effective level 2. Monthly Improvement Board to monitor progress 3. Peer review of SEF summer 2022	1. Ofsted ILACS recognised progress and NCT status is now "Requires Improvement" 2. Updated Improvement Plan currently in Draft Form including input from partners and will be	2	4	8	1. Updated improvement plan to be sent to Improvement Board	2	3	6
SCR 03	01/04/2021	Director of Children's Social Care	Service delivery	Ongoing impact of Covid-19 on service demand and related budget pressures	Insufficient apportionment of national monies to cover incurred Covid-19 related Trust costs. Additional financial pressure on the Council. Covid-19 affecting staff members / foster carers / residential homes	Service delivery constrained - reduced service provision; workforce reduction. Need to find additional funding for services. Some non-essential services may be affected.	3	5	15	1. Baseline report produced detailing Trust position as at 1st November. 2. Continuation of targeted funding for additional SW capacity, early help and fostering 3. Placement and performance monitoring in place	1. increase in pressure and complexity with particular impact on certain service areas 2. Weekly demand level report showing pressure on placements	4	4	16	Monitoring impact, potential impact on service demands post March. Additional request for additional funding through contract as part of Invest to save.	2	5	10
SCR 04	09/05/2022	Director of Children's social care	Service delivery	Increase in safeguarding referrals and complexity of need leading to an increase in numbers of children in care	impact of Covid 19 pandemic, combined with legacy of unmet needs and underdeveloped early help offer.	Impact on capacity to manage the workload and to deliver quality services potential impact on budgets and placement cost alongside complexity of young people needs to be met	3	3	9	1. early help steering group and action plan and ongoing work with the wider partnership to ensure right help at the right time and reduce escalation of needs 2. system approach to ensure appropriate levels of intervention for families 2. work on robust application of thresholds by a strong front door 3. continue to improve quality of services and ensure sustainable plans at closure	1. Increase in demand and complexity as the effects of the pandemic are more prevalent. 2. Increase in separated children and fewer children leaving care over the last year. Therefore, increase	3	4	12	ICS engagement to address system challenges Safeguarding partners working collectively on priorities, one being early help Neglect steering group to develop action plan and monitor impact	3	3	9

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SCR 05	09/05/2022	Director of Children's social care	Service delivery	Unregistered placements that are illegal	THE CARE PLANNING, PLACEMENT & CARE REVIEW (ENGLAND) (AMENDMENT) REGULATIONS 2021 came into force on 9 September 2021- demands that Looked after children under the age of 16 must be placed in foster care or a registered children's home	risk of prosecution/ judicial review/ insurance/ reputation/ Ofsted inspection unintended impact where we see regulated providers that refuse complex cases as they may negatively impact their Ofsted rating and increase in solo placements	4	5	20	Unregulated placement is made only when no other alternative is available. Decision at AD/ Director level. Checks prior and after the placement is made ensuring risks are mitigated and the needs of the young person are understood. All unregulated placements are monitored on a weekly basis by senior managers to ensure all children living in unregistered children's home placements are safe and children's needs are met, and that timely action is taking place to secure a registered placement that meets their needs or so that they can safely return home. Fortnightly reports to councils/ DCSs and ICF. Regular reporting to Ofsted is in place. We report to our Social Care Improvement Board and OCG on a monthly basis. Quality assurance in regards to this area of work in place.	Unregistered placements procedure devised to ensure consistency. Senior management oversight and regular review. Learning from Ofsted inspection has been implemented. Reporting to council and ofsted in place. Sufficiency	4	3	12	implementation of sufficiency action plan. implementation of capital investment and DfE bid. Implementation of valuing care project. Weekly meetings chaired by AD for QA and Commissioning involving services and commissioning team. Increase in quality assurance activity with focus on both compliance and outcomes	2	5	10
SCRO 6	01/04/2021	Director of Children's Social Care	Finance / service delivery	Challenges to the delivery of / withdrawal of the Troubled Families Programme	Government withdraw or significantly amends the terms of the Troubled Families Programme	Insufficient funding to sustain services funded by the Troubled Families Programme. Poor outcomes for young people. Increased costs, reputational risk.	2	4	8	1. Regular monitoring of troubled families (supporting families) attachment and PBR income	1. Attachment funding covers staffing and has been rolled forward by government for a further year to 21 / 22 2. Significant increase in successful claims for the final quarter of 20/21 financial	1	4	4	1. A/D Early Help leading a piece of work to identify where further claims are possible 2. Closer interface with Business intelligence with dedicated resource 3. funding confirmed for future years	2	2	4
SCRO 7	01/04/2021	Director of Children's Social Care	Service delivery	Non recent child sexual exploitation connected cases	Victims coming forward, police investigation and criminal charges, identification of further victims and alleged perpetrators as investigation continues and made public	Serious harm experienced by a child/ young person, reputational, financial (litigation, insurance, additional resource requirements), HR (disciplinary)	3	4	12	1. The Trust is managing the safeguarding aspects of the operation/ investigation in collaboration with safeguarding partners who together manage the communication strategy.	Police investigation completed and review of case files has also been	3	4	12	1. Once report written and publication timeline confirmed then to develop a comms plan. 2. Additional resources agreed by the council to effectively manage existing work and any new	2	4	8
SCRO 8	07/03/2023	Assistant Director CFSS & YOS	Service Delivery	YOS pending HMIP inspection.	Impact for the Children Trust if the YOS provision is considered not to be a strength.	Failure to achieve a successful outcome for inspections and decrease in positive outcomes for young people and families.	3	4	12	Regular inspection readiness Meetings Peer review undertaken Service Performance Data Clinics YJB action Plan performance monitoring QA Audit Controls - recent review of Custody support plans Data intelligence with Police and Partners to Target areas and themes. Scrutiny on Top ten re-offenders YOS Management Board, Assurance reporting, oversight and challenge.	Preparing to convene external scrutiny for inspection readiness preparing to undertake a full audit control of all policy and procedures to ensure updated and accessible to staff. Training Audit tracker Inspection folders in place Review Risk areas known	3	4	12	Continue to hold the inspection readiness meetings. Report all risks to YOS management Board NCT SLT Oversight	2	3	6
FINANCE AND OPERATIONAL RISKS																		
FOR 01	01/04/2021	Chief Executive/Director of Finance and Resources	Service delivery	Manage budget within agreed contract sum	The inability of the Trust to break even leads to a 'breach of contract' as determined within the Financial Mechanism	Step-in notice	1	5	5	1.Regular monitoring of cash flow by Director of Finance 2. Regular monitoring of budget through SLT and Trust Board	1. No current cash flow concerns 2. Transformation and efficiency reporting in place 3. Balanced Outturn position as at the 31/3/2022 subject to final	3	5	15	1. Review of Placement spend, though Joint Funding panels and procurement 2. Creation of local provision 3. Continued drive to recruit foster carers 4. Implementation of new ways of working as part of both IT and asset strategy within the trust 5. Implementation of valuing care project in 2023.	1	5	5
FOR 02	01/04/2021	Director of Finance and Resources	Finance	The risk of cuts in the budget contributions of partner agencies following central budget cuts	Partner agency reduce / withhold supporting budget	Service delivery constrained - reduced service provision; workforce reduction	2	5	10	1. Regular meetings with funding partners to ensure clear sight of any proposed budget cuts 2. Successful bid for additional funding from DfE for improvement activities £469k 3. Reviewing new grant allocations and submission of bids for 22/23 (i.e. new burdens grant)	1. Submission of contract sum for period 2023 -2025 and provisional contract sum agreed in accordance with SDC 2. Monthly detailed financial monitoring in place	3	5	15	1. Funding agreements in place for 22/23. 2. Process in place for change control in the 22/23 financial year to respond to Medium term pressures. 3. Finalising arrangements for the treatment of earmarked grants and reserves 4. Inflation pressures including pay inflation above the levels forecast in the contract sum, which will require a change control mechanism to be enacted	2	5	10

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FOR 03	01/04/2021	Director of Finance and Resources	Finance / service delivery	Increase in volume and the complexity of care required and increase in numbers of children in need of support adding to budget pressures.	Inaccurate prediction of service demand and Placement Sufficiency	Failure to achieve a successful outcome for inspections and decrease in positive outcomes for children, young people and families	3	5	15	1. Regular monitoring of cases 2. Review commissioning arrangements and benchmarking for external placements 3. Joint funding arrangements with education and CCG 4. Development of placement sufficiency strategy	1. Increased complexity of cases post Covid-19 2. Review of placement budgets and partner contributions 3. MARP panel developing, however challenges from partners as implementation of new arrangements for joint funding protocols 4. Increasing demand in	4	5	20	1. Individual pupil Monitoring systems in place re case numbers. 2. Improved placement sufficiency and planning , through capital investment 3. Trust workshop to develop placement sufficiency and the development of additional local provision 4. Review of Trust property and linking to the councils asset management strategy 5. submission of additional capital bids to develop local provision. 6. Placement modelling to inform contract sum negotiations as part of quarter 1 report , final position to be agreed on actuals. Retrospective change control to be implemented at year end .	2	5	10
FOR 04	01/09/2021	Director of Finance and Resources	Finance / service delivery	Increasing cost of commissioned services and placements as a result of uncontrollable external factors (i.e. Increased national insurance; changes in regulation; impact of Brexit and Covid on ability of providers to secure suitable workforce, failure of external placement market to meet needs)	Failure to secure services and placements to meet level of demand within budget	1. reduced service provision for children and families leading to future increase in demand 2. not able to fulfil contractual requirements 3. Cost pressure	3	4	12	1. Commissioners working with providers to address workforce related issues 2. Re-opening of frameworks to increase number of providers and reviewing commissioning options 3. Identifying alternative service delivery models to commissioned services	1. Care and support providers experiencing challenges in securing suitable workforce 2. Reviewing provider	4	4	16	1. Join additional placement frameworks 2. Improve joint commissioning with adults services 3. Bring commissioned services in house if this is viable and will achieve better value for money	2	4	8
FOR 05	01/04/2021	Director of Finance and Resources	Finance / service delivery	Inability to deliver savings plans within contract sum	There have been additional cost burdens on Children's Services as a result of Covid-19. We have also postponed some transformation projects which were set to deliver savings and efficiencies for the Council	Failure to deliver savings and transformation projects leading to pressures on the contract sum and targeting resources on improving from line service delivery.	3	5	15	1. Review of individual project delivery 2. Work with partners as a collaborative approach (i.e. CCG, housing). 3. Identify alternative savings and in year mitigations 4. Incorporate project management with SRO for each project. 5. Closer links with finance and corporate project management to establish co-dependencies	1. Continued review of budgets 2. Review benchmarking and demand forecasts 3. New monitoring and reporting system in place. 4. Workshop with WNC in December 22 to review key priorities and savings co-delivery	3	5	15	1. Impact factored into the development of the MTFs and contract sum 2. Review residual pressures impacting on 22/23 financial year 3. New monitoring and reporting system in place. 4. Workshop with WNC in December 22 to review key priorities and savings co-delivery	2	5	10
FOR 06	01/07/2021	Director of Finance and Resources	Information Governance	Data Breach. NCT processes and stores a high volume of sensitive information related to the safeguarding and protection of vulnerable children and their families. Data breaches risk the integrity and availability of this information.	Deliberate or accidental action (or inaction) by NCT as data controller or a data processor of NCT data. Access by an unauthorised third party. Sending personal data to an incorrect recipient. Computing devices containing personal data being lost or stolen. Alteration of personal data without permission. Loss of availability of personal data.	Reputational Harm. Financial penalty through ICO fines under GDPR. ICO audit and regulatory action due to reduced UK GDPR compliance. Harm or risk of harm to service users, their families, employees and 3rd parties due to data breach. Loss of systems functionality. Possible safeguarding impact to children from information loss, incorrect information recorded or inability to access data when decision making. Loss of NCT contract to deliver services.	4	5	20	1. IG Service established and DPO appointed. Data Protection and Cyber Security Essentials training is mandatory to all staff and is renewed annually. Data Protection policies and procedures are in place. Data breach reporting procedure is defined and communicated to workforce. Workforce report data breaches promptly and in line with policy. DPO report breaches meeting threshold to ICO within 72 hours deadline. . Data breach protection policies and procedures reviewed as IG BAU. The DPO and SIRO work closely with workforce and SLT to ensure a Trust wide awareness of data protection responsibilities, that training is taken up and breaches are reported to DPO. NCT data protection compliance certification for ICO place. 2. Systems Data Protection Impact: New processes, systems, working methods, project programmes, software implementation, etc., are assessed for their data protection impact. 3. Unlawful Access to NCT Systems: Third party agencies and organisations provided with access to NCT systems within a NCT SLA, Commissioned Contract, other contract type or Data Sharing Agreement (DSA) for defined usage.	08/2022. Implementation of IG Framework Action Plan on hold due to additional workload to address Leaving Care information access request backlog. 07/2022. New controls to authorise access to NCT systems and data for third-parties through an updated access request form has been completed. Trust wide communications through DPO and CEO to workforce	3	4	12	1. Permanent recruitment of IG team and level of resource to be agreed 2. Training completions to be continually monitored to ensure levels of compliance are maintained. Additional training to be put in place specific to roles and service areas across workforce; direct target of staff not completed mandatory training. 3. Implementation Development of Information Governance and Data Protection Framework action plan.	2	4	8
FOR 07	01/07/2021	Director of Finance and Resources	Information Governance	Cyber security incident or issue. NCT processes and stores a high volume of sensitive information related to the safeguarding and protection of vulnerable children and their families and its workforce through computer systems.	Cyber Attack - Security breaches or hacks of computer systems leading to data breach and loss of functionality from ransomware (malicious software) placed on systems. Successful phishing exercise, data leakage, hacking activities and insider (employee) threat. Cyber defences are not sufficiently robust because the IT environment is not maintained to the required standard of security and integrity.	Harm or risk of harm to service users, their families, employees and 3rd parties due to data breaches. Loss of systems functionality. Possible safeguarding impact to children due to inability to access information. Staff unable to make correct safeguarding decisions due to cyber security attacks.	4	3	12	1. Data Protection policies and procedures in place. 2. Data protection policies and procedures to be regularly reviewed . 3. Data Protection and Cyber Security Essentials training is mandatory to all staff and is taken up. 4. Procedure and process to report breaches meeting threshold to ICO. 5. Regular communications to workforce regarding adherence to policies and procedures. 6. Additional training and workshops offered to workforce on procedures and policy requirements.	1. Data Protection policies and procedures are in place, either NCT owned or incorporated from NCC, WNC or NNC legacy documentation. 2. Review of data protection policies and procedures incorporated into Information Governance and	2	3	6	1. Data Protection policies and procedures to be reviewed and formatted to NCT brand. 2. Information Governance and Data Protection Framework Action Plan to be completed 3. Training completions to be monitored to ensure levels of compliance are maintained. 4. Additional training to be provided.	2	2	4

Risk No	Date Raised	Risk Owner	Risk Type	Risk Description	Event	Impact	Initial Risk Score			Mitigating Action	Current Position	Current Risk			Further Management Actions	Target Residual Risk		
							Probability	Impact	SCORE			Probability	Impact	SCORE		Probability	Impact	SCORE
FOR 08	01/11/20	Director of Finance/SLT	Staffing	High levels of permanent staff turnover	Less consistency of practice and increased levels of agency staff	Service delivery is hindered by staff recruitment and retention issues. An over reliance on interim social workers, that impacts the overcapacity and capability to deliver. Increased financial cost of interim staff. Inconsistency for families and potential for reduced outcome achievement High caseloads due to vacancies	5	4	20	1. Push permanent recruitment 2. Effective support for staff to mitigate high levels of attrition 3. Work in partnership with OPUS and community care as part of a strategic campaign 4. Develop reputation and offer for social workers	1. Review of arrangements to introduce permanent SW staff to the organisation and consideration of an alternative provider to further improve opportunities to recruit to permanent posts. 2. A 2% pay award for roles paid at SM1 or below arranged for payment in July and backdated to 1	5	4	20	1. Ongoing regular focus on permanent recruitment - performing well in a difficult market 2. Development of a strategic recruitment partnership - microsite for recruitment in place 3. Working with community care to promote the trust and utilise networks 4. Development of communication strategies including the use of social media platforms(Linked in and Twitter). Continued focus on alternative ideas for retention. Focus on hotspots across organisation continues.	2	4	8
FOR 09	01/04/2021	Director of Finance and Resources	Contracts and Supplier resilience	Risk of weak supplier resilience	If there is a risk of weak supplier resilience, then there is the possibility of provider bankruptcies putting service continuity at risk.	A reputational risk of failing to meet the needs and expectations of our customers, members and politicians as well as legal implications for statutory services. Potentially increased costs through recommissioning are failure to identify an alternative provider	3	4	12	1. Ensure service continuity plans are in place and annually reviewed for all strategic and priority contracts. 2. Increase frequency of monitoring of the provider, and use other indicators such as share value performance to help determine risk. 3. Monitoring CreditSafe alerts if the providers financial standing changes and rating drops to below 50%, Contract Managers to Increase frequency of monitoring of the provider, and use other indicators such as share value performance to help determine risk	1. Review of all contracts and providers 2. Exposure to financial risk (post covid) organisations have been funded at budget. 3. Impact on changing demands (Transport - continuation of	2	4	8	1. Continue to review supplier resilience as part of contracts review and commissioning strategy 2. Consideration of developing strategic partnership which would provide longer term stability of commissioning arrangements 3. Consideration of inflation related increase to commissioned services in with contract sum negotiations	2	4	8
FOR 10	01/04/2021	Director of Finance and Resources	IT Infrastructure	Implementation of new children's IT system 1/4/22 - RISK updated to Procurement and Implementation of new Children's IT system	Failure to implement the new IT system aligned to support practice improvement, improved reporting and integration with other systems > failure to engage with the service	1. System does not support practice and improved decision making and efficiencies . 2. Failure to integrate with other systems	3	4	12	1. Embed best practice into new system (e.g. Signs of Safety) 2 .Ensure new system supports Ofsted Improvement Plans 3.Implementation supports Ofsted Improvement Plans. 4. Appropriate groups embedded in Trust through project but continued post programme 5. Enhance technical support and ongoing development	1. Engagement of Project lead for Children's Services 2. Governance structure proposed. 3. Revenue from NNC and WNC sought - awaiting final decision on governance arrangements	4	4	16	1. Programme board decision on future of social care information management system has defined new actions for this risk 2. Agree Capital with Council(s) to start procurement 3. Start procurement with engagement from Trust teams as required - 5/1/23 First programme board started. NNC funding approved, WNC funding due to be approved end Jan 23.	2	4	8
FOR 11	01/04/2021	Director of Finance and Resources	Service delivery	The Trust is dependent upon the Council(s) delivery of aligned services and of a number of support services	Reduced service delivery level by the Council(s) impacts the trust own performance	1. Performance targets are not met 2. Support services are not supporting the delivery of the trusts objectives	4	4	16	1. Development of KPIs that will support service delivery levels required by the Trust 2. Continued development of support services board , with focus on areas of poor performance	The Support Services Board has been in operation for 2 years and is receiving high quality monthly performance information and narrative around KPIs. The board reviews risk and issues monthly and records actions / commentary	2	4	8	1. Review potential impact on KPI's and service improvement delivery 2. Review alternative delivery models in partnership with the councils 3. A separate risk and issue register has been developed and is in place for Support Services. This enables recording of items relating to performance and affecting service delivery that are not picked up by existing KPIs 4) IT KPIs have been reviewed and agreed. 5) Transport SLA being developed following disaggregation.	1	4	4
FOR 12	01/08/2021	Director of Finance and Resources	IT on-going support	IT support for the Trust including access to systems	Failure to implement new functions in existing IT systems (e.g. CareFirst) results in NCT not being able to fulfil improvement and contractual requirements	1. Not able to support improvement plans 2. Not able to fulfil contractual requirements	3	4	12	1. Escalation with IT and also Eclipse programme board to gain buy in and support for this risk 2. Recruitment of IT relationship manager for the Trust 3. Review critical incident and business continuity	1. Escalated to IT and gained positive results. 2. New business relationship manager employed by IT and has had positive impact	3	4	12	1. CareFirst and other systems roadmap created to align with NCT priorities 2. Invest to save investment in technology to incorporate new ways of working 3. Continued engagement with IT relationship manager 4. Creation of a Trust Digital Strategy	1	4	4

