



**Annual Report of the Service Delivery Contract between
Northamptonshire Children's Trust and West and North
Northamptonshire Councils 2021/22**

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1. Background and Purpose of the Annual Review

The overarching aims and objectives of the Annual Review are:

- for the Parties to consider the quality of practice in the provision of children's social care services delivered by 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.

2. Summary of NCT performance against the KPIs

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 commentary on the performance and how NCT are working to improve. The full list of KPIs as well as performance against each KPI thought the year is included as Appendix 1. A summary of NCT's performance in the 2021-22 contract year is included below.

2.1. *What worked well*

- The percentage of all referrals with a decision within 2 working days remained above target for 11 out of 12 months, this was despite the increase in demand that was seen following the lifting of covid-19 restrictions
- The percentage of Single Assessments authorised within 45 working days was consistently above target throughout the year and never dipped below 97%
- The percentage of children who have been in care 2.5 years or more who have been in the same placement for 2+ years/placed for adoption, which measures long term placement stability, improved through the year and finished above target. Despite this good performance, there is some concern that the covid-19 restrictions to some extent kept performance high and that the national placement sufficiency challenges will impact on this measure in 2022-23
- Both measures related to care leavers (percentage in education, employment and training and in suitable accommodation) were above target and the national average. This was supported by joint working with both councils to support young people who left care
- After an increase in vacancies in the middle of the year, the percentage of social workers vacancies finished the year better than the target and at the national average. The percentage of Social Worker posts filled with agency staff has also hovered around the target. This is in the context of national recruitment challenges

and historic challenges in Northamptonshire. Despite positive signs, recruitment of both permanent and agency social workers remains an area of focus for NCT

- After a drop in performance during quarter 2, performance against both adoption indicators improved in quarters 3 and 4. This is in the context of court delays and a backlog caused by covid-19 alongside achieving permanence through adoption for some children with complex needs and sibling groups, that has taken longer to achieve but has a positive impact on children's outcomes.

2.2. Challenges and areas to work on

- The percentage of children that became the subject of a Child Protection Plan for the second or subsequent time fluctuated throughout the year. Whilst some of these children were first on a plan sometime in the past, NCT recognises the number of repeat plans has been too high on occasion. Where there are repeat plans, these cases are reviewed to understand the causes and to support learning.
- Performance for both indicators related to complaints has varied through the year.
 - The percentage of complaints responded to within 10 working days has fallen below target on 4 occasions although this has sometime been impacted by low volumes. NCT have worked closely with WNC as the provider of the complaints support service to improve performance in this area including providing training to managers.
 - Stage 2 investigations as a % of stage 1 complaints received within the year has often fallen below target; both NCT and the Councils recognise the issues with this measure and are proposing to remove this KPI.
- Short term placement stability, as measured by the percentage of Children in Care with three or more placements in the previous 12 months, saw a gradual decline through the year. This is in the context of a small rise in children in care numbers and continuing challenges in identifying placements for children with specific needs which means they can experience a number of placements moves in quick succession until an appropriate home is identified. Consideration of various options to improve sufficiency is continuing, including exploration of capital investment, additional in-house resources, as well as improved engagement with the market.
- Whilst not falling out of tolerance, the percentage of referrals with a previous referral within 12 months has remained above target throughout the year. NCT have strengthened the model in MASH and made developments in CFSS/Early Help while engaging with the wider partnership, which they hope will continue to support appropriate reduction going forward.
- The percentage of qualified social workers with caseloads above target has been just above target. Despite some positive signs, recruitment of permanent and agency social workers remains an area of focus for NCT

3. Summary of the Councils Performance of its obligations

The responsibilities of the Councils on what they must deliver to NCT are set out in Schedule 4 of the Service Delivery Contract and are known as the Dependencies. NCT relies on the Councils to fully deliver these Dependencies when delivering services to children, young people and their families. Inadequate performance or failure to perform the Dependencies, where this has a direct impact on the Trust's provision of the Services, will entitle the Trust to relief from performance of its obligations under the Service Delivery Contract. The Councils' performance of the Dependencies is summarised below.

3.1. Support Services provided to NCT by the Councils

A wide range of support service provision is provided to the Children's Trust by North Northamptonshire and West Northamptonshire. 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.

There is a total of 37 KPIs across 15 different Support Services. Of these, 78.3% (29 KPIs) met or exceeded their target. Of the eight measures that missed target, six reported an amber outturn, meaning they were below target but within tolerance. A further two measures recorded a red outturn, meaning they were below target and out of tolerance. 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. 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. There have been areas of challenge where services took time to understand the new arrangements, this is particular the case with property which is expanded on below.

Support Services have been delivered in the context of a great deal of change in both Councils as they dealt with the impact of local government reorganisation and began to think about the disaggregation of certain shared services. This has led to some changes; the Information Governance Support Service was handed over to NCT in November 2021 and the Health and Safety Support Service did so on 1st April 2022. The Council's Audit services were also disaggregated which meant NCT chose to purchase this service from WNC from April 1st, 2022.

Looking ahead to 2022, the Councils will be looking to continue to improve the services provided to NCT and to enable them on their improvement journey. 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.

3.2. Property

NCT occupies 29 buildings across Northamptonshire with 17 in the West and 12 in the North. It has been 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 has been hindered by the disaggregation of the property support service delivered to NCT and the need to put in place appropriate systems and processes. There are some challenges with properties that are being worked through in the Operational Group.

To rectify this, NCT is collaborating with the Councils individually to develop a schedule of planned maintenance which will bring buildings up to standard. In West Northamptonshire, this schedule is close to being agreed whilst in the North, it is delayed by the need to complete condition surveys. Agreeing these schedules and monitoring the councils' performance against them is a key priority for NCT.

NCT will also collaborate with both councils to review its future property strategy and how this aligns with the strategies of both councils.