Risk No	Date Raised	Risk Owner	Risk Type	Risk Description	Event	Impact	Initial Risk Score			Mitigating Action	Current Position	Current Risk			Further Management Actions	Target Residual Risk		
							Probability	Impact	SCORE			Probability	Impact	SCORE		Probability	Impact	SCORE
FOR 13	20/12/2021	Director of Finance and Resources	Property Infrastructure	The current level of repair across the properties occupied by the Trust is poor. Clarity of the working principles between the North and West with respect to rectification is causing delay and there are concerns around the availability of funding to rectify issues raised.	1. Health and Safety concerns/event 2. Poor working conditions for staff 3. Staff safety concerns 4. Ability to provide services (children's centres and children's homes)	1. Ability to provide a safe working environment for staff and customers 2. Ability to provide frontline services	4	4	16	1. Escalation to the Assistant Directors of Property (North and West) on 3rd December 2. Escalation to the Support Services Board 20th December 3. North/West to provide clarity on working arrangements as the service disaggregates, including confirmation around tracking and prioritising expenditure 4. Children's home report by Trust capturing high risk areas 5. Monthly SLA meetings to be put in place with N/W Unitaries 6. Progress to be reported to the Support Services Board 7. Trust undertook soft FM audit across sites to feed into retender of N and W contracts 8. Planned programme of works to be developed to address NCC underinvestment in properties 9. ICF tested with defining clear routes for accessing capital for both N and W - documented process with associated templates.	Following escalation to property ADs in North and West, engagement has continued to improve. Monthly operational and quarterly strategic SLA meetings are in place for the North and the West. The North and West fully disaggregated responsibilities on 31st January. The North have been responsive to queries raised and are bedding in their	2	4	8	Establish a clear working process with the North and West Unitaries for the management and prioritisation of repairs and maintenance. Ensure the North and West are reporting on all agreed KPIs and that MI information requested by the Trust is provided regularly Agree a funded planned maintenance programme across all Trust occupied buildings once Unitary budget setting process has completed (developing well) receive documented access to Capital process via the ICF for in year applications Feed specific capital projects requests into contract setting process to ensure key projects are included within Unitary capital plans Joint N/W/Trust Asset utilisation working group chaired by ICF established since Feb 23.	1	4	4
FOR 14	25/04/2022	Director of Finance and Resource / AD CFSS and YOS	Financial Risk	YOS restructure plans rely on the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner funding support. Recently this has been withdrawn for the year 21/22 which has placed a financial shortfall on the team budget. It is imperative that OPFCC provide ongoing funding via the Unitary Authorities to support the Prevent and Diversion from offending priority.	Clear funding arrangements with the unitary authorities needs to be clarified with longer term agreements. OPFCC need a direct reporting line to one unitary authority on behalf of both councils to be able to ensure good communication and payment responsibilities agreed.	Less staffing to deliver the preventative and Diversion element of YOS priorities to reduce the number of first time offenders. YOS are already a Priority one in this area for YIB therefore this would raise ongoing concerns.	4	3	12	1. Senior Managers aware, 2. Identified Unitary Council Lead, 3. Set up regular meetings to discuss financial agreements for the future.	New Finances have been provided by MoJ to aid the early help and prevention work supported by the YOS. This will be a positive position for the YOS staffing issues and managing	1	1	2	Review current Service Plan. New recruitment drive of fixed term staff. YOS management Board oversight of priorities strengthened.	1	1	2
FOR 15	25/04/2022	Director of Finance and Resource / AD CFSS and YOS	Financial Risk	Supporting Families Changes to Outcome Framework to be implemented in October 2022, the Prescribed framework and guidance has made the reporting of successful PBR claims more challenging than previously. We will need much more partnership engagement to identify more families than last year. The changes to the framework also identifies health as a data provider which has not always been easy to achieve previously.	Data meetings with health are ongoing to ensure we can download what we need BiPi leading on Data warehouse work. Partnership engagement sessions to deliver the new framework so that everyone understands what is required going forward. Information sharing protocol understood and shared to all partners. Governance arrangements to be set out clearly to ensure priority plan delivery. Need to achieve 100% again this year for PBR	Reduced financial contribution from the DLUHC resulting in less staff employed to deliver the work. More scrutiny by DLUHC department and regional leads. More scrutiny in data performance and auditing of casework.	4	3	12	1. Senior managers aware of new Framework, 2. Steering Group aware, 3. New Governance arrangements developed. 4. Revise action plan and risk register.	1. Dates set for meetings with Health Data Leads and IS Governance 2. Police ISA for data sharing sign up. 3. New Early Help Strategic Partnership Board to oversee the SF Action Plan and EH	4	3	12	Health Lead and AD for CFSS to ensure Early Help Partnership Board hold this as a key priority. Also link with Family Hub delivery plans and ICB and place based delivery development groups for both west and North.	2	2	4
FOR 16	07/01/2022	Director of Finance and Resources	Operational risk	There is a risk that the split of DTI services between NNC and WNC Councils will impact the SLA provided from WNC DTI to NCT. This is because the capability and capacity of service from WNC DTI could be impacted by this split.	Continued dialogue with WNC Chief Information Officer to provide assurance of no impact	Currently unknown	4	3	12	1. This is being raised with the CIO for WNC 2. A formal request for reassurance that SLA and other elements of IT services provided will not be impacted by this change	1. Raised with WNC CIO (July 2022). Reassurance received 2. Council assessment March 2023 3. Continue to	4	3	12	Contractual escalation of risk if the impact threatens front line services.	2	3	6
FOR 17	10/01/2023	AD Quality Assurance & Commissioning	Operational and Financial risk	Residential Short Breaks	Councils do not agree to NCT / NCT partner organisation delivery; no other viable providers; have to continue with current provider at cost higher than budget	Risk to family breakdown and increase in children in care if service significantly changes/ withdrawn in unplanned manner; failure to meet statutory duties ;increase costs if have to continue with current provider; negative SEND inspection outcome	3	4	12	Specialist pension advice being sought; twin track planning NCT or NCT partner to deliver; project steering group in place; financial modelling	Due diligence report to be completed by end Jan 23	2	4	8	Reviewing models in other areas; consideration of what additional financial support could enable transfer to alternative provider ; options to remodel service prior to transfer	1	4	4

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Appendix K

		Last 6 Months Activity							Comparators		Target	Trend	
Measure		October	November	December	January	February	March	YTD	SN	England		20/21	21/22
Children and Family Support Services	Total families allocated to Children & Families Support Service teams	113	174	152	130	124	139	1639	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	1538
	Families allocated within 2 days of receipt	64%	73%	71%	65%	72%	60%	65%	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	71%
	Initial Family Contacts conducted	96	96	100	94	96	108	1110	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	971
	Total children open to CFSS at month end	1255	1294	1396	1370	1422	1496		n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	1399
	Of which open for 9+ months	105	106	142	136	143	174		n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	103
	Of which open for 12+ months	52	50	55	56	66	77		n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	31
	Average weeks open per child (at month end)	19.1	17.6	17.9	18.1	18.2	18.7		n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	20
	Average caseload per worker (at month end)	9.2	9.4	10.2	10.5	11.0	11.3		n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	11
	Total families closed	137	126	82	122	87	89	1353	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	1344
	% closed as completed successfully	48%	53%	50%	58%	56%	48%	52%	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	47%
	Families escalated to Social Care at any point while active with CFSS	27	22	10	14	16	21	244	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	135
	Children escalated to CP within 12 months of CFSS EHA	5	0	3	4	0	1	23	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	18
	As % of total CP starts	7%	0%	4%	4%	0%	2%	3%	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	2.4%
	Children escalated to CIN within 12 months of CFSS EHA	10	9	2	5	0	4	78	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	55
	As % of CIN acceptances	4.9%	3.2%	1.3%	2.8%	0.0%	1.8%	3.4%	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	2.5%
Measure		October	November	December	January	February	March	YTD	SN	England	Target	20/21	21/22
Contacts and Referrals	Number of Initial contacts received by the MASH	3904	4152	3071	3617	3840	4201	46624	n/a	n/a	n/a	41323	43393
	% of contacts to referral	21%	21%	17%	18%	19%	18%	19%	n/a	n/a	n/a	25%	30%
	% of contacts to EH	11%	14%	20%	26%	23%	22%	15%	n/a	n/a	n/a	25%	14%
	% contacts NFA	68%	65%	64%	56%	58%	57%	66%	n/a	n/a	n/a	50%	56%
	Number of referrals received by the MASH (in month)	837	877	511	657	728	767	8926	n/a	n/a	n/a	11357	12959
	Rate of referrals received by the MASH per 10k (annualised)	580.3	608.0	354.3	460.5	510.3	537.7	517.1	503.0	538.0	n/a	677.0	748.7
	% of Referrals to Section 47	26.2%	24.5%	24.9%	28.6%	27.3%	25.0%	24.6%	n/a	n/a	n/a	0%	0%
	% of Referrals to Assessment Only	73.8%	75.5%	75.1%	71.4%	72.7%	75.0%	75.4%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
	Percentage of referrals with a previous referral within 12 months	22.7%	31.2%	29.0%	25.7%	28.3%	30.0%	29.5%	21.0%	20.0%	29.0%	31.0%	35.6%
	MASH referrals given an outcome within 48 hours (2 working days)	61.9%	61.1%	57.0%	57.0%	54.7%	51.2%	67.5%			85.0%		
Measure		October	November	December	January	February	March	YTD	SN	England	Target	20/21	21/22
Assessments	Number of assessments authorised	675	1195	798	745	718	825	9702	n/a	n/a	n/a	8728	9110
	Rate of assessments authorised per 10k (annualised)	468.0	828.5	553.2	522.2	503.3	578.3	562.0	496.0	533.0	578	500	526
	Percentage of Single Assessments authorised within 45 working days	95.7%	89.9%	88.8%	91.4%	93.0%	94.9%	93.9%	87.0%	84.0%	85%	98.2%	97.8%
	Percentage of DAAT cases visited within 5 days of referral	64.4%	47.9%	46.2%	40.7%	57.5%	51.3%	57.1%	n/a	n/a	tbc	74.0%	78.2%
	Open assessments past 45 days	5	29	35	41	14	52	52	n/a	n/a	n/a	2	7
	% of assessments ending with service involvement	41%	33%	32%	39%	32%	36%	34%	n/a	n/a	n/a	39.7%	36.6%
	% of assessments stepping down to early help or universal	27%	31%	30%	26%	31%	26%	29%	38.0%	29.0%	n/a	22.9%	24.6%
	% of assessments closing with no further action	31%	36%	38%	35%	37%	38%	36%			35.0%	34.0%	38.9%
Measure		October	November	December	January	February	March	YTD	SN	England	Target	20/21	21/22
S47's	Number of S47's authorised	318	364	304	193	301	295	3473	n/a	n/a	n/a	2436	2670
	Rate of S47's authorised per 10k (annualised)	220.5	252.4	210.8	135.3	211.0	206.8	201.2	155.0	180.0	161	136	154
	% of S47's with outcome ICPC required	37%	35%	37%	37%	29%	41%	37%	34%	34%	n/a	46%	42%
	% of S47's with outcome no further S47 action	55%	57%	57%	53%	59%	48%	54%	n/a	n/a	n/a	41%	50%
	% of S47's with outcome no further action	8%	7%	7%	9%	12%	10%	9%	n/a	n/a	n/a	11%	8%
CIN	Number of children in need (inc CP and CIC as per DfE definition)	4838	4646	4336	4333	4376	4491	4491	n/a	n/a	n/a	4223	4196
	Children in need rate (per 10,000)	279.5	268.4	250.5	253.1	255.6	262.3	262.3	299.0	334.0	335.8	282.0	242.4
	% of children in need with an up to date CIN plan	75.5%	74.8%	70.3%	75.4%	83.7%	76.5%	76.5%	n/a	n/a	90%	90.0%	86.6%
	% of children in need with an up to date CIN visit	75.3%	73.0%	71.8%	78.2%	82.0%	76.6%	76.6%	n/a	n/a	90%	80.1%	83.1%
	Number of privately fostered children	6	6	6	5	4	4	4	n/a	n/a	n/a	4	7
Measure		October	November	December	January	February	March	YTD	SN	England	Target	20/21	21/22
Child Protection	Percentage of Initial Child Protection Conferences held within 15 days of a strategy discussion being initiated	54.9%	45.9%	49.4%	9.3%	42.6%	24.3%	60.5%	84.0%	79%	81%	86.0%	82.2%
	% of ICPC's which result in a child protection plan	74.7%	63.3%	71.8%	76.6%	90.7%	62.9%	79.1%	86.0%	87%	n/a	86.0%	80.0%
	Number of children with a Child Protection Plan	672	669	666	698	678	625	625	n/a	n/a	n/a	725	591
	Children with a Child Protection Plan rate (per 10,000)	38.8	38.7	38.5	40.8	39.6	36.5	36.5	34.0	42.0	45.5	42.2	34.1
	% of children on CP plans with a visit within timescales	84.6%	88.7%	77.4%	87.5%	90.8%	89.9%	89.9%	n/a	n/a	90%	88.8%	92.2%
	Percentage of children that became the subject of a Child Protection Plan for the second or subsequent time	22.1%	40.5%	15.4%	33.3%	24.0%	21.3%	29.7%	24.0%	23.0%	20%	22.6%	27.7%
	Percentage of children with Child Protection reviews completed within timescale	96.7%	96.2%	96.8%	97.0%	98.0%	99.3%	99.3%	92.0%	89.0%	95%	94.0%	97.1%
Percentage of Child Protection Plans closed after two years or more	2.7%	0.0%	12.9%	3.2%	0.0%	6.0%	4.2%	2.0%	4.0%	3.6%	2.8%	3.7%	

Measure		October	November	December	January	February	March	YTD	SN	England	Target	20/21	21/22	
Children in Care	Number of children in care	1221	1241	1229	1233	1232	1231		n/a	n/a	n/a	1143	1185	
	Children in Care rate (per 10,000)	70.5	71.7	71.0	72.0	72.0	71.9		64.0	70.0	n/a	66.3	68.5	
	Number of Children in Care who are UASC	94	100	103	104	105	104		n/a	n/a	n/a	0.0	66.0	
	Number of children entering care	42	51	32	44	33	32	448	n/a	n/a	n/a	387.0	458.0	
	Number of children discharged from care	37	31	44	42	34	35	398	n/a	n/a	n/a	401.0	424.0	
	% of children leaving care due to permanence (Special Guardianship Order, adoption, residence order)	16%	16%	25%	10%	21%	23%	19%		31%	n/a	30%	29%	22%
	Percentage of eligible Children in Care of statutory school age with PEPs completed by the end of last term (reported May/September/January)	97.0%	97.0%	98.0%	-	-	-	-		n/a	n/a	95%	-	-
	Percentage of Initial Health Assessments completed within 28 days of becoming looked after.	82.4%	78.3%	83.7%	44.4%	84.4%	42.9%	55.4%		N/A	N/A	90%	51.9%	46.6%
	Percentage of Children in Care with an up to date dental check	74.2%	73.9%	72.5%	72.2%	73.0%	71.2%	71.2%		69.0%	70.0%	90%	40.1%	55.2%
	Percentage of Children in Care with an up to date health assessment	65.1%	66.1%	73.8%	66.8%	67.1%	66.6%	66.6%		88.0%	89.0%	93%	62.0%	63.0%
	% of Children in Care with an up to date care plan	85.0%	82.1%	80.6%	79.8%	82.2%	83.6%	83.6%		N/A	N/A	95%	93.0%	86.0%
	% of Children in Care with a visit within the last 6 weeks	87.6%	91.0%	87.4%	85.8%	92.3%	89.9%	89.9%		n/a	n/a	95%	85.0%	91.2%
	% of Children in Care with their 1st review on time	90.9%	80.0%	90.9%	57.1%	74.3%	68.2%	82.6%		n/a	n/a	tbc	70.8%	78.9%
	% of Children in Care with their 2nd review on time	84.7%	88.4%	87.0%	85.7%	87.7%	88.3%	88.3%		n/a	n/a	tbc	89.7%	88.0%
% of Children in Care with their subsequent review on time	93.0%	92.1%	91.6%	91.6%	91.3%	92.7%	92.7%		n/a	n/a	tbc	95.4%	93.2%	
Measure		October	November	December	January	February	March	YTD	SN	England	Target	20/21	21/22	
Placements	Percentage of Children in Care with three or more placements in the previous 12 months	11.9%	11.7%	11.6%	11.0%	11.0%	11.0%	11.0%	10%	10%	10%	8.8%	12.7%	
	Children who have been in care 2.5 years or more, and of those, who have been in the same placement for 2+ years/placed for adoption (%)	68.4%	67.5%	65.1%	64.1%	65.2%	65.2%	65.2%		71%	71%	66%	63.0%	72.5%
	% of children in care placed out of county and 20+ miles from their home	17%	18%	18%	18%	19%	20%	20%		19%	16%	17%	19.0%	18.0%
	% of Children in Care in residential placements	11.5%	11.7%	12.0%	11.4%	12.3%	12.7%	12.7%		20.0%	17.0%	n/a	11.9%	11.9%
	% of residential placements which are in house	9.4%	8.4%	9.6%	10.0%	11.1%	9.2%	9.2%		n/a	n/a	tbc	11.0%	10.8%
	In house residential utilisation	73.0%	73.0%	73.0%	73.0%	73.0%	73.0%	73.0%		n/a	n/a	tbc	72.7%	59.1%
	In house foster utilisation	69.2%	67.7%	68.7%	70.3%	69.0%	67.0%	67.0%		n/a	n/a	tbc	86.0%	65.8%
Measure		October	November	December	January	February	March	YTD	SN	England	Target	20/21	21/22	
Adoption	Number of adoption orders granted			7			9	30	n/a	n/a	n/a	72	38	
	The average number of days between children entering care and being placed for adoption			401.0			426.9	498.3	340	376	273	436	588	
	The average number of days between the placement order being granted and being matched (Quarterly)			102.0			144.7	120.2	152	178	178	165	184	
	Percentage of Children in Care who were placed for adoption within 12 months of an agency decision that they should be adopted (Quarterly)			85.7%			77.8%	86.7%	72.5%	74%	72%	72.9%	70.3%	
Care Leavers	Percentage of eligible Children in Care and young people with up to date Pathway Plans	85.4%	82.2%	78.7%	80.2%	83.1%	84.8%	84.8%	N/A	N/A	95%	87.8%	88.9%	
	Percentage of eligible Children in Care and young people with up to date In Touch Visits/Contact	88.5%	86.4%	85.1%	84.8%	89.1%	89.6%	89.6%	N/A	N/A	90%	79.7%	81.3%	
	% of Children in Care & Care Leavers aged 16+ with a personal advisor	84.9%	84.4%	79.4%	78.4%	79.7%	78.8%	78.8%		n/a	n/a	tbc	77.6%	78.5%
	Percentage of young people now aged 17-21 and living in suitable accommodation who were looked after when aged 16	95.4%	94.6%	93.1%	93.4%	95.6%	94.7%	94.7%		89.0%	89%	90%	91.9%	91.7%
	Percentage of young people now aged 17-21 and in employment, education or training who were looked after when aged 16	64.2%	63.5%	62.8%	64.2%	64.5%	63.4%	63.4%		56.0%	58%	55%	58.6%	62.5%
Measure		October	November	December	January	February	March	YTD	SN	England	Target	20/21	21/22	
Caseloads & Staffing	Workers with caseloads above the target in Assessment Teams	10	5	3	3	0	4	4	n/a	n/a	35	0	0	
	Workers with caseloads above the target in Safeguarding Teams	34	38	33	29	39	36	36	n/a	n/a	22	39	27	
	Workers with caseloads above the target in LAC Teams	5	3	4	7	7	5	5	n/a	n/a	20	1	4	
	% of qualified social workers with caseloads above target	19.2%	17.9%	15.9%	15.5%	17.8%	17.3%	17.3%		n/a	n/a	12%	16%	13.1%
	Overall % social care posts which are vacant	15.7%	17.4%	17.1%	16.8%	15.3%	16.4%	16.4%		16%	17%	20%	19%	17%
	Overall % social care posts filled by agency staff	18.1%	17.8%	18.6%	17.7%	18.1%	17.8%	17.8%		tbc	17%	18%	18%	18%
	Periods of absence recorded for SW staff - starting in month	49	29	29	40	24	24	348		n/a	n/a	tbc	n/a	314
	Number of SW staff that reached any sickness absence trigger in month	6	5	4	6	4	tbc	4		n/a	n/a	tbc	n/a	6.0
	Open SW sickness absence cases managed by HR team (includes informal)	25	21	17	21	16	tbc	16		n/a	n/a	tbc	n/a	10
	Staff Turnover Rate (All NCT)	17.4%	17.2%	17.0%	17.3%	17.5%	18.1%	18.1%		tbc	18.1%	tbc	15.6%	14.4%
Number of unallocated cases (>48 hours)	14	0	0	0	0	0	0		n/a	n/a	0	0	0	

1. Executive summary – Head of Audit opinion

1.1 The role of internal audit is to provide an opinion to the Trust, through the Finance, Resources and Audit Committee, on the adequacy and effectiveness of the internal control system to ensure the achievement of the organisation’s objectives in the areas reviewed. The annual report from internal audit provides an overall opinion on the adequacy and effectiveness of the organisation’s risk management, control, and governance processes, within the scope of work undertaken by Internal Audit. The basis for forming our opinion is:

- An assessment of the range of individual opinions arising from risk-based audit assignments contained within internal audit plans that have been reported throughout the year, including services provided to the Trust by West Northamptonshire and Cambridgeshire Councils
- The relative materiality of these areas and management’s response to agreed actions
- Management investigation and response to issues raised from fraud investigations

1.2 We can provide satisfactory assurance that there is a sound system of internal control, designed to meet the Trust’s objectives, and that controls are being applied consistently.

2. Summary of Internal Audit 2022-23

2.1 This report details the work undertaken by internal audit for Northamptonshire Children’s Trust (the Trust) and provides an overview of the effectiveness of the controls in place for the full year. Internal Audit has been provided to the Trust via a service level agreement with West Northamptonshire Council (WNC) Internal Audit Service.

2.2 2022-23 was a challenging year from an audit perspective, with a large proportion of activity relating to audits initiated as part of the 2021-22 plan outstanding at the end of 2021-22. These were reviewed and delivered by BDO, an external provision partner. The 2022-23 plan was also reviewed, and 5 audits removed to prioritise impactful audits, leaving 5 audits which were delivered by the WNC audit team.

2.3 Audits relating to the 2021-22 plan which were issued as final reports in 2022-23 have had the working papers reviewed to ensure that sufficient 2022-23 evidence was covered, and they could be included in the 2022-23 opinion. The 5 audits delivered as part of the 2022-23 plan were supported by 4 audits relating to WNC services provided to the Trust. The insourcing of the WNC audit team has led to delays in the delivery of audits, and the completion of the plan has been challenging, with some audits at draft report stage at the time of this report. These have been included in the assurance rating for 2022-23. Any changes identified following this report will be reviewed and, if required, re-audited as part of the 2023-24 plan.

2.4 The assessment ratings for the audit coverage is summarised in the table 1 below, with detail for individual audit assignments provided in table 2.

Table 1: 2022/23 audit activity

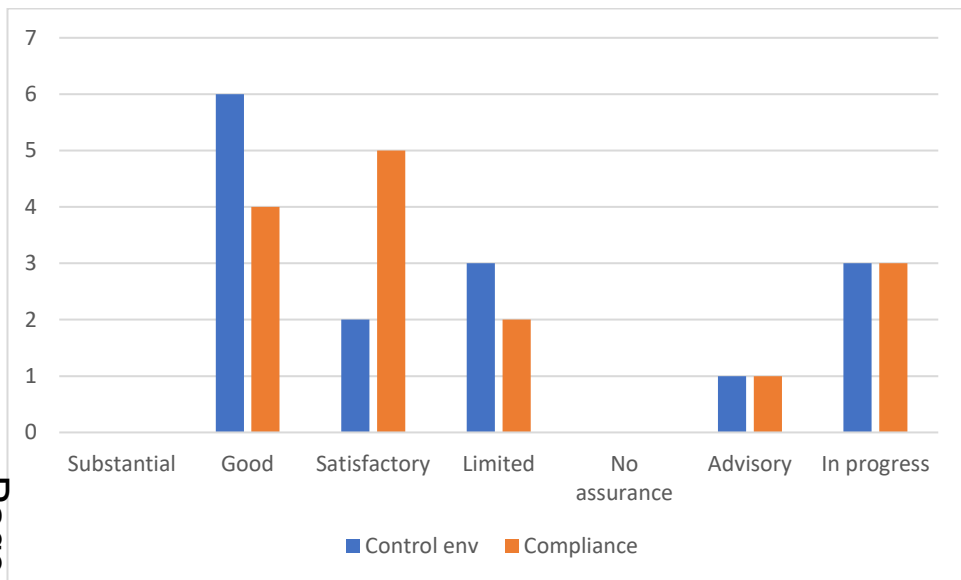


Table 2: Audit details

Assignment	Audit Status *	Assurance Rating			Recommendations			Key findings / Comments
		Control Environment	Compliance	Org Impact	E	I	S	
2021/22 – Plan; 2022/23 Assurance								
Services - Foster Care and Special Guardianship Payments	Final Report	Good	Good	Minor	0	0	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New/ceased Foster Care and Special Guardianship Orders (SGO) payments, overpayments and one-off discretionary expenses had sufficient supporting evidence. The system design could be improved by reviewing the policies and procedures. It can further be strengthened by including who prepared the reconciliation. Policies and procedures relating to Foster Care and SGOs have not been reviewed within a timely manner or version control is missing.

Assignment	Audit Status *	Assurance Rating			Recommendations			Key findings / Comments
		Control Environment	Compliance	Org Impact	E	I	S	
								<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The payment run reconciliation has no information in relation to who has completed and reviewed leading to risk of lack of adequate audit trail, segregation of duties and accountability.
Services - Placement Contract Management	Final Report	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Moderate	0	5	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence of a best match form and approval in line with the Scheme of Delegation. Evidence of invoice review against IPA's, sample checking of payments and evidence of final review and approval for payments. No placement review and approvals panel. No formal IPA or documentation for in-house fostering placements Processes for best match forms not completed due to the recent back log. Review of monthly placement management reports found there is no documented action plan detailing actions to be completed and expected completion dates
IT Systems Security - Carefirst System	Final Report	Limited	Satisfactory	Moderate	4	2	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The system is outdated and not user friendly, which creates duplication and inefficiencies. Roles and responsibilities in relation to the system support management have not been clarified and confirmed to ensure the most effective and efficient use of resources. Current arrangements for user access are duplicated Changes to user accounts are not proactively notified by the relevant managers. Business continuity planning and back up arrangements were not documented. There are limited improvements that can be made to make the system more user friendly and compatible with the modern technology. There are easy to complete online forms. Security declaration and CareFirst training are being completed and supporting evidence is in place. There are documented data entry procedures. The system is regularly backed up and backups are checked and confirmed.
2022/23 – Plan and Assurance								

Internal Audit: Annual report and statement of assurance
2022-23

Assignment	Audit Status *	Assurance Rating			Recommendations			Key findings / Comments
		Control Environment	Compliance	Org Impact	E	I	S	
Overarching Safeguarding Arrangements	Final report	Good	Good	Minor	0	2	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Job descriptions should be reviewed and updated as required Develop a robust system of monitoring and reporting to evidence training takes place in respect of Rapid Reviews and Children Safeguarding Practice Reviews Consider making safeguarding training mandatory for all NCT staff
Corporate Parenting – Leaving Care s24	Final report	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Minor				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Transition to Adulthood (Leaving Care) – Financial Policy and Guidance should be revised and approved at an appropriate level The Operational Group should be specifically tasked with investigation of the reasons for and setting up corrective action to bring Pathway Plan KPIs bank in line Management should ensure that required service improvements arising from Collaborative Reflective Practice Discussion review Practice Week have been or are being actioned
Corporate Governance Framework (incl Ofsted Improvement Plan Monitoring)	Fieldwork							50% complete
Social Work Workforce	Final report	N/A	N/A	N/A				Strategic level review <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Workforce Development Strategy demonstrates a focus on leadership, manager support of staff and initiatives for recruitment and retention Further review of how the workforce is using the strategy and how it is embedded required
Fostering Service (In-House - Independent Fostering Agency)	Fieldwork							Scope amended and agreed with management after consideration of Ofsted report. Focus on replacement content management system: development of specification and controls until new system in place 75% complete
West Northamptonshire Council provided services								
IT Disaster recovery	Complete	Limited	Limited	Moderate	0	7	0	Management action plan in place

Internal Audit: Annual report and statement of assurance
2022-23

Assignment	Audit Status *	Assurance Rating			Recommendations			Key findings / Comments
		Control Environment	Compliance	Org Impact	E	I	S	
IT Cyber security	Complete	Limited	Limited	Major	10	3	0	Management action plan in place
Payroll transaction testing	Complete	Good	Good	Minor	0	1	3	Management action plan in place
ERP Gold IT user access controls	Fieldwork							80% complete
Cambridgeshire Council provided services								
Accounts payable: combined shared service	Final report	Good	Good	Minor	0	0	10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good level of control over the key control processes within Accounts payable system • Good level of control over the key control processes within Accounts payable system
Debt recovery	Final report	Good	Moderate	Moderate	0	0	9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Documented policies and procedures • Some improvement areas have been identified • Recovery process was generally robust • No write offs processed in ERP Gold
Income processing: combined shared service	Final report	Good	Moderate	Minor	0	0	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • System controls are in place, with automatic allocation to customer and invoice accounts, or suspense accounts • Software is being replaced in 2023-24 and current controls are being maintained • Controls were largely complied with • Reconciliation discrepancies were identified
Removed audits								
Sustainability – corporate parent role	Removed							
OFSTED action plan monitoring	Removed							Combined with Corporate Governance Framework audit.
MTFP and budget management	Removed							Suggested for inclusion in 2023/24 plan

Assignment	Audit Status *	Assurance Rating			Recommendations			Key findings / Comments
		Control Environment	Compliance	Org Impact	E	I	S	
ICT – network infrastructure security	Removed							
ICT – privileged access control	Removed							

3. Audit action monitoring

3.1 Trust audit action monitoring is undertaken by the Trust and reported to the WNC Internal Audit team.

3.2 WNC service audit action monitoring is undertaken by the Internal Audit team with regular contact with service managers to ensure actions are implemented as agreed. All limited assurance audits are involved in monitoring meetings with relevant operational managers to ensure that service progress is consistent, and actions are achieved.

3.2.1 IT related audits – cyber security and disaster recovery

Regular monthly meetings are held with the Head of IT Operations. Of 20 audit recommendations there are three ‘Essential’ that remain outstanding but are in progress. A considered action plan has been developed to break down the activity so progress can be monitored against the recommendations more easily. The service area has had some unforeseen issues that has impacted on the delivery of the audit actions. Two staff members have left the Council and recruitment for replacements is underway, the operations team have been involved in several major projects and activities which were either not known or not fully defined when the original dates were set and the level of BAU has increased.

3.2.2 IT Carefirst

A meeting with the key personnel took place on 4 July 2023 to obtain an update and gain assurance to close off the audit following review of evidence supplied.

Council 25th April 2024

Report Title	Audit & Governance Committee Annual Report 2023
Report Author	Rachel Ashley-Caunt, Chief Internal Auditor

Are there public sector equality duty implications?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information (whether in appendices or not)?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Applicable paragraph number/s for exemption from publication under Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972	
Which Corporate Plan priority does the report most closely align with? Our priorities for the future North Northamptonshire Council (northnorthants.gov.uk)	Modern public services

List of Appendices

Appendix A - Audit and Governance Committee Annual Report 2023

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To inform the Council on the work of the Audit and Governance Committee during the twelve-month period of 1st October 2022 to 31st September 2023 and the means by which the Committee has provided independent assurance to those charged with governance on the integrity of financial reporting and annual governance processes, the adequacy of the risk management framework and the internal control environment.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 The report summarises the work carried out by the Committee in the areas of responsibility defined within its terms of reference. The report reflects upon the Committee's contribution to embedding good governance, internal control and risk management within the organisation during the last twelve months and also includes the outcomes of a self-assessment of the committee's effectiveness, against the latest Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) Guidance, with action plan.

3. Recommendations

3.1 It is recommended that Council:

- a) Welcomes the work of the Audit and Governance Committee during the twelve-month period of 1st October 2022 to 31st September 2023;
- b) Approve the Audit and Governance Committee Annual Report 2023.

3.2 Reason for Recommendations:

- To comply with the Audit and Governance Committee's terms of reference and best practice guidance on effective audit committees.

3.3 Alternative Options Considered:

- None – it is best practice and consistent with the Council's Code of Corporate Governance for Council to consider and approve the annual report of the Audit and Governance Committee.

4. Report Background

4.1 The Chartered Institute of Public Finance & Accountancy (CIPFA) sets out the role of Audit Committees in the Position Statement 2022: Audit Committees in Local Government. This states that "the purpose is to provide an independent and high-level focus on the adequacy of governance, risk and control arrangements".

4.2 The Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations impose a responsibility on a local authority "for ensuring that the financial management of the body is adequate and effective and that the body has a sound system of internal control which facilitates the effective exercise of that body's functions and which includes arrangements for the management of risk."

4.3 The Audit and Governance Committee's Terms of Reference state: "The Audit and Governance Committee will carry out an annual self-assessment, including a review of these terms of reference, to evaluate its own performance and determine any action required to improve its effectiveness. The outcomes will be reported to Full Council".

4.4 The Audit and Governance Committee comprises of 12 elected Members. The Committee has five planned meetings each year at which reports submitted by officers and the External Auditor are considered. By consideration of these reports and matters raised within them it is considered that the Audit and Governance Committee fulfils the core functions of an Audit Committee as set out in the CIPFA Guidance and is able to give independent assurance to the Council to meet the requirements of the Accounts & Audit (England) Regulations.