3.3. Retained functions and their interface with NCT

The Councils' retained services have gone through a period of transformation following local government reorganisation and disaggregation of services that were previously delivered on

a countywide basis. There is a general direction of travel for services to be disaggregated where possible, this process has accelerated following the departure of the joint Director of Children's Services in January 2022 and the decision to appoint separate Directors for each Council. This creates an element of uncertainty for NCT regarding the future delivery of certain services.

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 Board which has representation from NCT. Any future transformation of SEND services will have an impact on NCT and will need to consider the recommendation and changes following the SEND and Alternative Provision Green Paper.

The Councils have delivered a satisfactory Intelligence Client Function to manage the contractual relationship between the Councils and NCT. There has been an internal audit undertaken by NNC and all recommendations are being enacted.

3.4. Procure for NCT data, databases, and casework records

The current children's social care case management system used by Northamptonshire Children's Trust, has been in use since 2005 and is now 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. The current arrangements hinder effective practice, and this has been recognised by the councils.

The Councils and NCT are currently working together to procure a new system as soon as possible, to be live for January 2025. This will require financial investment from both Councils.

3.5. 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.

3.6. Act as the Corporate Parent

Elected members and the officers are the corporate parents for Northamptonshire's Looked After Children 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 Councils universal services in supporting Looked After Children. 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.

North Northamptonshire Council and West Northamptonshire Council support the Northamptonshire Corporate Parenting Board. NCT provides professional expertise and advice to the Corporate Parenting Board, to help the Council(s) discharge their responsibilities. It has been agreed that the Corporate Parenting arrangements will be subject to a peer review in 2022/23 to support the Councils in delivering this vital role and to consider how Local Government Reorganisation may impact on the current arrangements.

3.7. Consult NCT on any corporate or property strategy

The Councils have consulted with NCT on various corporate or property strategies. A particular area of focus has been and will continue to be how the Councils and NCT take

forward future ways of working as restrictions in place during the covid-19 pandemic are lifted. NCT submitted property requirements in March 2022. Each organisation will need to consider where their staff will work from and how their decisions in this area impact upon each other. Maintenance, refurbishment and equipment in property has been a standing item of concern at the monthly Operational Group as the maintenance, refurbishment and equipment replacement schedule remains unclear. Buildings such as the contact centre at Weston Favell require urgent refurbishment works and equipment refresh. NNC and WNC are working on this.

3.8. 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.

NCT and the Councils did seek funding from the Department for Education as part of a programme to deliver new and improved children's homes. The bid was unfortunately unsuccessful but both NCT and the Councils have committed to work together on any future bids and learn from the feedback provided by the Department for Education.

3.9. Implement any actions resulting from a regulatory inspection

Services delivered by NCT were subject to several regulatory inspections in 2021/22. 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 needs to be identified and these works should be undertaken swiftly to ensure this does not have adverse impact on future Ofsted inspection.
- 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. Initial discussions have taken place about procuring an alternative system and this work needs to be accelerated.

3.10. 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.

3.11. Procure provision of appropriate ICT to enable the Emergency Duty service

This was successfully delivered by the Councils.

4. Cost of delivering services in 2021/22

NCT is a not-for-profit entity and aims to break even each financial year.

The Trust achieved a balanced budget position in its first operational period Nov 2020 - 2022. The outturn position for the financial year 2021/22, is an overspend of £1.070m against the approved budget of £123.348m. The Trust will mitigate this pressure through the use of the carry forward reserve of £1.089m (relating to the financial period Nov 2020–Mar 2021), leaving a net underspend position of £0.019m. Also factored into the outturn at period 12 to mitigate the overspend is £2.631m of assumed approved covid funding.

The cost of performing the services in 2021/22 can be summarised as follows:

Service Area	Budget £'000	Gross Outturn (Excluding Covid Funding) £'000	Less Covid Funding £'000	Forecast Outturn £'000	Outturn Variance £'000
Corporate Parent Service	43,998	45,026	(856)	44,170	172
Children, Young People and Family Support Services	5,692	5,076	-	5,076	(616)
Prevention & Safeguarding	14,314	15,784	(1,656)	14,128	(186)
Quality Assurance and Commissioning	57,579	59,399	(120)	59,279	1,700
NCT Central	1,765	1,765	-	1,765	0
Northamptonshire Children's Trust	(123,348)	(123,348)	-	(123,348)	0
Total	-	3,701	(2,631)	1,070	1,070

Key Issues

Placements (£1.7m overspend)

Placements remains the biggest single risk and is incredibly volatile, with a single placement costing £500k. The current levels of volatility, efficiency of joint funding process and current flux of emergency placements, increasing complexity of need in a market where demand outstrips supply are all impacting.

We will continue to mitigate and strive 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. The placements budget will remain under significant pressure as it remains extremely volatile both locally and also nationally. The expenditure could increase, and this risk is identified in the contract sum.

As part of the placement sufficiency strategy a capital bid to create local provision has

been submitted to both North Northamptonshire and West Northamptonshire as part of their respective capital programmes.

An external review of NCT placements commissioning completed by People Too in February 2022 found that disproportionately low levels of contributions from health and education are received towards placement costs, with opportunity to increase collective accountability. Work to re-dress the balance is in progress and WNC and NNC have agreed to support NCT in generating appropriate income towards placements from health and education.

5. A summary of any changes to the Service Delivery Contract

During 2021-22, NCT and the Councils agreed the Deed of Variation to the Service Delivery Contract. This is currently in the process of being executed by NCT and the Councils.