4.5 The Annual Report reflects upon the work of the Committee against its core functions during the year.

- 4.6 In July 2023, three Members of the Committee led on the completion of a self-assessment against the 2022 CIPFA guidance on the role of the Audit Committee. The outcomes of this assessment were shared with the wider Committee and further discussed at a training session, resulting in the action plan included in the Annual Report. These actions will be subject to regular review by the Committee.

5. Issues and Choices

- 5.1 The recommended approach is in line with the Committee's Terms of Reference and best practice guidance for the Council.

6. Implications (including financial implications)

6.1 Resources and Financial

- 6.1.1 None specific to this report.

6.2 Legal

- 6.2.1 None specific to this report.

6.3 Risk

- 6.3.1 None arising from this report.

6.4 Consultation

- 6.5 The Audit and Governance Committee considered the Annual Report at its meeting held on 27th November 2023 prior it now being presented to Council for approval.

6.6 Consideration by Scrutiny

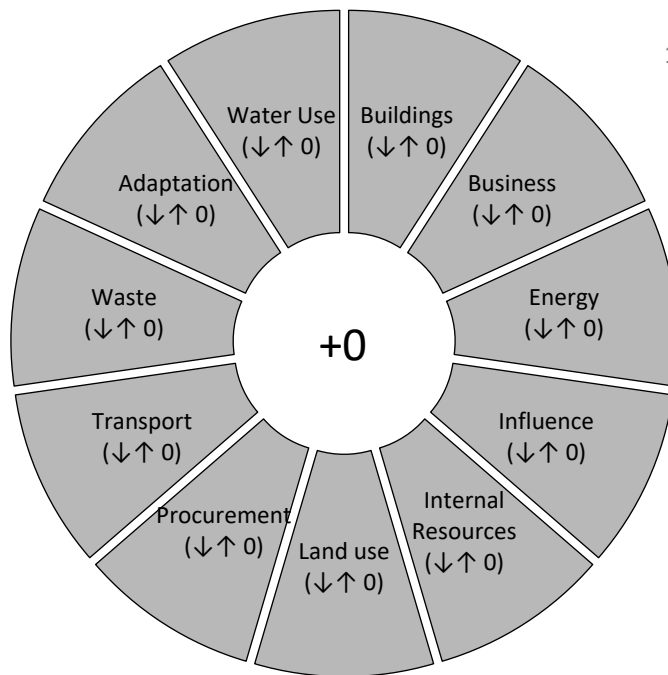
- 6.6.1 Not required on this occasion.

6.7 Equality Implications

- 6.7.1 None specific to this report.

6.8 Climate Impact

- 6.8.1 None specific to this report.



North Northamptonshire Council has committed to being a carbon neutral organisation by 2030, 5 yrs & 8 mos away.

6.9 Community Impact

6.9.1 None specific to this report.

6.10 Crime and Disorder Impact

6.10.1 None specific to this report.

7. Background Papers

7.1 [Report to Audit and Governance Committee – 27 November 2023 \(minute 140 refers\).](#)

7.2 [Council Code of Corporate Governance](#)

Audit and Governance Committee Annual Report 2023



**North
Northamptonshire
Council**

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Chairman's Statement



I am pleased to present this year's Annual Report of the Audit and Governance Committee. The Committee is accountable to full Council and welcomes scrutiny of its effectiveness in fulfilling its terms of reference and its impact on the improvement of governance, risk and control within the authority.

This report covers the work of the Audit and Governance Committee during the period October 2022 – September 2023.

The Audit and Governance Committee plays a key role in providing the Council with assurance in respect of the adequacy and effectiveness of the Council's systems of risk management, financial and internal controls and governance. As usual, the Committee obtained its own assurance from multiple sources with the main source being provided through the reports of our internal and external auditors.

In addition to a summary of work undertaken, the report includes details of committee membership, officer support to the committee and how the committee has engaged with others. In particular, I would like to draw attention to Committee's engagement in areas receiving less than Moderate Assurance in Internal Audit reviews. In all cases where such weaknesses have been reported to the Committee, senior management for the service area have attended the Committee meeting and provided detailed assurances over actions being taken. The Committee has been supportive of officers in this work and it has been pleasing to see the improved findings reported in follow up audits, demonstrating the strengthening of controls in these key risk areas, and the value of the audit process.

I would also like to recognise the significant work completed during this period to conclude the external audit of the last of the legacy council accounts. The Committee has considered a number of reports during the year in relation to these accounts and commended officers on the achievement of an unqualified audit opinion in September 2023.

The Committee continues to reflect upon its own effectiveness, and I am pleased that we have agreed actions to further improve upon our performance to date. These are reflected further within this report.

Cllr Andrew Weatherill

The Audit and Governance Committee

Our role

The Audit and Governance Committee operates in accordance with the CIPFA Position Statement 2022: Audit Committees in Local Government. This position statement sets out the role of an Audit Committee as follows:

Audit committees are a key component of an authority's governance framework. Their purpose is to provide an independent and high-level focus on the adequacy of governance, risk and control arrangements. The committee's role in ensuring that there is sufficient assurance over governance risk and control gives greater confidence to all those charged with governance that those arrangements are effective.

In a local authority the full council is the body charged with governance. The audit committee may be delegated some governance responsibilities but will be accountable to full council.

The committee has oversight of both internal and external audit together with the financial and governance reports, helping to ensure that there are adequate arrangements in place for both internal challenge and public accountability.

This is important to ensure that the Council understands where things may go wrong and has controls in place to make sure that it mitigates against them.

The functions that are discharged by the Committee are not Executive functions and cannot be discharged by the Executive. The full role and responsibilities of the Committee are set out in written terms of reference which are published on the Council's website: [04. Part 4 - Audit and Governance Committee.pdf \(modern.gov.co.uk\)](#)

The Committee's responsibilities include, but are not limited to, the following, with a view to bringing any relevant issues to the attention of the Council:

- Oversight of the integrity of the Council's financial statements;
- Oversight of governance, risk management and internal control arrangements;
- Oversight of the external auditors' performance, objectivity, and independence; and
- Oversight of the performance of the internal audit function.

Membership and attendance

Full Members of the Audit and Governance Committee



Councillor
Andrew
Weatherill
(Chair)



Councillor
Jonathan Ekins
(Vice Chair)
(Since May 2023)



Councillor Jean
Addison
(Until May 2023)



Councillor
Valerie Anslow
(Since May 2023)



Councillor Kirk
Harrison



Councillor Bert
Jackson
(Since May 2023)



Councillor Ian
Jelley



Councillor Anne
Lee



Councillor
Richard Levell



Councillor Paul
Marks



Councillor
Russell Roberts



Councillor Mark
Pengelly
(Until May 2023)



Councillor
Elliott Prentice
(Until May 2023)

Substitute Members



Councillor Jean
Addison
(Since May 2023)



Councillor
Valerie Anslow
(Until May 2023)



Councillor Paul
Bell
(Since May 2023)



Councillor
Melanie
Coleman
(Since May 2023)



Councillor John
Currall



Councillor Bert
Jackson
(Until May 2023)



Councillor
Peter McEwan
(Until May 2023)



Councillor John
McGhee
(Until May 2023)



Councillor Tom
Partridge-
Underwood
(Until May 2023)



Councillor
Mark Pengelly
(Since May 2023)



Councillor
Roger Powell
(Until May 2023)



Councillor Chris
Smith-Haynes
(Since May 2023)



Councillor Lee
Wilkes

During the period of 1st October 2022 – 30th September 2023, the Committee met six times.

The membership of the Committee and meeting attendance during the period is detailed in Table 1.

Table 1: Committee attendance – Full Members

Full Member	Attendance	% of meetings attended
Councillor Andrew Weatherill (Chair)	6 meetings out of 6	100%
Councillor Jonathan Ekins (Vice Chair) (From May 2023)	3 meetings out of 3	100%
Councillor Kirk Harrison	3 meetings out of 6	50%
Councillor Jean Addison (Until May 2023)	3 meetings out of 3	100%
Councillor Valerie Anslow (From May 2023)	3 meetings out of 3	100%
Councillor Bert Jackson (From May 2023)	3 meetings out of 3	100%
Councillor Ian Jelley	5 meetings out of 6	83%
Councillor Anne Lee	6 meeting out of 6	100%
Councillor Richard Levell	6 meetings out of 6	100%
Councillor Paul Marks	5 meetings out of 6	83%
Councillor Mark Pengelly (Until May 2023)	2 meetings out of 3	67%
Councillor Elliott Prentice (Until May 2023)	2 meetings out of 3	67%
Councillor Russell Roberts	5 meetings out of 6	83%

If Full Members are unable to attend, they can ask Substitute Members to attend on their behalf.

Table 2: Committee attendance – Substitute Members

Substitute Member	Attendance
Councillor Jean Addison (From May 2023)	0 meetings
Councillor Valerie Anslow (Until May 2023)	1 meeting
Councillor Paul Bell (From May 2023)	0 meetings
Councillor John Currall	0 meetings
Councillor Melanie Coleman (From May 2023)	0 meetings
Councillor Bert Jackson (Until May 2023)	0 meetings
Councillor Peter McEwan (Until May 2023)	0 meetings
Councillor John McGhee (Until May 2023)	0 meetings
Councillor Mark Pengelly (From May 2023)	0 meetings
Councillor Roger Powell (Until May 2023)	0 meetings
Councillor Chris Smith-Haynes (From May 2023)	1 meeting
Councillor Lee Wilkes	0 Meetings

In support of constitutional requirements for the Audit and Governance Committee, three independent persons should be appointed to the Committee. There is currently one independent person on the Audit and Governance Committee, who has attended all six of the meetings held during this period.

Other regular attendees at Committee meetings are the Executive Director of Finance and Performance (s151 Officer), Chief Internal Auditor, Assistant Director of Finance and Accountancy and external auditors.

Training

Members receive induction training prior to serving on the Audit and Governance Committee. This is based on the CIPFA Position Statement 2022 and the Committee's terms of reference.

During the last year, Committee members received additional training in a number of areas, to further strengthen their effectiveness in exercising the Committee functions. This has included some targeted training, from professional experts, on key risks that the Council faces, to ensure the Committee is suitably informed in providing assurance over internal control and risk management for the Council.

The training is summarised as follows in Table 3, and is ongoing:

Table 3: Training Topics

Date	Training topic
28 th November 2022	Statement of Accounts
20 th February 2023	Cyber security
24 th April 2023	Adult Safeguarding
12 th June 2023	Adult Safeguarding
14 th August 2023	CIPFA guidance (2022) for Audit Committees

Functions of the Committee

Financial reporting

Financial accounts

During the period, the Committee received and reviewed a number of reports relating to accounts for the legacy Corby Borough Council, as summarised in Table 4.

Table 4: Financial accounts received by the Audit & Governance Committee

Date of meeting	Council	Accounts year
28 th November 2022	Corby Borough Council Draft accounts	2020/21
20 th February 2023	Corby Borough Council External Audit Plan	2020/21
12 th June 2023	Corby Borough Council Audit Results Report Draft Statement of Accounts	2020/21
25 th September 2023	Corby Borough Council Audit Results Report Statement of Accounts	2020/21

In reviewing these accounts, the Committee considered how assurances were given that appropriate accounting policies had been followed and whether there were any concerns arising from the financial statements, or from the external audit, that needed to be brought to the attention of the Council. In carrying out these reviews, the Committee discussed the report from the external auditors identifying the accounting and judgemental issues that arose in the course of the audit.

The Committee commended officers for their work on the accounts and for achieving an unqualified external audit opinion at the meeting in September 2023, recognising the challenges faced during this process.

External Audit reports

During the period, the Committee received and reviewed reports from both the external auditors for the legacy councils, EY, and the Council's own external auditor, Grant Thornton. The reports relating to the legacy council accounts have been included in Table 4. The coverage relating to the work of Grant Thornton is summarised in Table 5.

Table 5: NNC external audit reporting

Date of meeting	Agenda item	Discussion
28 th November 2022	Verbal update received from Grant Thornton	<p>The external auditor reported that they had been working on the IT audit and hoped to reach a conclusion to bring to the Committee on 20th February 2023. Work had also been carried out on Value for Money (VFM). A draft version of this report would be shared with officers for comment.</p> <p>The Committee also requested an update on the recent report from the Financial Reporting Council (FRC) in relation to Major Local Audits and Audit Quality Inspection, and other audit quality reports.</p>
20 th February 2023	Verbal update received from Grant Thornton	<p>Confided that an interim annual value for money audit report had been shared with management for comments.</p>
14 th August 2023	Annual report 2021/22 from Grant Thornton	<p>Members of the committee heard that for all three areas the external auditor had judged that there were no significant weaknesses in arrangements identified but recommendations for improvement had been made.</p> <p>It was stated that the overall position was a positive one and that North Northamptonshire Council was in the process of making the necessary arrangements to address and implement the recommendations as set out in the auditor's report.</p>

Governance, Risk Management and Internal Control

Risk management

During the year, the Committee reviewed and discussed regular reports on risk management activity, as summarised in Table 6. The Committee has encouraged the embedding of a risk management culture across the organisation and the ongoing development and maturity of the risk management framework over time.

The Committee has sought assurances over the management of key risks and this has included seeking clarification on assurances available for the management of risks in Children’s Services (delivered by Northamptonshire Children’s Trust).

Table 6: Risk reporting to Audit and Governance Committee

Date of meeting	Nature of report	Discussion
28 th November 2022	Strategic Risk Register update	<p>The Committee welcomed the introduction of a heat map diagram in the reporting.</p> <p>Several members commented on the risk relating to the Children’s Trust and asked that risk owners review this entry. Following discussion, representatives from the Children’s Trust were invited to attend the subsequent meeting in February 2023.</p>
24 th April 2023	Strategic Risk Register update	<p>The Committee requested clarification on the sources of assurance for Risk 1 – relating to the Children’s Trust. Following discussion, representatives from the Children’s Trust were invited to attend the subsequent meeting in June 2023.</p> <p>It was agreed that the Committee’s concerns regarding the budget should be noted.</p>
14 th August 2023	Strategic Risk Register update	<p>Members raised questions regarding progress in relation to Children’s Trust concerns previously raised and also raised further questions and concerns regarding the strategic risk register entry for inadequate organisational capacity.</p> <p>Following discussion, representatives from the Children’s Trust were invited to attend the subsequent meeting in September 2023.</p>

Internal controls and counter fraud

The Committee is responsible for monitoring the effectiveness of the Council's system of control which facilitates the effective exercise of the Council's functions and management of risk.

The Committee has considered the effectiveness of the Council's control environment, including preventative and detective counter fraud controls, through its review of internal audit reports. Key findings from each internal audit assignment are provided for the Committee's consideration. Where any assurance opinions of less than 'moderate assurance' have been given, members of the Committee have received full copies of the audit report and have discussed the findings with senior management at the subsequent meeting.

Members of the Committee have sought assurance that action is being taken where auditors have highlighted weaknesses. Internal audit has provided updates on implementation of agreed actions at every meeting of the Committee and share full details of any actions which are 'high priority' and over three months overdue. Such actions have been focused on by the committee and assurances sought from management on actions being taken.

Assurances over controls exercised by partners, such as the Children's Trust, have been sought by the Committee. Reports received from the Trust in February 2023, June 2023 and September 2023 provided details on the governance arrangements and risk management approach in place for the Trust. A key source of assurance over internal controls is considered to be the internal audit reporting for the Trust and the Committee has raised significant concerns during this year regarding the robustness of the 2022/23 internal audit opinion for the Trust, and the level of internal audit coverage. This has been raised by the Committee and formally noted in the Council's consideration of the Trust's Annual Report for 2022/23.

The Council has a zero tolerance to fraud. The Committee receives updates on counter fraud activity within reports from Internal Audit – both pro-active and reactive work.

Governance

The Committee has recognised that the last year has been focused on conclusion of the remaining legacy financial accounts and key audit coverage. The forward plan is to be reviewed to seek greater coverage on governance related items going forward – such as regular review of the Code of Corporate Governance and insight into ethical governance arrangements. In the next year, the Committee will receive and review the Annual Governance Statement for 2021/22.

Internal and External Audit

Internal Audit

The Committee reviewed and approved the Internal Audit Charter and Strategy in April 2023. This is subject to annual review, in line with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards.

The Committee was actively involved and consulted as part of the development of the Internal Audit plan for 2023/24. The Committee agreed the internal audit plan coverage for 2023/24, which was considered to provide appropriate assurance and focus for the Council. A workshop session attended by Committee Members provided an opportunity for detailed consultation and input on the development of the plan.

The Internal Audit Plan is risk based and is updated throughout the year to reflect the changing risk and assurance environment, with amendments being suitably approved by the Committee.

The Audit and Governance Committee sought assurances during the year on the delivery of the audit plan and the resourcing available and has been suitably assured that the coverage would be sufficient to inform an annual Internal Audit Opinion. At the conclusion of the 2022/23 financial year, the Committee was satisfied with the delivery of the internal audit work, both in coverage and quality, and noted the annual audit opinion and report. The Committee has commended the quality of the internal audit reporting and the assurances that this provides to Members.

Throughout this period, the Committee received an update from the Chief Internal Auditor at every meeting, which provided an overview of progress against planned assignments and summaries of the findings of finalised audit reports. The reports also include updates on implementation of recommendations arising from audit reports.

External Audit

The Committee had, in a prior year, opted into the national sector-led arrangements and nominated Public Sector Audit Appointments Limited (PSAA), to appoint the external auditor on its behalf.

The external auditors appointed to deliver the audit of North Northamptonshire Council's accounts have been regular attendees at the committee meetings and have presented reports on their planning for the 2021/22 audit, as detailed in Table 5.

The Committee's effectiveness

In July 2023, three Members of the Committee led on the completion of a self-assessment against the 2022 CIPFA guidance on the role of the Audit Committee. The template self-assessment tool was utilised, provided as Appendix E to the CIPFA guidance. The outcomes of this assessment were shared with the wider Committee and further discussed at a training session on 14th August 2023.

Members welcomed this opportunity to further develop the Committee's effectiveness and reflected on the value of this exercise - with the intention to re-perform this assessment at least annually.