The main purpose of the Deed of Variation was to amend the SDC to reflect and give effect to the restructuring of Northamptonshire County Council (the Council) and its replacement by West Northamptonshire Council and North Northamptonshire Council (the Unitaries). The key changes were:

- Amending any reference to the Council to the Unitaries
- Clarifying that NNC would be the host council and the DCS for NNC would be Councils' Representative as defined in the contract
- Updating the Terms of Reference to key governance groups to clarify the standing membership
- Amending the Clause on Property to reflect the fact that leases and licences have been agreed for most properties and to note the properties where a lease or licence needs to be finalised

During the contract year, NCT and the Councils also agreed a finalised Support Services Agreement following negotiations through 2021/22. The finalised agreement clarifies the 'performance concepts' that set out how NCT monitor and hold the Councils to account for their delivery of Support Services to NCT.

6. Service demand in 2021/22 and expected demand 2022-24

Between 2020/21 and 2021/22 there has been an increase in:

- Number of referrals to MASH
- Rate of assessments
- Rate of s.47 investigations
- Rate of children in care

The impact of the covid 19 pandemic is likely to have had an impact, as well as an increase in the complexity of needs of children and risks of exploitation.

The embedded document shows the current and forecast numbers of children in care and the expected demand for placements. Overall numbers of children in care increased from 1094 to 1184 across 4 years up to March 22, which is an 8% increase. A straight linear trend line estimates the March 24 total care population at 1211.



LAC Modelling June
22.pptx

7. Actual or anticipated changes in legislation and their effects

7.1. Unregulated and unregistered placements

From 9 September 2021, a placement in a setting which is unregulated or unregistered with Ofsted is not lawful for any looked after child who is under the age of 16 years. This applies to existing placements, as well as new placements. Whilst the rationale for this legislation is recognised and supported, it has been introduced at a time of real challenge in the placements market and local authorities have continued to have to make placements in unregulated and unregistered settings, because of the lack of suitable regulated provision that can meet children's needs. Providers are being encouraged to register with Ofsted and 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 nationally that can meet the needs of children we are likely to continue seeing increasing costs as local authorities compete for places.

7.2. The Competition and Markets Authority report on Children's Social Care

[The final report](#) published in March 2022 concluded that a lack of placements of the right kind and in the right places meant children are not consistently getting access to care and accommodation that meets their needs. The largest providers of placements are making materially higher profits, with materially higher prices than would be expected if the market were functioning effectively. Some of the largest providers are carrying very high levels of debt, creating a risk that failure of highly leveraged firms could disrupt the placements of children in care.

The report recommends improvements to commissioning, by having some functions performed by collaborative bodies; and providing additional national support and support to local authority initiatives to provide more in-house foster care. It recommends to reduce barriers to providers creating and maintaining provision, by reviewing regulatory and planning requirements, and supporting the recruitment and retention of care staff and foster carers. Finally, it recommends to reduce the risk of children experiencing negative effects from children's home providers exiting the market in a disorderly way by creating an effective regime of market oversight and contingency planning.

7.3. National standards for providers of supported accommodation

In December 2021, the Department for Education confirmed that national standards for providers of supported accommodation for 16 and 17-year-old children in care and care leavers will be introduced. These were due to be published in early 2022 but have not yet been. Providers will be required to register with Ofsted from April 23 and inspections will start from April 24. This may lead to an increase in prices and some providers leaving the market.

7.4. Independent Review of Children's Social Care

The Independent Review of Children's Social Care published its final report in June 2022 [Final Report - The Independent Review of Children's Social Care \(independent-review.uk\)](#) recommending wholesale changes to children's social care which will impact on NCT including:

- Creating a new umbrella of 'Family Help' combining multi- disciplinary support at targeted early help and child in need, potentially on a statutory footing, with a national

eligibility level, indicators and outcomes set and investment from government for transformation. This would include bespoke support in relation to extra familial harm. This would result in significant changes to our ways of working, with potential benefits

- Review of current legislation that supports children with disabilities and their families
- Introduction of Expert Child Protection Practitioner to co-work with Family Help worker where children are at risk of significant harm – with the Independent Child Protection Chair role being removed which would have implications for our workforce
- Five year early career framework for social workers
- Implement recommendations from Taylor Review of youth justice
- Legislate for mandatory family decision making before a family reaches public law outline – to ensure all options have been considered before care proceedings commence
- Provide legal aid for special guardians and kinship carers and new legal definition of kinship care
- Replace the roles of independent reviewing officers (IROs) and regulation 44 visitors to children’s homes with independent advocate roles employed by the Children’s Commissioner that children opt out from – this is likely to create a more adversarial system as well as impacting on our IRO workforce
- National recruitment programme and support structure for foster carers
- Creation of regional care co-operatives with responsibility for sufficiency duty, to create and run public sector fostering, residential and secure care and commission from the external market as required. This would mean the transfer of NCT fostering, children’s homes and placements commissioning to a regional organisation.
- Creation of lifelong guardianship order to support care leavers and double the proportion of care leavers attending university

The review’s recommendations are also in response to the findings of the Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews national panel report (below)

The government is considering what changes can be made in the short, medium and long-terms, and an implementation board is being established, with a comprehensive implementation plan anticipated in December 2022.

7.5. Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews

Recommendations from the Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews into the murders of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and Star Hobson. The National Review highlighted a number of areas which are of concern nationally. The review panel identified a set of issues which hindered professionals’ understanding of what was happening to Arthur and Star. These are:

- Weaknesses in information sharing and seeking within and between agencies.
- A lack of robust critical thinking and challenge within and between agencies, compounded by a failure to trigger statutory multi-agency child protection processes at a number of key moments.
- A need for sharper specialist child protection skills and expertise, especially in relation to complex risk assessment and decision making; engaging reluctant parents; understanding the daily life of children; and domestic abuse.
- Underpinning these issues, is the need for leaders to have a powerful enabling impact on child protection practice, creating and protecting the optimum organisational conditions for undertaking this complex work.

The national recommendations from the report are:

- A new expert-led, multi-agency model for child protection investigation, planning, intervention, and review.
- Establishing National Multi-Agency Practice Standards for Child Protection.