The Committee reflected on a number of areas where performance against the standards was particularly strong, including:

- Good level of engagement by committee Members at all meetings;
- Chairing is very effective and ensures a clear focus on key issues;
- Apolitical nature of the meetings;
- Management appears to acknowledge and respect the committee's role and take on board the feedback from the committee.
- Relationships with Chief Finance Officer and Internal Audit are strong; and
- Range of attendees at Committee meetings over the last year, including Children's Trust representatives.

The assessment has also resulted in an action plan which has been agreed by the Committee and will be subject to monitoring. The actions are detailed in Table 7.

Table 7: Self-assessment action plan

No	Description	Timeframe
1	Terms of Reference for Committee To ensure these are reviewed and refreshed to align with CIPFA Position Statement 2022.	Expected for November 2023 committee meeting
2	Private meetings with auditors To schedule private meetings with Internal and External Auditors.	Internal Audit – February 2024 External Audit – April 2024
3	Committee training / skills assessment To conduct a committee effectiveness assessment, using Appendix F of CIPFA guidance, including an assessment of committee skillsets. This should then inform a training plan for the committee for 2023/24 onwards.	Q1 2024/25
4	Independent members To advertise for further independent members, with relevant skillsets (following committee skills assessment).	Q4 2023/24
5	Feedback To explore options for obtaining feedback from the committee's key stakeholders i.e. Executive, External Auditors.	Q4 2023/24

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Council 25th April 2024

Report Title	Planning Improvement Board
Lead Member	Cllr Jason Smithers, Leader of the Council
Report Author	George Candler, Executive Director of Place & Economy (Deputy Chief Executive)

Are there public sector equality duty implications?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information (whether in appendices or not)?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Applicable paragraph number/s for exemption from publication under Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972	
Which Corporate Plan priority does the report most closely align with? Our priorities for the future North Northamptonshire Council (northnorthants.gov.uk)	Safe and thriving Places

List of Appendices

Appendix A – Summary Internal review findings and Action Plan

Appendix B – Terms of Reference, Planning Improvement Board

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The Council recognises that it needs to deliver a significant step change within the planning service, to enable the Council to effectively manage and deliver the service to meet its statutory obligations as the Local Planning Authority.
- 1.2 This report advises Councillors of the findings of an internal review and proposes the adoption of a Planning Improvement Plan (PIP) and Planning Improvement Board (PIB) to address the action plan recommended in the report arising from this review (see Appendix A) and the planned follow-on internal audit reviews scheduled in Quarter 3 of 2024/25 (October – December 2024), and advice provided from the Planning Advisory Service following their forthcoming visit in May 2024.
- 1.3 Following local government reorganisation (LGR) in April 2021 the Council has taken steps to bring together and synergise five planning departments. Despite some progress over the last 3 years such as the development of a detailed Transformation Plan following the Planning Advisory Service review in autumn 2022, and a review of the planning committees, there still remain a number of operational concerns, as the recent planning

application has highlighted.

1.4 Planning application ref NC/22/00198/DPA (“the Weetabix site”).

A planning application for the former Weetabix site was approved by the Council in September 2022. The planning application related to the building of a 160,800ft² warehouse on a former Weetabix factory site in Corby. Permission was implemented in October 2023 with works commencing on the site; in particular, the erection of a steel frame warehouse. In February 2024, the Council received feedback from residents whose houses abutted the site that:

- They had not been consulted on the planning application.
- The site notice had not been placed in the correct location.
- Issues regarding the building works were also raised: noise etc.

As a result of the representations received, officers responded as a matter of urgency and found concerns regarding the processing of the application, as a result of which the Leader instructed the Executive Director of Place and Economy to commission an urgent, independent review into the processing of the application.

1.5 The independent review sought to establish:

- How the errors in relation to the addresses used for neighbour consultation letters and the placement of the site notice occurred;
- Whether any internal controls had been circumvented or overridden in relation to the above; and
- Any changes to the control environment recommended to prevent further incidents/errors of a similar nature.

The investigation was not intended to establish the legal position regarding the planning application approval nor any next steps in relation to the development in question. Furthermore, the investigation was not intended to review any other areas of compliance relating to the planning application in question. The investigation was limited in scope to these core areas so that it focused on the immediate concerns raised.

1.6 A summary of the findings of the independent review and action plan are attached at Appendix A. The findings of the investigation have highlighted issues with the processes in place at that time within the service and where expected controls had failed. It is proposed that the findings from this report will feed into the PIP and PIB. Assurance will be sought over compliance with current processes and controls to ensure that the processing of planning applications is effectively managed going forward.

1.7 This report addresses the identified issues within the planning department as set out in the report on key findings from the investigation and associated action plan. A key aim of the actions arising from this report is to ensure the Council provides the best possible planning services to residents, developers and stakeholders, and that it meets its legal obligations. This report is presented to give Councillors assurance, early oversight and awareness of the issues identified and to demonstrate the Leader of the Council’s commitment to ensuring a robust and transparent

process is followed to deliver a step change and continuous improvement in the delivery of the planning service. This report sets out the proposed process to be followed to address the immediate issues identified and also a longer-term action plan.

- 1.8 Initially a PIP will be developed within eight weeks under the direction of a PIB. The PIB will be made up of seven members and will be politically representative to include 4 conservative members plus one member from each of the recognised political groups. The PIB will be chaired by a conservative member. It is proposed that the first meeting of the PIB be in May 2024 and that meetings occur at least every 2 months thereafter.
- 1.9 The PIB will be advisory in its purpose where matters are of an operational nature. Where improvements are developed under the wider constitution then these will be brought forward through Place and Environment Scrutiny, Democracy and Standards Committee and Executive. It is proposed full Council receive a progress update report every 6 months or as appropriate.
- 1.10 The actions identified from the independent review require the Council's urgent attention to ensure planning processes are robust, consistent and any risks are mitigated as much as possible. In view of this, officers have sought advice from the Planning Advisory Service ("PAS"). Specifically, PAS have been asked to support with defining what a good Planning Service looks like, in terms of processes and procedures, so that proposed remedial actions can be presented via the PIP to the PIB and their implementation considered, to address all concerns that arise through this process.
- 1.11 The Leader of the Council has made clear the importance of ensuring compliance and that improving planning services is a key priority. Therefore, he is presenting this report to support transparency, openness and cross-party engagement. The PIP will give considerable focus to addressing the issues identified, and its adoption will demonstrate a continuing commitment to that. Improvements will restore public confidence in the service.
- 1.12 This report acknowledges that in the processing of the application relating to the Weetabix site there has been non-compliance with the law: Section 5 Local Government and Housing Act 1989. In presenting this report at a meeting of full Council the Monitoring Officer is satisfied that the issues pertaining to Section 5 are addressed. This report is being considered by all elected members of the Council and it identifies the concerns and issues that would be raised by the Monitoring Officer if a Section 5 report were presented. Bringing a report in this form supports consideration of these issues and concerns, will provide a response to them and fulfils the requirements of a Section 5 report.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1. A planning application was approved for a site in Corby by the Council in September 2022. The planning application related to the building of a

160,800ft² warehouse on a former Weetabix factory site in Corby. Permission was implemented in October 2023 with works commencing on the site that month. In February 2024, the Council received feedback from residents whose houses abutted the site that:

- They had not been consulted on the planning application.
- The site notice had not been placed in the correct location.
- Issues regarding the building works were also raised: noise etc.

- 2.2. This report provides insight into the findings of an internal review that was undertaken following this feedback and proposes the adoption of a Planning Improvement Plan (PIP) and Planning Improvement Board (PIB) to address the action plan recommended in the independent report arising from this review. The report also highlights the planned follow-on internal audit reviews scheduled in Quarter 3 of 2024/25 (October – December 2024), and advice to be sought from the Planning Advisory Service.
- 2.3. The proposed Planning Improvement Board will be made up of four conservative members (including the chair) plus one representative from each of the recognised political groups. A Terms of Reference is also included as part of the report

3. Recommendations

3.1 It is recommended that Full Council:

- i) Approve the establishment of the Planning Improvement Board and its draft Terms of reference (attached at Appendix B). The Board will be chaired by a member of the administration and will be made up of 4 conservative members (including the chair) plus one representative from each of the recognised political groups.
- ii) Approve the establishment of a Planning Improvement Plan that will be overseen by the Planning Improvement Board and reported on to Place and Environment Scrutiny Committee, Audit and Governance Committee, Executive and full Council as required
- iii) To note the specific remedial actions taken thus far and proposed with regards to the processing of planning applications as set out at paragraph 4.9.
- iv) To note the proposed governance arrangements as set out at paragraphs 4.11 to 4.14 to ensure effective oversight and monitoring of progress in relation to the Planning Improvement Plan and the work of the Planning Improvement Board.

3.2 Reasons for Recommendation:

- The PIP and PIB would be formulated to address the issues identified in the independent review. The review has highlighted a need for the Council to address issues that appear to have developed following LGR specifically relating to the processing of planning applications. Upon identification of specific issues, the Council has responded promptly and diligently to rectify weaknesses and the PIP will show a significant and continuing commitment to improving standards in the planning service.
- The Council, as local planning authority has a duty to comply with legislation and its own policies in processing planning applications. Failure to do so leaves the Council vulnerable to challenge and negatively impacts public and stakeholder confidence in the service.
- The proposal to establish a PIP and PIB reporting to Place and Environment Scrutiny, the Audit and Governance Committee, and full Council, as required, provides a focus on key areas which means there is greater oversight and accountability from the leadership of the organisation and Councillors to address the issues that have been identified within the planning service as a key priority. Officers will support development of the PIP. The governance arrangements proposed will provide even greater focus and scrutiny from Councillors giving assurance to the Council of the work that is to be undertaken.

3.3 Alternative Options Considered: Given the Council's statutory duties as Local Planning Authority and the risks highlighted in respect of compliance, maintaining the status quo (do nothing) is not deemed acceptable and further resource and focus will be required to ensure compliance with legislation and planning policy.

4 Report Background

4.1 The Council is the Local Planning Authority ("LPA") for the Council's administrative area covering Corby, Kettering, Wellingborough and East Northamptonshire. As the LPA the Council has a legal obligation to ensure planning applications are processed in accordance with:

- The relevant legislation
- National Planning Policies and Guidance including the National Planning Policy Framework and the Planning Practice Guidance.
- Local planning Policy Framework

4.2 The Council wants to ensure that it meets these obligations and also has an aspiration to deliver a high-quality service to stakeholders so that there is trust and confidence in its processes. A high-quality Planning service will also support and progress wider economic development across North Northamptonshire. This report proposes a plan that will provide a focus in this area with a view to delivering significant improvement and assurance with oversight by Councillors.

- 4.3 Following LGR, the planning service has faced a number of challenges ranging from bringing five planning services together, all with different cultures and ways of working, through to the national challenge many local authorities face of recruiting planning staff, in an extremely competitive market. This has resulted in a higher number of agency workers than the service would ordinarily want, but due to the statutory nature of the service, and the high economic development growth in North Northamptonshire, the use of these workers has been a necessity. As a result, there has been a degree of instability in the team, both in terms of leadership and wider turnover of staff. Following the commissioning of the independent review, it is apparent from the findings that there are significant and long-standing challenges in relation to effectively delivering the planning service.
- 4.4 The Council, recognising the need to improve at pace, invited the Planning Advisory Service (PAS) into the authority in autumn 2022 to undertake a 'Peer Review' of the Planning Service. The findings and their report were published in December 2022 and from this a cross-party member Transformation Board was formed to develop an action plan set against the 13 recommendations. 35 actions were established and to date 26 are completed with the remaining 9 all in progress.
- 4.5 The Planning service also has a range of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and Management Performance Indicators (MPIs) which are reported monthly to the Place & Economy Departmental Managers Meeting. The KPIs are also reported to Executive Committee monthly and to Corporate Scrutiny Committee. However, note that not all KPIs are reported on a monthly basis, some are reported quarterly or annually as the context so requires.
- 4.6 The year-to-date position of the planning services KPIs as at Period 11 shows that both the major and minor application processing time turnaround has been under-performing and 'other' application processing has been performing within the tolerance of its statutory target. KPIs measuring minerals and waste planning application processing, planning policy housing land supply and additional homes are all meeting targets.
- 4.7 KPIs reported within 2023-24 are as follows:
- STP15 Percentage of major planning applications determined within 13 weeks (or within agreed extension of time)
 - STP16 Percentage of minor planning applications determined within 8 weeks (or within agreed extension of time)
 - STP17 Percentage of other (including householder applications) planning applications determined within 8 weeks (or within agreed extension of time)
 - STP18 Percentage of planning application appeals allowed as a proportion of planning decisions made
 - STP19 Total number of planning applications received – all types of applications
 - STP41 Percentage of applications determined which were subject to an extension of time

4.8 KPIs proposed to be reported for 2024-25 for the planning area (Development Management) area as follows:

- STP15 Percentage of major planning applications decided on time (including agreed Extensions of Time) - Monthly
- STP16/17 Percentage of non-major planning applications decided on time
- STP15a Percentage of major planning applications decided on time (2 year rolling)
- STP16/17a Percentage of non-major planning applications decided on time (2 year rolling)
- STP18a Percentage of major planning applications overturned on appeal (2 year rolling)
- STP18b Percentage of non-major planning applications overturned on appeal (2 year rolling)
- STP19 Total number of planning applications received - ALL TYPES of applications
- STP41 % planning applications determined which were subject to an extension of time
- STP23 Percentage of NNC County Matter (minerals and waste) planning decisions made within the required timescale

It is clear however that whilst performance has remained consistent and positive in many areas, the wider review of planning processes used in the processing of planning applications needs undertaking, to more effectively understand and ensure the issue with the application site mentioned herein is not repeated.

4.9 Since the issues were raised in February 2024, a number of immediate actions have been taken by officers including:

- The introduction of a Site Visit Protocol has been developed and embedded into the work of all Development Management Staff, to ensure correct photos have been taken, the context of the site is clear, and a plan highlighting the key positions of the site notice placement is recorded.
- All future Planning Reports now list all consultees, including residents and occupiers. Detailed responses are highlighted, listing concerns and how these have been reflected in the report. This ensures a check at report writing stage before it goes for validation to the officer authorised to sign off the report.
- Northings and Eastings are now identified on all new planning forms within the planning portal if the postcode is not accessible. This action substantially reduces the risk of errors.

The above will help to mitigate any future incidents and also ensures planning reports are transparent.

4.10 Following on from the positive improvements made after the PAS review, and to ensure that the service has sufficient resources to deliver a step change in improvement, officers will work with the PIP and PIB on a more fundamental and substantial improvement plan. The issue will also be

considered as a new risk to be added to the Council's Corporate Risk Register and if agreed, will accordingly be reported to the Audit and Governance Committee in accordance with their functions and responsibilities. A report will be presented to the Audit and Governance Committee highlighting the key findings and next steps. Internal Audit will be conducting an audit in 2024/25 and this will be reported to the committee. The outcomes of this will also inform the ongoing PIP, who will in turn make recommendations as to the actions that are necessary for the PIB and ultimately Council to demonstrate compliance and make improvements to the management of the planning service.

4.11 **Planning Improvement Plan (PIP)**

In response to the issues outlined above, a comprehensive Planning Improvement Plan is proposed. The key focus of this plan is to address the issues identified in the processes adopted by the team in the delivery of the service, particularly the processing of planning applications. Alongside these improvements, the PIP will also explore wider improvements (cultural and technology) and actions as appropriate.

The Council is also due to have a follow-up PAS visit on the 15 May 2024 primarily to review progress set against the original report recommendations in December 2022. However, PAS have been made aware of the recent issues encountered and have been separately asked to consider how they could help develop robust processes and procedures, set against best practice for the planning service.

Based on this, the scope of the PIP will include:

- The Actions from the independent review (Attached at Appendix A)
- The actions from the forthcoming PAS visit on 15th May that specifically looks at and identifies models of best practice from other planning services that could be adopted here at NNC.
- The Actions that will come from the follow up Internal Audit work that will be undertaken in the autumn 2024

4.12 **Planning Improvement Board (PIB)**

It is proposed that the board be made up of 4 conservative members (including the chair) plus one representative from each of the recognised political groups. The PIB will meet as a minimum every 2 months and will report, as required, to:

- Place and Environment Scrutiny
- Audit and Governance Committee
- Executive (as required for key decisions)
- Democracy and Standards (as required for any amendments to the constitution)
- Full Council (every 6 months for progress updates)

4.13 **Wider actions to manage and improve the planning service more generally**

In addition to the above actions which seek to ensure that the Council is meeting its legal obligations, the actions set out below seek to ensure an overall comprehensive compliance regime within the Council together with the adoption of sector best value, as advised by the Planning Advisory Service.

- 4.13.1 **Policy framework**: A framework including policies, procedures and guidance notes will be developed and presented as part of the PIP.
- 4.13.2 **Internal audit review**: reviews will take place in 2024/25 and the findings, recommendations and actions will all feed into and inform the PIP.
- 4.13.3 **Monitoring**: It is essential that effective monitoring of the development of the PIP and compliance against it is integrated as part of the plan. This will be done by developing an action plan, that will be monitored by the PIB. The Action Plan will detail not only the actions, but the difference they will make, and also be clear on timeframes for completion.
- 4.13.4 **Engagement with PAS**: The Council has worked positively with PAS since autumn 2022 and will continue to do so. The forthcoming visit on 15th May will also provide an opportunity for a wider 'health-check' on the planning service.
- 4.13.5 **Stakeholder engagement**: This will be provided through the regular reporting at scrutiny, audit and governance, Executive and Council.
- 4.13.6 **Interim resources**: A full time additional resource will be engaged to provide a degree of pace over the first 6 months and will be kept under review.
- 4.13.7 **Service development**: Whilst the immediate focus has to be on improving the delivery and processing of the planning service it is recognised there is a need to deliver step change. The PIP will therefore explore wider service improvements as the work evolves.

4.14 **Governance and Oversight of the PIB**

In light of the issues highlighted in the independent review, officers have taken immediate steps to ensure compliance with the legal framework underpinning the processing of planning applications.