- Strengthening the local Safeguarding Partners to ensure proper co-ordination and involvement of all agencies.
- Changes to multi-agency inspection to better understand local performance and drive improvement.
- A new role for the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel in driving practice improvement in Safeguarding Partners.
- A sharper performance focus and better co-ordination of child protection policy in central Government.
- Using the potential of data to help professionals protect children.
- Specific practice improvements in relation to domestic abuse

7.6. Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services

Ofsted are consulting in July 2022 on introducing a separate judgement within the Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) for care leavers. The aim of the proposals is for inspections to provide a clearer statement about the experiences of care leavers and to focus on the things that make the most difference to their lives. Ofsted will publish updated guidance in December 2023 which will take into account the government's response to the Independent Review of Social Care, with the view of introducing the care leavers judgement no earlier than January 2023. It is unlikely to be in place for our ILACS.

7.7. Consultation on the SEND and Alternative Provision Green Paper: SEND review: right support, right place, right time

The Green Paper proposes:

- New national SEND and alternative provision system setting nationally consistent standards for how needs are identified and met at every stage of a child's journey across education, health and care. Including clarity on roles and responsibilities of partner agencies
- An inclusive system, starting with improved mainstream provision that offers early and accurate identification of needs, high-quality teaching, and prompt access to targeted support.
- Standardised and digitised EHCP process and template and a streamlined redress process.
- DfE's new Regions Group would hold local authorities to account for delivering for children and young people with SEND locally through new funding agreements between local government and the DfE.
- New local SEND partnerships to produce a local inclusion plan setting out how each area will meet the national standards
- Updated SEND inspection framework
- Government investment in schools budget, additional special schools, additional respite and alternative education placements, family hubs and supported internships

Consultation closes on 22nd July 2022. The government will publish a national SEND delivery plan, setting out the government's response to the consultation and how the proposals will be implemented later in the year.

7.8. *Mental Capacity (Amendment) Act 2019, which replaces the Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) with Liberty Protection Safeguards*

Local authorities and NHS bodies will be 'Responsible Bodies' under the Liberty Protection Safeguards and will organise the assessments to ensure there is sufficient evidence to justify a case for deprivation of liberty. Responsible Bodies will be able to authorise deprivation of liberty arrangements to 16-17 year olds, without the need for a court order and will apply to individuals residing in domestic settings.

7.9. *Family Hubs*

Funding has been made available by government for identified local authorities to open Family Hubs by March 2024, of which NNC is one. Family Hubs offer families, children and young people a place to access a range of support services, including early education and childcare, mental health support, meetings with health visitors or parenting classes, counselling or advice for victims of domestic abuse.

7.10. *Integrated Care Systems*

Integrated Care Systems are intended to achieve major changes in how health and care services are planned, paid for and delivered. 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.

8. 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 2022/23-2025/26. This Plan was approved by NCT's Board and by the councils through the [Children's Trust Joint Committee on 22nd December 2021](#).

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
- Health partnerships
- Robust and effective resource management

These priorities have been developed to enable NCT to achieve their identified outcomes for Children, Young People and their Families. These outcomes are for Children, Young People and Families to:

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

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

9.1. *Impact of covid-19*

After a pattern of fluctuating demand experienced during covid lockdowns and school closures we are now seeing an increased number of referrals. These represent more complex issues experienced by families and children as a result of the impact of lockdown, reduction in support network and services available, which have increased the pressure on the families and as such they have experienced greater levels of need. In addition to that, as a direct result of Covid-19, we have seen the impact of poverty, anxiety, non- school attendance, poor child and adult mental health, loss and bereavement, and we have noted a rise in demand for mental health, eating disorder and domestic abuse services. As yet, we don't know what the longer-term impact will be on children and young people following missed time in school and isolation. However, we have seen an increase in the number of parents electing to home educate since the Covid-19 pandemic.

Health services in particular are still recovering from the impact of the pandemic, for example many GP surgeries are still providing restricted appointment bookings. This could have the impact of health issues going untreated, safeguarding issues being missed and more specialist intervention being required in the medium to long term.

9.2. *Cost of living and its impact on families*

While all families will be experiencing the impact of the rising cost of living, we anticipate an increase in the number of families falling into poverty, families unable to afford to pay energy bills, increased access to food banks, homelessness as a result of inability to afford rent or mortgage payments, an increase in stress and pressure for families and an overall increase in the number of children and families in need of early help and social care services.

9.3. *Asylum seekers from Afghanistan and Ukraine*

In the period 2021-22 there were 48 new admissions of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children. As at 4/7/22, 160 children aged 0 -18 have arrived in Northamptonshire from the Ukraine as part of the Homes for Ukraine scheme (all accompanied by adults).

NCT has undertaken safeguarding checks and risks assessments as part of the Homes for Ukraine scheme, which has been funded through a government grant administered by the councils.

Nationally, the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) is starting to see a steady stream of breakdowns and requests for rematching. There is concern that the numbers will significantly increase as more arrangements approach the end of the initial 6-month hosting requirement.

In July 2022, the government introduced a scheme to support unaccompanied children from Ukraine to live in the UK with someone known to their family, with parental consent. Councils are required to carry out pre- and post-arrival checks and ongoing monitoring of sponsorship arrangements to ensure children are being cared for appropriately. This will require resources in NCT to facilitate and support.

The checks that are completed before a child arrives are the same as those for all Homes for Ukraine sponsors but will be supplemented by a pre-application (and pre-arrival for

applications made before 15 July 2022) council-led assessment of the suitability of the prospective sponsorship arrangements for the eligible child. The assessments will be in line with Private Fostering Framework.

The private fostering framework only applies to children up to 16 (or 18 for children with a disability), and where the child is not being accommodated by a parent or legal guardian (or other person with parental responsibility) or a relative (as defined in the Children Act 1989). However, given the additional vulnerability of this group of children and young people, councils are asked to carry out these assessments for all children entering the UK under this expanded scheme.

Within 24 hours of a child's arrival, local councils should carry out an initial visit, consistent with the Private Fostering framework, to confirm the suitability of the living arrangements and establish any immediate welfare needs

Children arriving under this scheme will be able to live in the UK for up to 3 years and access education, healthcare, benefits, employment (as appropriate under UK law) and other support.

Should a sponsorship arrangement break down, and a parent or legal guardian cannot be reached or cannot identify another suitable sponsor for their child, or make alternative arrangements, then the council will need to take further action which could include accommodating the child under s.20 of the Children Act 1989.

The Government is providing funding at a rate of £10,500 per person to councils to enable them to provide support to families to rebuild their lives and fully integrate into communities and it is expected that NCT would have access to this funding to enable the necessary checks, assessments and oversight to be completed.

The government will provide funding to support councils with costs arising from cases where eligible children's sponsorship arrangements break down after arrival in the UK, and children are placed into the care of a council, at a rate of £64,150 per child per year (for the first year only).

The government will also support councils with the costs of supporting any eligible children who have arrived via this route, been placed into the care of a council, and leave the care system once they reach the age of 18, at a rate of £16,850 per care leaver per year (also for the first year only).

At the time of writing, LAs do not have sense of the number of children and young people in the system who are seeking sponsorship arrangements in their area, as data on this is not yet available.

It has also been acknowledged that these children who flee conflict experienced trauma and they require support that is complex and require consideration in terms of staff skills and capacity, and partnership working; there is potential pressure on councils and NCT as the organisation delivering children and family support services and children social care, but also potential pressure on primary care, mental health and education services.

9.4. *Deportation to Rwanda*

The Home Office policy to deport men aged over 18 years is in a state of flux following the recent intervention by the European Court of Human Rights. However, while the policy is still

in effect it applies to 'single young people', thereby creating a risk of children being deported, as well as a risk that deportation of a parent could leave children unaccompanied in the UK.

9.5. National and local workforce issues

There are currently challenges in recruiting and retaining skilled workforces across many sectors due the pandemic, leaving the EU and high competition for labour, and this has exacerbated issues for sectors where there were existing national shortages, such as social workers, social care, health care, voluntary sector practitioners. NCT's workforce strategy is having a positive impact however it is expected that these challenges will continue for the foreseeable future. Conditions for the workforce in terms of systems, property, support services would have an impact on this area.

9.6. Increased demand for services and increase in waiting times

As a result of services being less available during covid, workforce issues and the impact of covid on children and families, there are reported increases in demand for services for children and families and increases in waiting times. For example, ADHD assessments and domestic abuse services. This means that children and families are not necessarily receiving the support when they need it.

9.7. 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. These are undertaken by the children in care health team commissioned by the NHS. All partners are concerned this could mean that that the health needs of some of our children may not be understood or supported in a timely way. We have reviewed and improved our processes within NCT and work in partnership with our health colleagues a to take action to address the issue and the impact is being monitored at board level.

9.8. 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 inadequate by Ofsted. Serious case reviews and child safeguarding practice reviews have also identified previous inadequacies. There has also previously been an under-developed 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. 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. Whilst improvements are being felt, it will take some time to change the reputation and fully develop the early help offer across our system.

9.9. Education Sufficiency

The demand for school places in West and North Northamptonshire is broadly reflective of national trends.

The increase in the demand for primary school places experienced since 2010, is forecast to plateau and decrease in the period ending 2026/27. The total number of children attending a West Northamptonshire primary provision is forecast to decrease by 1,104 pupils or 3.08% during this period due to an ongoing drop in birth rates. The total number of children attending a North Northamptonshire primary provision (not including pupil yield from large scale housing development) is forecast to decrease by 2,153 pupils or 7.23% during this period.

The larger cohorts of students that have/are moving through the primary phase of education continue to impact upon the secondary phase in West and North Northamptonshire and the Councils will be required to commission new additional capacity in each of their secondary planning areas in the area in the 22/23 and 23/24 academic years.

The total number of students expected to attend a West Northamptonshire secondary provision is forecast to increase by 862 or 3.05% in the period ending 2029/30. This number will then plateau in line with the birth rate drops seen in the primary phase. The total number of students expected to attend a Northamptonshire secondary provision in the county is forecast to increase by 1,100 pupils or 4.72% by 2024/25 before decreasing again up to 2030/31.

10. The results of any audits or surveys in 2021-22

10.1. Internal audit

Audits undertaken in 2021/22 covered strategic and operational reviews as well as work specifically focused on IT issues.

BDO Auditors commissioned through West Northamptonshire has provided assurance that the Trust has established adequate, appropriate and effective controls which help ensure that risks are being managed and objectives achieved.

The audit programme has seen 11 audits undertaken and these will be reported as part of the Annual Audit report which will be presented to the board in September 2022. The Trust has responded positively to issues raised and audit recommendations are monitored by respective Executive Directors and oversight is provided by the Board's Finance and Resources Committee.

10.2. List of Audits

Creditors, Payroll, Budget Management, Scheme of Delegation, Policies and Procedures, Social Care Transport, Placements Contracts Management, Foster care and Special Guardianship payments, Targeted Operating Model, Carefirst and Cyber Security.