In terms of governance, regular updates will be provided to the Place and Environment Scrutiny Committee, the Audit and Governance Committee, Executive, and Full Council, as required, in relation to the work undertaken as part of the PIP and required improvements. Outside of this, more informal updates will be explored, including through the internal Members Bulletin and all member briefings, as necessary.

5 Issues and Choices

- 5.1 Given the issues highlighted by the independent review and the urgency, the development of a PIP and PIB are considered necessary. Given the Council's statutory duties as Local Planning Authority and the risks highlighted in respect of compliance, maintaining the status quo (to do nothing) is not recommended.
- 5.2 Progress on the PIP will be reported through the governance process highlighted within this report.

6 Next Steps

- 6.1 It is proposed, subject to Full Council approval, to establish the PIB in May 2024 with the first meeting also taking place during the same month.
- 6.2 Running alongside this will be the PAS repeat visit on the 15th May 2024 and any additional advice and guidance they can provide to feed into the PIP.
- 6.3 It is expected to provide a progress update back to Full Council within 6 months of the PIB being established (before the end of December 2024).

7 Implications (including financial implications)

7.1 Resources, Financial and Transformation

- 7.1.1 In relation to the establishment of the PIB and development of the PIP, there are no immediate financial implications or resource issues at this stage. There is a specific piece of work over a period of six-months to accelerate the completion of actions as identified in the review referred to in this report. The cost of this will be found from within existing budgets.
- 7.1.2 The separate Planning Transformation Plan emanating from the PAS review in autumn 2022 will remain under review until all actions are complete.

7.2 Legal and Governance

- 7.2.1 Under section 5 Local Government and Housing Act 1989, where it appears to the Council's Monitoring Officer that there has been a contravention by the authority, by any committee, or sub-committee of the authority, by any person holding any office or employment under the authority, or by any such joint committee of any enactment or rule of law it is her personal duty by law to report to the Authority. The Authority must consider any such report within 21 days of receipt of it.
- 7.2.2 The Monitoring Officer believes that the compliance issues relating to the processing of [the said] planning applications amount to a contravention of obligations required by law. This report is being considered by all elected members and identifies the concerns that would be raised by the Monitoring Officer in a section 5 report. In bringing this report, and accepting the contravention, the Monitoring Officer is satisfied that the Council will provide a

response within consideration of the report to concerns raised. The Monitoring Officer will have intensive oversight of the issues raised and monitor in accordance with her personal duty under legislation. Specialist planning lawyers will also support her in this.

7.2.3 The Council must ensure that it complies with all relevant statutory requirements when validating, processing and determining planning applications, including, but not limited to those contained within the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended), the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) Order 2015 and the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. The Council also has a legal obligation to also ensure that planning applications are considered against local development plans and national planning policy and guidance including the National Planning Policy Framework (December 2023) and the Planning Practice Guidance.

7.3 Relevant Policies and Plans

7.3.1 The PIP and PIB will support the Council's Corporate Plan 2021 – 2025, the continued transformation agenda and other key strategies and plans that deliver the best outcomes for our residents.

7.4 Risk

7.4.1 An immediate response to the issues that transpired with the said application was mobilised, in particular the independent review. Some immediate actions were also undertaken by the service as identified in paragraph 4.9. The further steps intended as set out in this report will, if approved, be implemented at pace, and will be subject to close review and scrutiny.

7.4.2 There are no further risks to consider at this stage arising from the proposed recommendations in this report. Further risks however may be identified in the future internal audit review. Should this happen then this will be reported back to the Planning Improvement Board and factored into the Planning Improvement Plan.

7.5 Consultation

7.5.1 None required for this report.

7.6 Consideration by the Executive

7.6.1 The Executive would be engaged as considered appropriate by the PIB and PIP.

7.7 Consideration by Scrutiny

7.7.1 The Place and Environment Scrutiny committee would receive updates as determined by the PIB as the work on the PIP progresses.

7.8 Equality Implications

7.8.1 There are no Equalities impacts arising from this report.

7.9 **Climate Impact**

7.9.1 There are no specific climate impacts arising from this report.

7.10 **Community Impact**

7.10.1 There are no specific community impacts arising from this report.

7.11 **Crime and Disorder Impact**

7.11.1 There are no specific crime and disorder implications arising from this report.

8 Background Papers

- Fact finding investigation report, recommendations and action plan.
- Planning Advisory Service Report and Action Plan

Action plan table

Rec No.	Issue	Recommendation	Management comments	Priority	Officer responsible	Due date
1.	<p>Manual / procedure notes</p> <p>There is currently no procedural guidance or manual capturing the expected processes and controls to be applied in the handling of major planning applications across the Council's service.</p> <p>Whilst it is acknowledged to be a regulated area and subject to relevant legislation / frameworks / policies, how the key processes must be applied in practice and evidenced should be clearly captured to ensure consistency in approach and a clear audit trail for each and every application processed.</p> <p>The role of the officer, the planning admin team and the manager/approver should be clearly reflected in the guidance to ensure roles and responsibilities are</p>	<p>To ensure consistency and assurance that controls will be applied as expected, procedural notes or a manual should be developed. This should set out the expected approach to consultation, in accordance with regulations and the Statement of Community Involvement, whilst allowing for professional judgement to be applied – for example, specifying the considerations that should inform the location of the site notice(s) and the selection of neighbouring properties for consultation, and how this must be evidenced.</p> <p>The period of consultation, in particular, must be clearly confirmed to officers and applied in practice. An urgent review of compliance is required, to assess any impact of the incorrect interpretation of the consultation period.</p> <p>The role of the reviewing officer should also be clearly captured to ensure that a robust review process is in place and consistently applied, ensuring the basis for the</p>	<p>Additional support will be commissioned on the development of the Development Management (DM) Procedure Manual</p> <p>The Manual will include consultation procedures not just major but minor, and other applications; site notice protocols. Uniform upgrades to also be considered to enable focus on optimising admin. processes</p> <p>Government's 21 days consultation target is well established. However, this review will align NNC SCI with this timescale.</p> <p>Clear guidelines and processes will be developed. This will inform the final set of reports and the procedures in the DM manual</p> <p>The role of the reviewing officer will be included in the DM Manual work programme</p>	High	Head of Planning and Enforcement	End of June 2024

Rec No.	Issue	Recommendation	Management comments	Priority	Officer responsible	Due date
	<p>clearly and consistently understood and applied in practice.</p> <p>Interviewees consistently stated that the consultation period is 21 days but the Council's Statement of Community Involvement (2022) states 24 days. It is noted that a previous, outdated version from 2013 appears to have been 21 days.</p> <p>There is a risk that without clear processes, expected controls may not be consistently understood and applied – and/or insufficient evidence is retained to demonstrate compliance.</p>	recommended outcome is suitably informed and accurate.	The review process will be comprehensive including reviewing best practice in other Local Planning Authorities, as well as engaging with the Planning Advisory Service			
2.	<p>Records of site notices</p> <p>The only evidence retained of the site notices in the two cases reviewed were single photographs which lacked context or mapping of specific location.</p> <p>There is a risk that there is a lack of evidence of the location of site notices to defend any challenges presented and to ensure that the reviewing officer is</p>	The location of the site notices should be clearly recorded on files and in the officer's report. This should be reviewed as part of the sign off process, to ensure consultation was appropriate and compliant.	Site notice photos close up and wider context stored with the case file (internet and DM system), Case officer signs and dates the site location sheet marking position(s) of the posting.	High	Head of Planning and Enforcement	June 2024

Rec No.	Issue	Recommendation	Management comments	Priority	Officer responsible	Due date
	satisfied with the consultation conducted.					
3.	<p>Planning system</p> <p>The records published on the Council's website link all applications for either of the Weetabix factory sites to a single property address. It is acknowledged that this is an unusual situation in that there are two sites with the same address but if the applicant is selecting a single address and not entering the UPRN on the application, these are being matched to the same site. It also appears that the Uniform system mapping tool is linking all properties to the same site.</p> <p>There is a risk that this could lead to a lack of clarity on the location of the proposed developments and blurs the applications for the two separate premises.</p> <p>To improve workflow DM Performance Management needs upgrading</p>	<p>The planning portal should be reviewed to enforce use of UPRNs rather than single addresses from the point of application.</p> <p>Management should obtain a system audit log for Uniform to confirm if/when an amendment was made to the map linked to the Weetabix factory address, and explore the reason for this.</p> <p>Officers should be reminded of the need to verify the accuracy of all records in the validation stage, including confirming correct location and cross referencing to the submission, including site drawings. This should be reflected in procedures, see Rec 1.</p>	<p>Northings and Eastings are identified on planning forms within the planning portal if the postcode is not accessible. This substantially reduces the risk of errors. This element of the review will be included as part of the wider work in developing the DM Manual to ensure relevant officers in Administration are liaising with the planning officer</p> <p>Officers will look to optimise the use of its current IT systems for all elements for admin validation workflow.</p>	High	Head of Planning and Enforcement	June 2024

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APPENDIX B

HEADS OF TERMS FOR THE PLANNING IMPROVEMENT BOARD

Membership:

- Four Conservative members (including one member as Chair)
- One representative from each of the Recognised Political Groups

Advisors and Officers:

- Executive Director for Place & Economy
- Assistant Director for Growth and Regeneration
- Head of Planning and Enforcement
- Chief Internal Auditor
- Senior Planning Lawyer
- Input from the Planning Advisory Service as required
- External subject matter expert from another planning local authority

Purpose:

The purpose of the Board is:

1. Ensure a comprehensive Planning Improvement Plan is established to address the issues identified to date following an independent review, as well as further actions that will follow from an internal audit of the planning service and the processing of planning applications.
2. To explore any wider improvements across the Planning service, by engaging with the Planning Advisory Service, to ensure that the team considers how to adopt sector best practice in the way that it operates.
3. To report on progress of the Planning Improvement Plan to Place and Environment Scrutiny, Audit and Governance Committee, Executive and full Council (as appropriate).

Format:

Meetings will not be in public, but discussions and actions will be noted, and an Action Plan developed and updated. There will be periodical reporting to the committees as set out above as required.

Frequency:

The Board will meet bi-monthly as a minimum or, if the situation demands it, more frequently, in agreement with the Chair.

Quorum:

At least four Members should be present for the proceedings of the meetings to be quorate. No substitute members will be permitted to support continuity and the board working at pace.

Reporting:

A note of each Board meeting will be produced capturing key discussion topics and actions. There will be periodical reporting to the committees as set out above, as required.

Progress on the Action Plan will be presented in public, at regular intervals, at the following meetings:

- Place and Environment Scrutiny committee
- Audit and Governance committee
- Executive
- Council

Review:

The terms of reference will be reviewed after 6 months of the first Boards meeting.

Council

25 April 2024

Report Title	Start time of Full Council meetings
Report Author	Sanjit Sull (Director of Law and Governance / Monitoring Officer) Sanjit.sull@northnorthants.gov.uk

Are there public sector equality duty implications?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information (whether in appendices or not)?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Applicable paragraph number/s for exemption from publication under Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972	N/A
Which Corporate Plan priority does the report most closely align with? Our priorities for the future North Northamptonshire Council (northnorthants.gov.uk)	Modern Public Services

List of Appendices

- Appendix A – Recorded Apologies, Meeting Duration and level of Public Participation
- Appendix B – YouTube Views
- Appendix C – Details of Full Council meeting start times from other comparable Unitary Councils
- Appendix D – Results of the survey to Councillors.

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. To consider and determine the start time of full Council meetings following discussion and recommendation by Democracy and Standards Committee on 15 April 2024.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1. Council considered the start time for full Council meetings at its meeting of 24 November 2022 and resolved to start meetings at 6pm. Prior to this change the start time of full Council meetings was 2pm.
- 2.2. The start time for full Council meetings is a matter of local choice. It is acknowledged that whatever start time is chosen there may be apologies

submitted for each meeting due to a range of circumstances and factors.

- 2.3. The appendices attached to the report provide some data associated with attendance and participation at full Council meetings.
- 2.4. The Democracy and Standards Committee recommended a minor change to full council meeting times (other than the Budget meeting) with meetings proposed to commence at 6.00pm between 1 April and 31 October and 5.00pm between 1 November and 31 March each year.
- 2.5. Full Council could decide to approve the recommendation from Democracy and Standards, or choose one of the surveyed times of 10.00am, 2.00pm, or 6.00pm, or another alternative.

3. Recommendations

3.1. That council:-

- a) Reviews the start time of full Council meetings (with the exception of the Budget meeting); and
- b) The pattern of full council meeting times (other than for the Budget Council meeting) be incorporated into the municipal calendar, from the Annual Council meeting of 23 May 2024.

3.2. *Reason for Recommendations – the Council has trialled afternoon and evening start times for full Council meetings since 1 April 2021. Having done so it is prudent to review the effectiveness and efficiency of meetings during this period so that a start time can be settled on.*

3.3. *Since the revision of the start time to 6pm the business at 71% of meetings was not concluded or proceeded beyond the guillotine.*

3.4. *Alternative Options Considered – the start time of full Council meetings is a matter of local choice for Council.*

4. Report Background

4.1. From 1 April 2021 full Council meetings were held at 7pm. Full Council agreed at its meeting on 29th September 2021 to trial an alternative start time for ordinary full Council meetings, moving from 7:00 pm to 2:00 pm start. At its meeting of 24 November 2022 full Council reviewed the trial and resolved to approve a start time for ordinary full Council meetings of 6pm.

4.2. Full Council has since vesting day held meetings starting at 2pm, 6pm and 7pm. A reasonable number of full Council meetings have therefore been held at alternative start times and it is prudent having done so to review the efficiency and effectiveness of the meetings at the different times.

4.3. There have been four meetings of the Full Council held whilst the standardised start time has been 7.00pm. Of these four meetings –

- (i) 1 x Annual Council (commencing at 7:00 pm, public participation prohibited);
- (ii) 1 x Special Full Council (commencing at 7:00 pm, exempt business only); and
- (iii) 2 x Ordinary Full Council (commencing at 7:00 pm).

Of the two ordinary meetings Councillors will note:

- (iv) The number of agenda items carried forward to the next meeting
- 0
- (v) The number of meetings where business was concluded ahead of the guillotine
- 1
- (vi) The number of meetings where business was not concluded or proceeded beyond the guillotine
- 1

4.4. There have been nine meetings of the Full Council held whilst the standardised start time has been 2.00pm. Of these nine meetings –

- (i) 1 x Special Full Council (exempt business only commencing at 7:00 pm);
- (ii) 1 x Budget Full Council (commencing at 10:00 am);
- (iii) 1 x Annual Council (commencing at 2:00 pm, public participation prohibited); and
- (iv) 6 x Ordinary Full Council (commencing at 2:00 pm).

Of the six ordinary meetings Councillors will note:

- (v) The number of agenda items carried forward to the next meeting
- 0
- (vi) The number of meetings where business was concluded ahead of the guillotine
- 2
- (vii) The number of meetings where business was not concluded or proceeded beyond the guillotine
- 4

4.5. There have been 11 meetings of the Full Council held whilst the standardized start time has been 6.00pm. Of these 11 meetings –

- (i) 2 x Budget Full Council (commencing at 10:00 am);
- (ii) 1 x Annual Council (commencing at 6:00 pm, public participation prohibited);

- (iii) 7 x Ordinary Full Council (commencing at 6:00 pm); and
- (iv) 1 x extraordinary Full Council (commencing at 6:00pm).

Of the seven ordinary meetings Councillors will note:

- (v) The number of agenda items carried forward to the next meeting
- 2
- (vi) The number of meetings where business was concluded ahead of the guillotine
- 2
- (vii) The number of meetings where business was not concluded or proceeded beyond the guillotine
- 5

4.6. Whilst agreeing to trial different start times for ordinary meetings, full Council recognised the need to treat the Budget Full Council meeting as an exception given the business to be discussed at that meeting and resolved to commence this meeting at 10:00am.

5. Issues and Choices

5.1. The decision as to what time meetings of the ordinary full Council commence is a matter for Councillors. Whilst traditionally at local borough and district council level full Council meetings commence in the early evening, at county council level they are predominately daytime meetings.

5.2. In making its decision full Council should consider a variety of factors given the differing work and personal factors for each individual Councillor and attendee. In determining what may be considered the most favourable option, Council may wish to consider the following factors –

- Amount of business likely to be discussed at full Council meetings. The Council as a significant unitary authority has a significant number of decisions for consideration by full Council, it is important that there is therefore sufficient time for consideration of reports and motions.
- The ability and impact of extension of the guillotine beyond the present 3 hours (limited for evening meetings).
- Health and safety. Tiredness can negatively impact Councillors in making decisions at meetings particularly where the agenda consists of several complex reports.
- Ability for effective and considered decision making.
- Level of Councillor attendance.
- Ability for Councillors to attend.
- Level of public participation and interaction in person.
- Ability to receive public participation via online link.
- Ability for the public to attend in person i.e. access to public transport.
- Ability for the public to view via the Council's YouTube channel.

- Resource implications i.e. officer time.
- Availability of venue.
- Travel to venue i.e. distance, timings at various points of the day, availability of public transport, health & safety issues.

5.3. Appendix A provides a detailed breakdown of statistics to assist councillors in determining the above factors. For ordinary meetings of Council, the statistics can be summarised as follows:-

(i) Average duration of full Council meetings since May 2021;

Total Average Ordinary Meeting Duration	Avg. Ordinary Meeting Duration at 2.00pm	Avg. Ordinary Meeting Duration at 6.00pm	Avg. Ordinary Meeting Duration at 7.00pm
3 hours 15 mins (3.24)	3 hours 10 mins (3.16)	3 hours 12 mins (3.20)	3 hours 37 mins (3.61)

(ii) The recorded number of apologies submitted for each meeting;

Total Average Number of Cllrs Present at Ordinary Meetings	Avg. Cllrs Present at Ordinary 2.00pm meetings	Avg. Cllrs Present at Ordinary 6.00pm meetings	Avg. Cllrs Present at Ordinary 7.00pm meetings
60	58	61	62

Total Average Number of Cllrs Not Present	Avg. Cllrs Not Present at 2.00pm	Avg. Cllrs Not Present at Ordinary 6.00pm meetings	Avg. Cllrs Not Present at Ordinary 7.00pm meetings
18	20	16	16

(iii) The number of direct public interactions inc. public giving statements, public asking questions and public presenting petitions;

Total Average Number of Public Participating at Ordinary Meetings	Avg. Public Participating at Ordinary 2.00pm meetings	Avg. Public Participating at Ordinary 6.00pm meetings	Avg. Public Participating at Ordinary 7.00pm meetings
2.5	0.5	3.0	6.5

- The Democracy and Standards Committee requested officers take steps to implement full usage of the AV equipment to facilitate attendance for public participation remotely at meetings for non-decision makers.