Figure 1: Progress of internal audit review of 2021/22 (as at June 2022)

AUDIT	PLANNING	FIELDWORK	REPORTING	SYSTEM	COMPLIANCE	IMPACT
Creditors	✓	✓	✓			
Payroll	✓	✓				
Budget Management	✓	✓				
Scheme of Delegation	✓	✓	✓			
Policies and Procedures	✓	✓	✓			
Social Care Transport	✓	✓				
Placement Contract Management	✓	✓				
Foster Care and Special Guardianship Payments	✓					
Target Operating Model	✓	✓	✓			
CareFirst	✓					
Cyber Security	✓	✓				

LEVEL OF ASSURANCE	CONTROL ENVIRONMENT / SYSTEM ASSURANCE	COMPLIANCE ASSURANCE
Substantial 	There are minimal control weaknesses that present very low risk to the control environment.	The control environment has substantially operated as intended with no notable errors detected.
Good 	There are minor control weaknesses that present low risk to the control environment.	The control environment has largely operated as intended although some errors have been detected.
Satisfactory 	There are some control weaknesses that present a medium risk to the control environment.	The control environment has mainly operated as intended although errors have been detected.
Limited 	There are significant control weaknesses that present a high risk to the control environment.	The control environment has not operated as intended. Significant errors have been detected.
No Assurance 	There are fundamental control weaknesses that present an unacceptable level of risk to the control environment.	The control environment has fundamentally broken down and is open to significant error or abuse.

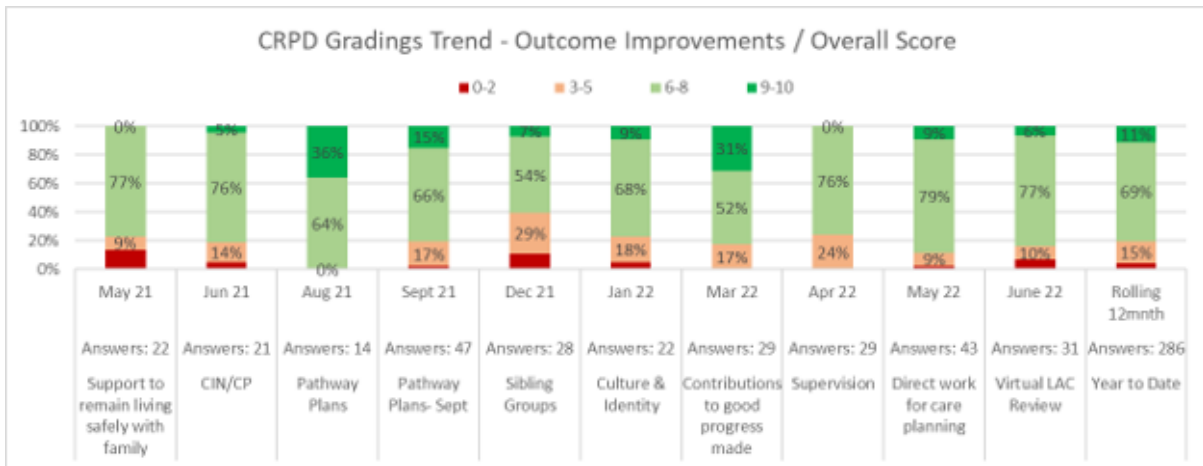
10.3. Self Evaluation

A copy of the current self-evaluation has been reviewed by the Operational Group and will be presented to Ofsted during the social care annual conversation and the regional improvement and innovation alliance.

10.4. 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

Figure 2: Collaborative Reflective Practice Discussions – overall outcome score (June 22)



10.5. Surveys of our workforce

Equalities surveys

NCT carried out two equalities surveys in 2021 to gauge the response of our workforce to new measures introduced to support more equitable and inclusive approaches to equality and diversity at work. Feedback is also sought from our Equalities Forum on a quarterly basis. Results include:

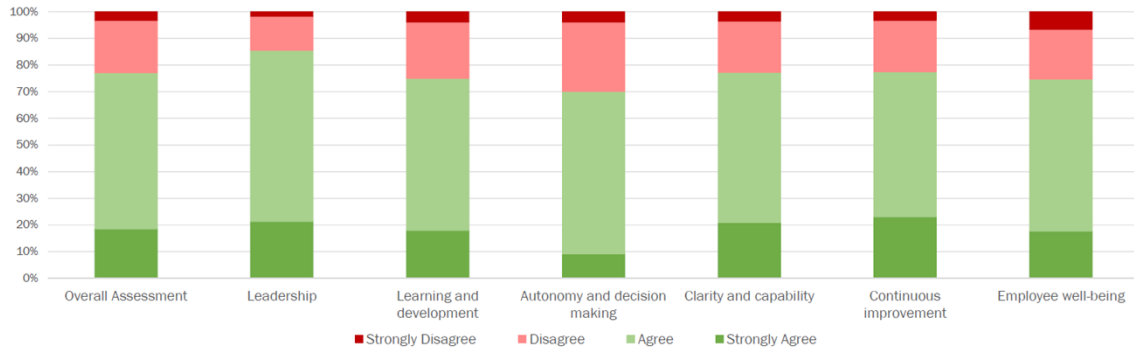
- 77% feel equality, diversity and inclusion has become more of a priority since we became NCT
- 66% feel supported to progress their career in NCT
- Membership of the forum is building confidence to work with diverse families
- Important to recognise we don’t know everything, so good to talk to other people to find out
- Since forum started, found E & D not just an overlooked agenda item / afterthought – becoming more prominent as a discussion topic

Social Worker survey (Frontline)

Our annual social worker health check survey in 2021 provided the following results. This survey was undertaken as part of our successful application to the Frontline programme.

Figure 3: Social Worker survey results

	LA Rating	No. of Responses	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Leadership	7.17	101	1.8%	12.7%	64.2%	21.4%
Learning and development	7.23	102	3.9%	20.8%	56.6%	17.9%
Autonomy and decision making	6.89	102	3.9%	25.9%	60.9%	9.2%
Clarity and capability	7.37	102	3.5%	19.2%	56.4%	20.9%
Continuous improvement	7.43	102	3.3%	19.2%	54.4%	23.1%
Employee well-being	7.15	102	6.7%	18.6%	57.0%	17.7%
Overall Assessment	7.20	102	3.3%	19.6%	58.5%	18.5%



Leadership Development Programme

All line managers in NCT participated in the 9 month NCT Leadership Development programme in 2021-22. The following feedback was received from participants, showing positive progress from October 21, part way through the programme to February 22 near the end of the programme.

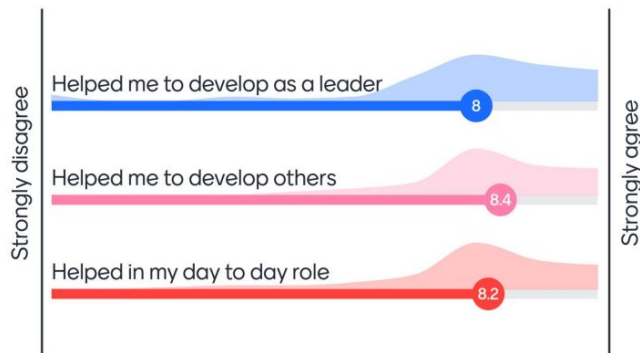
Results from October 2021

Leadership Development Programme



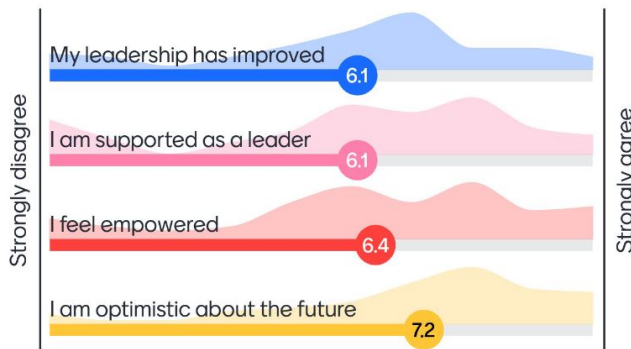
Results from February 2022

Leadership Development Programme



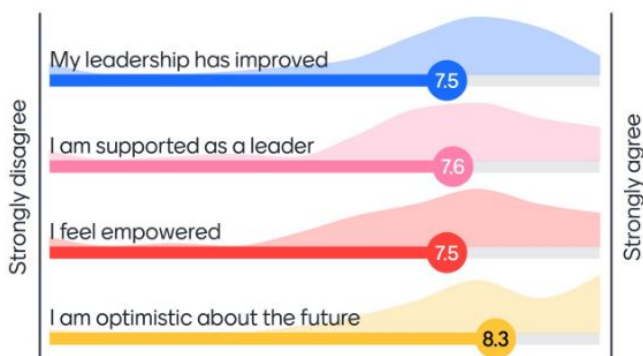
Results from October 2021

Your Leadership



Results from February 2022

Your Leadership



10.6. Surveys of children and young people

Children in care reviews

The Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) service carried out a telephone survey of 44 children and young people in the period 2021-22, in response to feedback from the Ofsted monitoring visit which recommended we ensure IROs consistently seek the views of children and promote their attendance at children in care reviews. The children surveyed were 44% of the children who had reviews during the period. Five recommendations were made based on the feedback, including the need for the IRO to send one page profiles about themselves to all the children and young people they support, including those newly allocated to them, to improve recognition, as well as a need for a short guide on the purpose of children in care reviews to improve children's understanding and encourage their attendance.

Mind of My Own

In 2021, the Mind of My Own app was introduced as a way for social workers to gather feedback from children and young people, and for children and young people to have an additional method to get in touch with their workers outside of scheduled visits. So far, NCT have learned that school/ college, home, family and friends are the things that have the biggest impact on the wellbeing of children and young people, which provides a benchmark for discussion and improvements.

Young people receiving support from Youth offending service

During 21/22, 69 young people provided their views in a questionnaire. The findings showed vast majority 57 of 69 (83%) found their worker supportive and also majority of young people 59 out of 69 (86%) said they did not commit further offences since working with the YOS.

11. 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. As there were no Performance Failures during the 2021-22 contract year, there were no Rectification Plans.

12. High-level review of applicable Central Government funding Government funding

Both Councils are currently forecasting projected budget gaps going forward in their medium-term financial plans. These gaps, as estimated at the point their 2022/23 budgets were approved, are outlined in the table below:

Estimated budget (surplus)/deficit	2023-24 £m	2024-25 £m	2025-26 £m
West Northamptonshire Council	15.454	23.394	26.448
North Northamptonshire Council	25.192	33.913	N/A
Total	40.646	57.303	N/A

There is considerable uncertainty with regards to general central government funding available to the Councils due to the probable implementation of Business Rates reform, the Fair Funding Review and the short-term nature of the local government financial settlement. This makes medium term financial planning challenging and the level of central government funding that will be available from 2023-24 remains unclear.

Other Government Revenue Grants

18+ Former LAC Care Provision - Exc Placements (£85,942- contract variation relating to Staying Put Implementation Grant (S31 New Burdens)- £272,372-18+ Former LAC Care Provision - 21/22	-358,314
Leaving Care Team (Contract variation relating to S31 Extended Personal Adviser duty Implementation Grant)	-177,700
Remand Secure Grant	-237,629
Strengthening Families Management Team (contract variation relating to Public Health Support to Targeted support and YOS)	-130,000
Supporting Families Programme Funding Grant	-1,759,600
UASC Funding - Over 18	-2,190,382
UASC Funding - Under 18	-2,700,011
Youth Offending Team	-584,948
Other Government Revenue Grants	-1,306,739
Covid /funding	-2,631,000
Total - Government Revenue Grants	-12,076,323

13. Risk register

The risk register is regularly discussed at NCT Board and the Operational Group to ensure risks are managed.