(iv) The number of agenda items carried forward to the next meeting;

Ordinary 2.00pm meetings	Ordinary 6.00pm meetings	Ordinary 7.00pm meetings
0	2	0

- (v) The number of meetings where business was concluded ahead of the guillotine;

Ordinary 2.00pm meetings	Ordinary 6.00pm meetings	Ordinary 7.00pm meetings
2	2	1

- (vi) The number of meetings where business was not concluded or proceeded beyond the guillotine.

Ordinary 2.00pm meetings	Ordinary 6.00pm meetings	Ordinary 7.00pm meetings
4	5	1

5.4. Budget Council meetings are particularly lengthy given the business to be discussed. Full Council has previously agreed that for the Budget meeting a start time of 10:00 am is preferred. This allows for a clearly defined lunch break.

5.5. Apologies are recorded in the minutes for each respective meeting. There is no requirement for a Councillor to record “why” they are absent from a meeting, or the reason recorded. Officers can confirm that the reasons given vary and include holiday, sickness (incl. Covid), work, family celebrations, etc.

5.6. Appendix B details interactions with regard to views on YouTube. Eighteen of the full Council meetings have been live streamed onto YouTube. They have been streamed onto the main NNC YouTube account or the Democratic Services account. Councillors will note that the installation of the new AV equipment in the Council Chamber has allowed for the continued live streaming of full Council meetings going forward.

Avg. YouTube Views at 10.00am	Avg. YouTube Views at 2.00pm	Avg. YouTube Views at 6.00pm	Avg. YouTube Views at 7.00pm
626	303	426	N/A

Total Average Number of YouTube Views	Avg. YouTube Views Daytime	Avg. YouTube Views Evening (6.00pm onwards)
425	411	426

* The aforementioned figures are not taken as live viewing figures and are taken as a snapshot at a point following the meeting.

5.7. To assist Councillors in considering what start time is preferable, Appendix C provides some comparators based on similar unitary authorities, i.e those formed after 1998. Councillors will note there are a range of start times which reflects the need for local circumstances to be taken into account.

5.8. It should be noted that based on the benchmarking group only, of the 17 comparator authorities, 71% commence their meetings during daytime (9.00am-6.00pm) and 29% during the evening (6.00pm onwards).

5.9. The Constitutional Working Group (CWG) when considering this matter requested that officers prepare an e-survey to be sent to all Councillors, the results of which were collated and reported to the Democracy and Standards Committee. The outcome of this survey and anonymised responses are attached as Appendix D and are summarised below, 60 councillors having responded (78%) of the 77 councillors sitting on the Council at that point in time.

Councillor Preferred Start time of 10.00am	Councillor Preferred Start Time of 2.00pm	Councillor Preferred Start Time of 6.00pm
8 cllrs (13%)	19 cllrs (32%)	33 cllrs (55%)

Councillor Preferred Start time of Daytime	Councillor Preferred Start Time of Evening
27 cllrs (45%)	33 cllrs (55%)

6. Next Steps

6.1. Council is requested to consider the options available and determine the recommendation from Democracy and Standards that full council meetings between 1 April and 31 October commence at 6.00pm and between 1 November and 31 March commence at 5.00pm, or determine an alternative start time.

7. Implications (including financial implications)

7.1. Resources and Financial

- 7.1.1. Currently all ordinary full Council meetings are scheduled in the Municipal Timetable for a 6:00 pm start however, if the final decision is to move to morning or afternoon meetings this can currently be accommodated with regard to staffing and venue.
- 7.1.2. There are resource implications associated with evening meetings as staff accrue time off in lieu (TOIL) which can put pressure on service delivery given the limited resources in the Democratic Services team.

7.2. Legal and Governance

- 7.2.1. The start time for Council meeting is not prescribed by statute, therefore it is a matter of local choice.

7.3. Relevant Policies and Plans

- 7.3.1. When agreed the Council's Constitution will be updated including on the website. Whilst the municipal calendar and diary appointments have been issued for 2024/25 for a 6:00 pm start time these can be amended if required.

7.4. Risk

- 7.4.1. From a governance perspective it is important that full Council meetings are quorate and that as many councillors are able to attend as possible. There will always be occasions, whatever start time is determined, when some Councillors will be unable to attend. Account should be taken that working patterns have changed since the pandemic with more organisations adopting hybrid working, traditional office hours are not applicable in a way that they were previously. Furthermore, there are sectors for example hospitality, health etc where shift patterns dictate working patterns.
- 7.4.2. It is important for Councillors, officers and the public that there is some certainty around the date and time of full Council meetings, in order that the Council's business can be conducted in an efficient, effective and timely manner.
- 7.4.3. Health & safety issues are also a consideration. As a unitary council, Councillors are responsible for decisions across all functions of local government for the administrative area of North Northamptonshire. Tiredness can negatively impact Councillors in making decisions at meetings particularly where the agenda consists of several complex reports. Furthermore, some Councillors may have significant commutes to work and then onto council meetings, tiredness when driving may also have negative impacts on the wellbeing of Councillors, especially at night-time.

7.5. Consultation

- 7.5.1. The Constitutional Working Group (CWG) considered this matter at its meeting on 4th March 2024. The Group suggested a survey be distributed to all 77 Councillors. The outcome of this survey is detailed in Appendix D and has been reported to the Democracy and Standards Committee.
- 7.5.2. Democracy and Standards Committee considered this matter at its meeting held on 15 April 2024. A variety of views were discussed with proposals for start times at each of 10.00am, 2.00pm and 6.00pm.
- 7.5.3. Those members in favour of a day start time raised issues including that of difficulty of travelling during rush hour to the meeting, travelling home during the dark - especially during winter, reduced evening public transport provision, and quality of decision making in evenings following a full day at work for some councillors.
- 7.5.4. Those members in favour of an evening start time raised issues including the benefit of greater accessibility for those in employment, those with childcare commitments and for the public being able to attend meetings after work.
- 7.5.5. Members also discussed the possibility of increasing public accessibility to council meetings by allowing them to participate remotely using the audio-visual equipment. The Monitoring Officer undertook to explore this with Democratic Services.
- 7.5.6. Democracy and Standards Committee resolved to recommend to full council a compromise change to the start time for full council meetings, proposing that in future meetings held between 1 April and 31 October commence at 6.00pm and those held between 1 November and 31 March commence at 5.00pm.

7.6. Consideration by Executive Advisory Panel

- 7.6.1. Not applicable to this report.

7.7. Consideration by Scrutiny

- 7.7.1. Not applicable to this report.

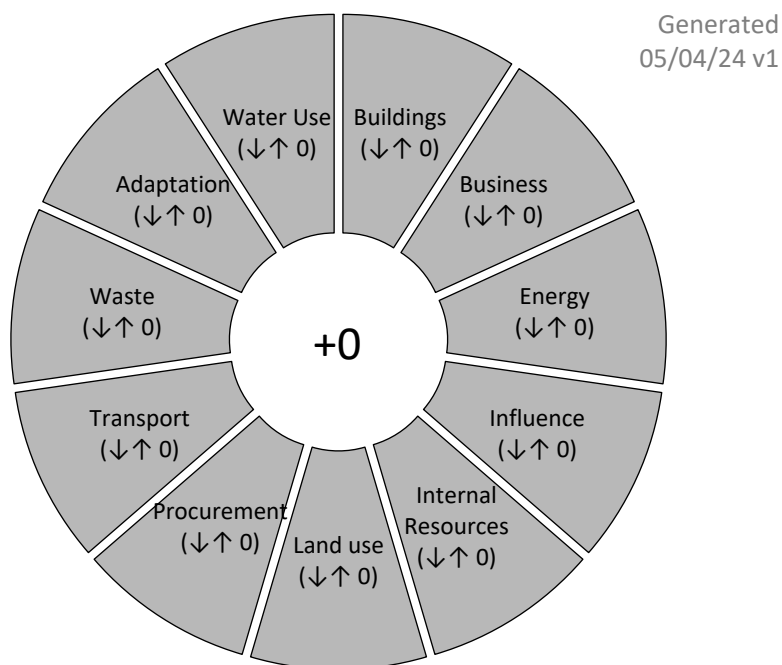
7.8. Equality Implications

- 7.8.1. None impacting on the nine protected characteristics defined in the Equality Act 2010.

7.9. Climate Impact

- 7.9.1. As the recommendation in this report is only proposing a very minor change to full council start times there are no climate impacts specifically to this report.

However, in terms of the range of options available for meeting start times, travel to meetings outside of rush hour is likely to be more beneficial in terms of reduced car emissions and daytime meetings provide a greater range of opportunity to use public transport.



North Northamptonshire Council has committed to being a carbon neutral organisation by 2030, 5 yrs & 8 mos away.

7.10. Community Impact

7.10.1. The public's right to attend full Council meetings for public agenda items are enshrined in statute. The Public Participation rules are included in the Council's Constitution.

7.11. Crime and Disorder Impact

7.11.1. Not applicable to this report.

8. Background Papers

8.1. [NNC Council Constitution](#)

Appendix A – Councillors Present, Meeting Duration, and Level of Public Participation

Date	Time	Type	Duration (Hours)	Total Cllrs	Present	Apologies/ Absent	Public Participation	Business Concluded before guillotine		Agenda Items Carried Forward to Next Meeting
								Yes	No	
26.05.2021	7.00pm	Annual	1.75	78	75	3	N/A	X		
29.06.2021	7.00pm	Extraordinary	1.78	78	70	8	N/A	X		
28.07.2021	7.00pm	Ordinary	4.01	78	57	21	9		X	
29.09.2021	7.00pm	Ordinary	3.20	78	67	11	4	X		
01.12.2021	2.00pm	Ordinary	4.22	78	54	24	0		X	
09.12.2021	7.00pm	Extraordinary	1.82	78	55	23	N/A	X		
24.02.2022	10.00am	Budget	6.47	77	63	14	1		X	
31.03.2022	2.00pm	Ordinary	4.92	77	63	14	1	X		
26.05.2022	2.00pm	Annual	1.28	78	66	12	N/A	X		
23.06.2022	2.00pm	Ordinary	2.92	78	58	20	1		X	
28.07.2022	2.00pm	Ordinary	2.00	78	58	20	1	X		
29.09.2022	2.00pm	Ordinary	1.87	78	53	25	0		X	
24.11.2022	2.00pm	Ordinary	3.03	78	62	16	0		X	
26.01.2023	6.00pm	Ordinary	3.52	76	61	15	1		X	
23.02.2023	10.00am	Budget	5.32	77	63	14	5	X		
30.03.2023	6.00pm	Ordinary	4.68	77	64	13	7		X	
25.05.2023	6.00pm	Annual	1.35	77	69	8	N/A	X		
22.06.2023	6.00pm	Ordinary	3.88	78	54	24	5		X	
31.08.2023	6.00pm	Ordinary	2.98	78	63	15	2		X	1
26.10.2023	6.00pm	Ordinary	2.93	78	62	16	1		X	1
07.12.2023	6.00pm	Ordinary	2.20	78	62	16	2	X		
25.01.2024	6.00pm	Extraordinary	0.93	77	51	26	N/A	X		
22.02.2024	10.00am	Budget	5.85	77	57	20	1		X	
07.03.2024	6.00pm	Ordinary	2.23	77	63	14	3	X		
TOTAL								12	12	2

Statistical Averages of Ordinary Meetings Only

Total Average Ordinary Meeting Duration	Avg. Ordinary Meeting Duration at 2.00pm	Avg. Ordinary Meeting Duration at 6.00pm	Avg. Ordinary Meeting Duration at 7.00pm
3.24	3.16	3.20	3.61

Total Average Number of Cllrs Present at Ordinary Meetings	Avg. Cllrs Present at Ordinary 2.00pm meetings	Avg. Cllrs Present at Ordinary 6.00pm meetings	Avg. Cllrs Present at Ordinary 7.00pm meetings
60	58	61	62

Total Average Number of Cllrs Not Present	Avg. Cllrs Not Present at 2.00pm	Avg. Cllrs Not Present at Ordinary 6.00pm meetings	Avg. Cllrs Not Present at Ordinary 7.00pm meetings
18	20	16	16

Total Average Number of Public Participating at Ordinary Meetings	Avg. Public Participating at Ordinary 2.00pm meetings	Avg. Public Participating at Ordinary 6.00pm meetings	Avg. Public Participating at 7.00pm
2.5	0.5	3.0	6.5

Statistical Averages of All Council Meetings

Total Average Meeting Duration	Avg. Meeting Duration at 10.00am	Avg. Meeting Duration at 2.00pm	Avg. Meeting Duration at 6.00pm	Avg. Meeting Duration at 7.00pm
3.13	5.88	3.16	2.74	2.70

Total Average Number of Cllrs Present	Avg. Cllrs Present at 10.00am	Avg. Cllrs Present at 2.00pm	Avg. Cllrs Present at 6.00pm	Avg. Cllrs Present at 7.00pm
61	61	59	61	63

Total Average Number of Cllrs Not Present	Avg. Cllrs Not Present at 10.00am	Avg. Cllrs Not Present at 2.00pm	Avg. Cllrs Not Present at 6.00pm	Avg. Cllrs Not Present at 7.00pm
16	16	19	16	13

Total Average Number of Public Participating	Avg. Public Participating at 10.00am	Avg. Public Participating at 2.00pm	Avg. Public Participating at 6.00pm	Avg. Public Participating at 7.00pm
2.4	2.3	0.5	3	6.5

Appendix B – YouTube Views

Date	Time	Type	Total YouTube Views
26.05.2021	7.00pm	Annual	N/A
29.06.2021	7.00pm	Extraordinary	N/A
28.07.2021	7.00pm	Ordinary	N/A
29.09.2021	7.00pm	Ordinary	N/A
01.12.2021	2.00pm	Ordinary	N/A
09.12.2021	7.00pm	Extraordinary	N/A
24.02.2022	10.00am	Budget	688
31.03.2022	2.00pm	Ordinary	255
26.05.2022	2.00pm	Annual	203
23.06.2022	2.00pm	Ordinary	405
28.07.2022	2.00pm	Ordinary	229
29.09.2022	2.00pm	Ordinary	331
24.11.2022	2.00pm	Ordinary	393
26.01.2023	6.00pm	Ordinary	456
23.02.2023	10.00am	Budget	772
30.03.2023	6.00pm	Ordinary	735
25.05.2023	6.00pm	Annual	318
26.06.2023	6.00pm	Ordinary	988
31.08.2023	6.00pm	Ordinary	358
26.10.2023	6.00pm	Ordinary	343
07.12.2023	6.00pm	Ordinary	255
25.01.2024	6.00pm	Extraordinary	169
22.02.2024	10.00am	Budget	419
07.03.2024	6.00pm	Ordinary	208

Total Average Number of Youtube Views	Avg. YouTube Views at 10.00am	Avg. YouTube Views at 2.00pm	Avg. YouTube Views at 6.00pm	Avg. YouTube Views at 7.00pm
418	626	303	426	N/A

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Appendix C –Full Council Start Times of Other Unitary Authorities Created after 1998

Unitary Authority	Start Time	Daytime (9.00-6.00pm)	Evening (6.00pm onwards)
Bedford	6.30pm		X
Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole	7.00pm		X
Buckinghamshire	4.00pm	X	
Central Bedfordshire	6.30pm		X
Cheshire East	11.00am	X	
Cheshire West and Chester	6.30pm		X
Cornwall	10.30am	X	
Cumberland	1.00pm	X	
County Durham	10.00am	X	
Dorset	6.30pm		X
North Yorkshire	10.30am	X	
Northumberland	2.00pm	X	
Shropshire	10.00am	X	
Somerset	2.00pm	X	
West Northamptonshire	5.00pm	X	
Westmorland and Furness	1.30pm	X	
Wiltshire	10.30am	X	
	Total	12	5
	Percentage	71%	29%

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Appendix D – Councillor Survey Results

Between 20th March and 3rd April 2024, councillors were surveyed as to their most preferred ordinary council meeting start time. They were also invited to make any specific comments.

60 of 77 councillors (78%) responded to the survey, with the following results and anonymised summary of responses being detailed below:-



● Morning (10am)	8
● Afternoon (2pm)	19
● Evening (6pm)	33

Councillor Preferred Start time of 10.00am	Councillor Preferred Start Time of 2.00pm	Councillor Preferred Start Time of 6.00pm
8 cllrs (13%)	19 cllrs (32%)	33 cllrs (55%)

Councillor Preferred Start time of Daytime	Councillor Preferred Start Time of Evening
27 cllrs (45%)	33 cllrs (55%)

Summarised Version of Anonymised Comments Made

a) Councillors in favour of 10.00am start time

- Easier to travel to and from meetings during the daytime including driving and use of public transport for both councillors and officers;
- Helpful for school runs;
- Earlier in the day allows for proper debate and less need to guillotine the meeting as there is still time in the day;
- A 6.00pm start allows little time for those at work to attend and refresh themselves, or to have time for an evening meal until late at night;
- Given the advance notice of the meeting dates, councillors should be able to make themselves available as appropriate;
- Length of working day for officers;
- Concern at quality of decision making in evening meetings following a full day at work.

b) Councillors in favour of 2.00pm start time

- The theory that evening meetings would mean substantially more public involvement has been tested and not been proven;
- A 2pm start, or even a 10am start would mean all business could be completed without the need for very late finishes, which may be more dangerous for drivers due to tiredness;
- Daytime meetings should be able to be accommodated by employers, and if not, there are only about 7 per annum;
- 6:00pm still interrupts a working day (so requires councillors to take time off), plus it requires commuting at the busiest of times;
- 2:00pm means working councillors only have to take a half day off work, the commute is during quieter periods, and officers can attend during their normal working hours;
- Evenings cause problems due to allowing extra time for rush hour traffic and not having a chance to eat in the evening;
- Officers would not have to work late, all attendees' welfare should be considered;
- The journey is unlit for much of the winter time and is dangerous leaving at 10pm.

c) Councillors in favour of 6.00pm start time

- Day time meetings are difficult for councillors who work or have carer's duties to attend;
- Daytime meetings exclude too many members across parties as people have to work. If we want true representation from all parts of the community it is important to make meeting at times for the majority;
- Councillors and members of the public from the working class would be impacted as these jobs are often less flexible in terms of time off;
- Evening meetings enable residents to attend and observe democracy in action;
- The public are able to be present in person more easily as it is not within usual working hours, so has improved public engagement;
- Evening meeting are more accessible for Members with work commitments;
- Childcare commitments during the day could affect the ability of younger people to become councillors, which would only be possible if evening meetings were the norm.

d) Other comments made

- During the autumn/winter months meetings could held in the afternoon and in the spring/summer in the evening;
- Any change should be made at the beginning of any new term, so that candidates understand what is expected.



Full Council 25th April 2024

Report Title	Political Balance on Council Committees
Report Author	Sanjit Sull, Monitoring Officer Sanjit.Sull@northnorthants.gov.uk Ben Smith, Head of Democratic Services Ben.smith@northnorthants.gov.uk
Lead Member	Cllr Jason Smithers, Leader of the Council

Are there public sector equality duty implications?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information (whether in appendices or not)?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Applicable paragraph number/s for exemption from publication under Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972	Not Applicable
Which Corporate Plan priority does the report most closely align with? Our priorities for the future North Northamptonshire Council (northnorthants.gov.uk)	Modern Public Services

List of Appendices

Appendix A – Proportionality Allocations

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 This report sets out the revised political balance of the Council following the results of the Council's Desborough Ward by-election held on 4th April 2024 in which Cllr Bill McElhinney was elected and joined the Conservative Group on the Council.
- 1.2 This report confirms the methodology proposed to be applied to determine the revised political balance of the authority following the above change to the makeup of the Council.
- 1.3 It also proposes the apportionment of seats on committees in accordance with the application of the calculations.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1. The political balance on Council Committees was last reported to the meeting of Council held on 7th March 2024. This report sets out the revised political balance of the council as of 5th April 2024, how many voting seats are available on committees and the political group nominations available for allocation to those seats.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 It is recommended that Council approves the recommendations set out in Appendix A inclusive of the revised allocation of seats for the committees to the recognised political groups, in accordance with statutory proportionality requirements and the Constitution.
- 3.2 *Reason for Recommendations – To ensure that the revised political balance of the Council is applied to the governance structure of the Council, in accordance with law and approved guidelines contained in the Council Constitution.*
- 3.3 *Alternative Options Considered – None, as the revised political balance calculation is required to be reported to full Council under the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 and Local Government (Committees and Political Groups) Regulations 1990.*

4. Report Background

- 4.1 The Council must allocate seats on committees and sub-committees in accordance with the provisions set out in the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 (“the 1989 Act”). Section 15(5) of the 1989 Act requires the Council to allocate seats on committees and sub-committees to political groups to give effect, as far as possible, to the following principles:
- a) not all the seats on the committee or sub-committee are allocated to the same political group (if the rules apply to that body);
 - b) that the political group having a majority of seats on the Council should have a majority on each committee and sub-committee;
 - c) that, subject to paragraphs (a) and (b) above, the number of seats on the Council’s committees and sub-committees allocated to each political group bears the same proportion to the total number of such committee seats as the number of members of that group bears to the membership of the full Council; and
 - d) that, subject to paragraphs (a) to (c) above, seats are allocated on each committee and sub-committee in the same ration as exists on the authority.

- 4.2 Section 16 of the 1989 Act requires the Council to give effect to the allocation of seats determined as set out above in accordance with the wishes of the political groups.
- 4.3 The Council can only depart from the principles set out above by passing a resolution with no member voting against the resolution.
- 4.4. Council will note that the political balance provisions only apply directly to committees and sub-committees and do not apply to the following:
- a) The Executive;
 - b) Bodies established by the Executive (e.g., Executive Advisory Panels, although Council has agreed that they may be applied subject to appointment by the Leader);
 - c) Health and Wellbeing Board;
 - d) Joint bodies established by the Executive.

5. Issues and Choices

- 5.1 Council last received an update on political balance at its annual meeting on 7th March 2023, when the political group composition was as follows:-

	Council	Conservative	Labour	Green Alliance	Independent Alliance	<i>Vacant Seat</i>
Members	78	52	17	4	4	1
%	100	66.67	21.79	5.13	5.13	1.28

- 5.2 Following the group changes detailed in section 1.1 of this report, the political group composition is now as follows:-

	Council	Conservative	Labour	Green Alliance	Independent Alliance
Members	78	53	17	4	4
%	100	67.95	21.79	5.13	5.13

- 5.3. Appendix A sets out the breakdown of the allocation of seats to the political groups in accordance with the above percentages, taking account of the law and the provisions of the Constitution.
- 5.4. Council has already determined that the membership of the two strategic Area Planning Committees (each representing roughly half of the council area) should reflect the political balance of each local area only.

- 5.5. It should be noted that some appointments are made by the Leader of the Council and cannot therefore be made by full Council.
- 5.6. The recognised political groups will be invited to submit their nominations for the revised committee seats allocated to them to the monitoring officer.
- 5.7. Should a member or members not form a group, those members are not entitled to a seat unless a unanimous decision is made by Council to allocate them committee seats.

6. Next Steps

- 6.1 Arising from appointments to committees made by Group Leaders, Democratic Services will provide details of revised committee appointments, dates of meetings and any training requirements to the new committee members.

7. Implications (including financial implications)

7.1. Resources and Financial

- 7.1.1 There are no resources or financial implications arising from the proposals.

7.2. Legal and Governance

- 7.2.1 The Council must allocate seats on committees and other prescribed bodies to give effect to political balance rules set out in Sections 15 and 16 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 and the Local Government (Committees and Political Groups) Regulations 1990.

7.3. Relevant Policies and Plans

- 7.3.1 The Council's meeting procedure rules (Part 3.2 of the Constitution) sets out that it is the responsibility of full Council to approve the allocation of seats in accordance with political balance rules.
- 7.3.2 The terms of reference for Area Planning Committees (Part 4.3 of the Constitution) sets out the requirement for political balance to be drawn from within each of the defined planning committee areas.

7.4. Risk

- 7.4.1 Council is required to determine the arrangements for committees and subcommittees, and to approve the allocation of seats with adherence to the law and approved local choices detailed within the approved Constitution. Failure to comply with such a statutory requirement could leave the Council open to successful legal challenge and disrupt the decision-making process.

7.5. Consultation

7.5.1 The recognised political groups have been notified of the changes to political balance during the preparation of this report.

7.6. Consideration by Executive Advisory Panel

7.6.1. Not applicable

7.7. Consideration by Scrutiny

7.7.1. Not applicable

7.8. Equality Implications

7.8.1. There are no discernible equality implications arising from the contents of this report.

7.9. Climate and Environment Impact

7.9.1. Not applicable to this report.

7.10. Community Impact

7.10.1. Not applicable to this report.

7.11. Crime and Disorder Impact

7.11.1. Not applicable to this report.

8. Background Papers

8.1 [Report to Council, 7th March 2024 – Political Balance on Council Committees \(Minute 319 refers\)](#)

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Appendix A - Proportionality Allocations

Changes since Last Political Balance Calculation

It is a legislative duty to review political balance if there have been changes to membership since the last calculation. Since political balance was calculated last in March 2024, there have been the following changes:-

- The election of Cllr Bill McElhinney (Conservative), to the vacant Desborough Ward Council seat.

This has had the effect of:-

- increasing the number of Conservative Group seats on the Council by one councillor;
- reducing the number of vacant seats on the Council from one councillor to zero councillors.

There are no changes to report in representation for the Labour, Green Alliance or Independent Alliance Groups on the Council.

Political Proportionality for the whole council of 78 members and recognised groups

Only recognised groups (2 or more members) are entitled to seats on Committees. Independent members could be allocated if there was a unanimous vote of the Council. This table sets out the current political makeup of the Council.

	Number of Members	Percentage
Conservative Group	53	67.95%
Labour Group	17	21.79%
Green Alliance Group	4	5.13%
Independent Alliance Group	4	5.13%
TOTAL	78	100 %

Seats available on Ordinary Committees

The Council has 82 seats available on Ordinary Committees which are Scrutiny Management Board (6), Corporate Scrutiny Committee (9), Health Scrutiny Committee (9), Place and Environment Scrutiny (9), Audit and Governance Committee (10), Democracy and Standards Committee (13), Employment Committee (13), Licensing and Appeals Committee (13).

The political proportionality for the Political Groups, as set out above, equate to the total number of seats set out in the table below.

- *Area Committees are excluded from these Ordinary Committee calculations as it is a legislative requirement that they are based on local political proportionality;*
- *Executive Committees/Executive Advisory Panels are excluded from this calculation as appointments are an Executive function rather than a Council one.*

	Allocated Seats
Conservative Group	55.71 seats (previously 54.66 seats) rounded up to 56 seats
Labour Group	17.87 seats (previously 17.87 seats) rounded up to 18 seats
Green Alliance Group	4.21 seats (previously 4.21 seats) rounded down to 4 seats
Independent Alliance Group	4.21 seats (previously 4.21 seats) rounded down to 4 seats
<i>Vacant Seats</i>	<i>0 seats (previously 1.05 seats)</i>
TOTAL	82

Seats available on Area Planning Committees

The Council has 13 seats available on Area Planning Committee North and 13 seats available on Area Planning South. The entitlement for each committee is now as follows:-

Area Planning North

	Allocated Seats
Conservative	6.07 seats (previously 5.78 seats) rounded down to 6 seats.
Labour	4.91 seats (previously 4.91 seats) rounded up to 5 seats.
Green Alliance	1.15 seats (previously 1.15 seats) rounded down to 1 seat
Independent Alliance	0.87 seats (previously 0.87 seats) rounded up to 1 seat
<i>Vacant Seats</i>	<i>0 seats (previously 0.29 seats)</i>
TOTAL	13

Area Planning South

	Allocated Seats
Conservative	13 seats (previously 13 seats)
Labour	0 seats (previously 0 seats)
Green Alliance	0 seats (previously 0 seats)
Independent Alliance	0 seats
TOTAL	13

Recommendations

- a) That in order to maintain political balance on Ordinary Committees, the revised distribution of seats across the political groups will be as follows:-

Standing Committees (subject to political balance)	Total seats	Conservative	Labour	Green Alliance	Independent Alliance
Scrutiny Management Board	6	5	1	0	0
Corporate Scrutiny	9	6	2	0	1
Health Scrutiny	9	6	2	1	0
Place & Environment Scrutiny	9	6	2	1	0
Audit and Governance	10	7	2	0	1
Democracy and Standards	13	9	3	1	0
Employment	13	8	3	1	1
Licensing and Appeals	13	9	3	0	1
<i>Total Seat Entitlement</i>		<i>56</i>	<i>18</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>4</i>
Total Seats	82	56	18	4	4

[Note:- This results in the Conservative Group gaining one seat on the Scrutiny Management Board which was previously held as vacant seat pending the Desborough by-election. There are no changes to other Group entitlements as a result.]

- b) That in order to maintain political balance on Area Planning Committees, it be noted there is no requirement to revise the distribution of seats across the political groups.

[Note:- For completeness, the distribution remains as follows:-]

Area Planning Committees (local political balance is required)		Conservative	Labour	Green Alliance	Independent Alliance
Area Planning North	13 total	6	5	1	1
Area Planning South	13 total	13	0	0	0

- c) In accordance with the Council's Scheme of Delegation, it be noted that any changes to places on committees arising from the new political balance will be made by the Monitoring Officer in consultation with the leaders of the political groups represented on the Council.



Full Council Thursday 25 January 2024

Report Title	Request for Dispensation for Attendance
Report Author	<p>Sanjit Sull, Director of Law and Governance</p> <p>Sanjit.sull@northnorthants.gov.uk</p> <p>Ben Smith, Head of Democratic Services</p> <p>Ben.smith@northnorthants.gov.uk</p>
Executive Member	Not applicable

Question	Answer
Are there public sector equality duty implications?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information (whether in appendices or not)?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Applicable paragraph number/s for exemption from publication under Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972	
Which Corporate Plan priority does the report most closely align with? Our priorities for the future North Northamptonshire Council (northnorthants.gov.uk)	Modern public services

List of Appendices

None

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. To advise Councillors of a request for a dispensation to a Councillor who is currently unable to attend any Council meetings due to illness, and to ask them to endorse the request.

2. Executive Summary

- 1.1. Where a Councillor fails throughout a period of six consecutive months from the date of their last attendance to attend any meeting of the Council, then subject to certain exceptions, he/she ceases to become a Member of the

Council unless the failure was due to some reason approved before the expiry of that period. Section 85 of the Local Government Act 1972.

- 1.2. Council has the authority to grant a dispensation for attendance at Council meetings for Councillors in circumstances when it is likely that the Councillor may be absent for six consecutive months from the date of the last attendance pursuant to Section 85 of the Local Government Act 1972.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 It is recommended that full Council
 - a) Grant a dispensation be for Councillor Peter McEwan from attending meetings of the Council for a six-month period by reason of illness.
-
- 3.2 Reason for Recommendations – Pursuant to Section 85 of the Local Government Act 1972 where a Councillor fails to attend any meeting of the Council for six months, they cease to be a Member of the Council unless a dispensation has been granted by the Council.
 - 3.3 Other Options Considered – Council decide not to approve the dispensation. This is not recommended as the reasons for it are considered reasonable and failure to grant would result in Councillor Peter McEwan ceasing to be a member of North Northamptonshire Council.

4. Report Background

- 4.1 Pursuant to Section 85 of the Local Government Act 1972 where a Councillor fails throughout a period of six consecutive months from the date of their last attendance to attend any meeting of the Council, then subject to certain exceptions, s/he ceases to become a Member of the Council unless the failure was due to some reason approved before the expiry of that period.
- 4.2 Council has the authority to grant a dispensation for attendance at Council meetings for Councillors if it is likely that the Councillor may be absent for six consecutive months from the date of their last attendance.
- 4.3 Councillor Peter McEwan's most recent attendance at a Committee of the Council was at the Employment Committee on 15 November 2023. He has given apologies for all meetings at which he was expected since this date due to illness.

- 4.4 Councillor Peter McEwan has also been unable to undertake ward business during this period, these have been covered by his fellow Kingswood ward councillors, Councillor John McGhee and Councillor Zoe McGhee.
- 4.5 A dispensation will allow Councillor Peter McEwan to attend Committees of the Council if he is able, and for his apologies to be given if he is not.
- 4.6 The circumstances given are considered sufficient to merit the grant of a dispensation from attendance.

5. Issues and Choices

- 5.1 The Council could decide not to grant the dispensation. However, to do so could result in Councillor Peter McEwan ceasing to be a member of North Northamptonshire Council.
- 5.2 The dispensation is a decision for full Council and is made pursuant to Section 85 of the Local Government Act 1972.

6. Next Steps

- 6.1 If approved the dispensation will be recorded for a period of six months from the date of the decision.

7. Implications (including financial implications)

1.3. Resources and Financial

- 1.3.1. There are no resources or financial implications arising from the proposals.

1.4. Legal and Governance

- 1.4.1. Section 85 of the Local Government Act 1972 states that where a Councillor fails to attend any meeting of the Council for six months, they cease to be a Member of the Authority unless a dispensation has been granted by the Authority concerned. The dispensation must be given before the expiry of the six-month period. In Councillor Peter McEwan's case, this is 14 May 2024.

1.5. Relevant Policies and Plans

- 1.5.1. Granting the dispensation will support delivery of the Council's Corporate Plan 2021 – 2025, the continued transformation agenda and other key strategies and plans that deliver the best outcomes for our residents.

1.6. **Risk**

1.6.1. There are no significant risks arising from the proposed recommendations in this report.

1.7. **Consultation**

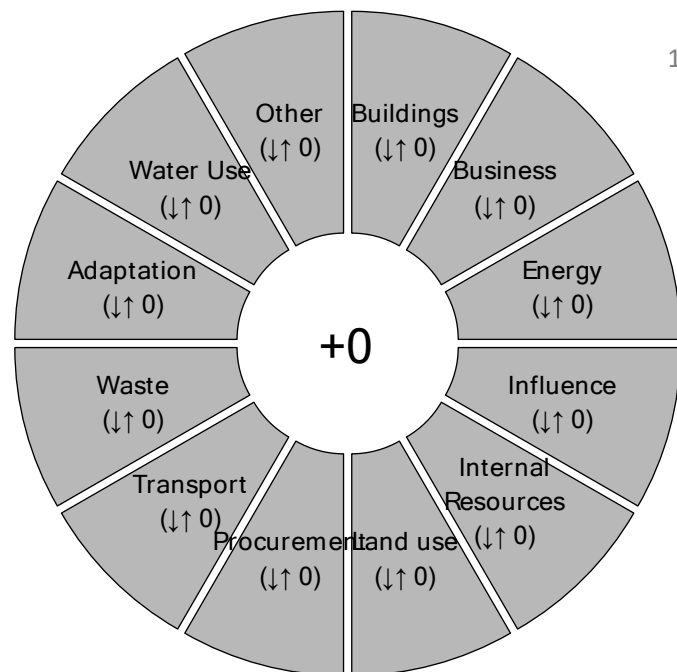
1.7.1. None required, the exemption complies with a statutory process.

1.8. **Equality Implications**

1.8.1. There are no specific equality implications arising from this report.

1.9. **Climate Impact**

1.9.1. There are no specific climate impacts arising from this report.



North Northamptonshire Council has committed to being a carbon neutral organisation by 2030, 5 yrs & 8 mos away.

1.10. Community Impact

1.10.1. There are no specific community impacts arising from this report.

1.11. Crime and Disorder Impact

1.11.1. There are no specific crime and disorder implications arising from this report.

8. Background Papers

1.12. None.

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