14. The outcome of any regulatory inspections

Ofsted Monitoring Visits of Children's Social Care

February 2021, Northamptonshire County Council (Feb 2021)
Children in Care, Placement Matching and Decision Making and Children with Disabilities
who are looked after
[50161312 \(ofsted.gov.uk\)](https://www.ofsted.gov.uk/inspections/50161312)

July 2021, North and west Northamptonshire, Child Protection and Child in Need
[Ofsted | North Northamptonshire](#)
[Ofsted | West Northamptonshire](#)

November 2021, North and west Northamptonshire, Children in Care who are 16+,
particularly planning for leaving care and Care Leavers
[50173511 \(ofsted.gov.uk\)](https://www.ofsted.gov.uk/inspections/50173511)
[50173510 \(ofsted.gov.uk\)](https://www.ofsted.gov.uk/inspections/50173510)

Independent Fostering Agency Inspection – October 21
[Ofsted | Northamptonshire Children's Trust Fostering Agency](#)
Judgement: Requires Improvement to be good

Voluntary Adoption Agency – January 22
[50179378 \(ofsted.gov.uk\)](https://www.ofsted.gov.uk/inspections/50179378)

Judgement: Good

NCT Children's Homes

Home	Full inspection date	Grading	Monitoring visit	Comments
Thornton House URN 2608872	14-15 Dec 2021	Requires improvement to be good	Improved effectiveness	Opened Jan 2020 Interim inspection 9 March 2022
Phoenix House URN 2608892	7th -8th March 2022	Good	20th-21st October 2020	Opened Feb 2020
Welford House URN 2608968	30 April 2019 October 2021	Good Good	24 Feb 2021	Interim Inspection 4 March 2020
Raven House URN 2615067	April 2019 July 2021 11-12 Aug 2021	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	

15. Any proposed changes to the SDC

The following items have been discussed during the year at Operational Group for decisions to be made before the commencement of FY 2023/24:

- Support Services Agreement
- Annual review process
- Disaggregation of council services
- Property maintenance, refurbishment, and equipment renewal
- Corporate Parenting Board arrangements
- KPIs
- Services provided from Family Hubs
- Extent of WNC / NNC specific services and resource implications

- Integrated Care System

The following activity will be undertaken in the coming months to address the items above;

Autumn 2022 – Meeting between NCT/WNC/NNC strategic leaders to be held post Ofsted ILCS inspection. The purpose of the meeting will be to develop plans to discuss what services will look like by Autumn 2025.

Jan – Feb 2023 – peer review of corporate parenting undertaken by the LGA

Mar – Apr 2023 – LGA insight report to follow up the LGA insight report produced in May 2021

NOTE:

Some discussion has taken place about Key Performance Indicators from 2023/24

Now the contract has been in operation for almost 2 years, it is timely to review the appropriateness of the KPIs. Discussions between ICF and NCT suggest the following KPIs (**in bold**) should be reviewed. It should be noted that all monthly performance data is shared at Operational Group, and any issues can be picked up and challenged there whether the indicator is a KPI or not.

Percentage of all referrals with a decision within 2 working days.

This is the KPI measured however the contract says the KPI should be 24 working hours. This should be changed to reflect 2 working days not 24hrs.

Percentage of young people now aged 17-21 and living in suitable accommodation who were looked after when aged 16

Percentage of young people now aged 17-21 and in employment, education or training who were looked after when aged 16

The above should remain KPIs but the monthly data should be year to date rather than individual months. The monthly figures are dependent on which month the young person's birthday falls.

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

It is appropriate to include Stage 1 complaints however complaints can be escalated to stage 2 for a variety of reasons and this does not necessarily indicate poor performance. A complaints update is shared regularly at Operational Group.

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

A change in this measure would require a lot of children moving between months to significantly change the measure. In addition, the LA boundary is Northamptonshire as was, not the individual LA's. The benefit of this KPI is unclear as placement decisions are fundamentally based on needs rather than distance from home.

The performance mechanism

KPIs have been established, and they include both national and local indicators, and oversight of performance reporting is good with reports issued to both the Operational Group, Strategic Group and Social Care Improvement Board. Consideration is being given by NNC/WNC/NCT to changes to some KPIs, to ensure the performance indicators that are used are relevant and meaningful.

Over the first year of the operation of the Service Delivery Contract, NCT and the Councils have reviewed the 'management information' NCT are expected to provide as part of the monthly performance report. It has been agreed that the current list of management information indicators do not provide the Directors of Children's Services with the required level of oversight required to assist in discharging the DCS's statutory duties relating to children's social care. It is therefore proposed that NCT provide the Councils with the Children's Trust Scorecard as well as the Improvement Plan on a monthly basis. This has a greater breadth of indicators that provide more insight into services and supports the interpretation of the Key Performance Indicators. The latest version of the Scorecard is included as appendix 3.

Council dependencies

Following Local Government Reorganisation, the Councils are continuing to review any shared service arrangements and disaggregate services where appropriate. Some of these services may also be Support Services provided to NCT. The Councils will continue to share the disaggregation route map with NCT and where a Support Services is being considered for disaggregation, the Councils will engage with NCT at the earliest possible opportunity. They will then work together to consider the best option for future delivery to NCT and consider what delivers value for money to NCT and the Councils and how the Service can best support NCT in improving services.



Governance arrangements

The terms of reference for both the Operational and Strategic Group meetings currently have a standing agenda item for covid-19. Whilst this remains an important issue to be considered by the meeting, it is proposed the standing item is changed to "Emergency and emerging issues." This allows the Councils and NCT to discuss any emergency issues as they arise. For example, the impact of the war in Ukraine and any child refugees entering the county.

Contract sum negotiations

The timeline is attached as appendix 4.

Appendices

Appendix	Attachment
1. NCT performance against contractual KPIs	 NCT Contractual Performance Agains
2. NCT Support Services Annual Report	To follow
3. NCT Scorecard	 Children's Trust Scorecard - June 22.