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

Contents

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 averages[1]. 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 teams[2] 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.

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[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

<u>Services</u>
- **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.

<u>Context</u>
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:

Fostering Annual
report 2022-2023 Fir

3.3.3   NCT Residential Children's Homes

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* *11-12 Aug 2021* *9th August 2022*	*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*

3.3.4 Adoption

NCT Adoption Annual Report:

Adoption Annual
report 2022-2023 v4.

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 and 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	• Original savings dependent on case management system • Mitigation non delivery of original savings • 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	• 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	• 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	• 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.
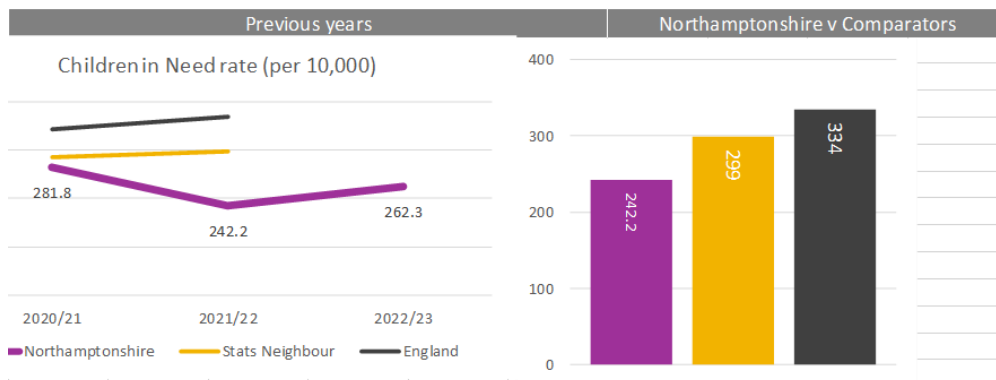
The rate of children on a child protection plan was 36.5 per 10,000 at end of March 23, an increase from 34.1 in 21/23. This equates to 34 additional children. The rate was below the England national average and above our statistical neighbour rates.
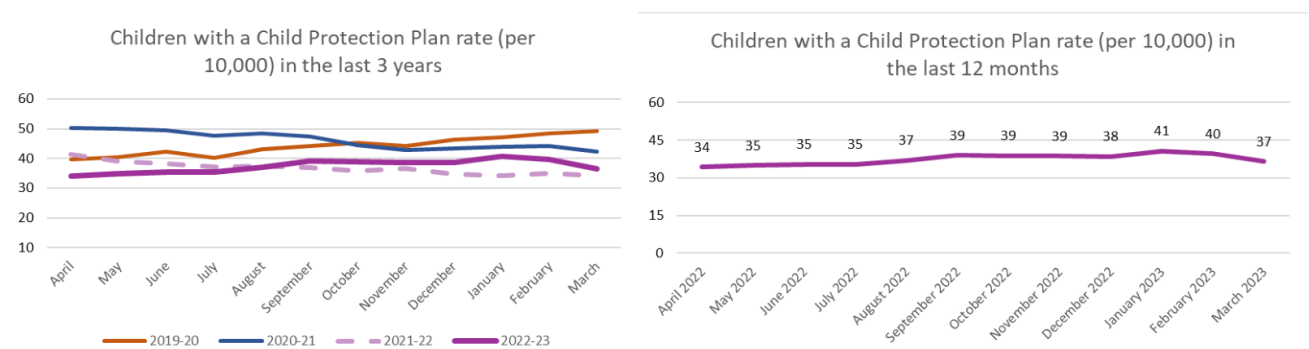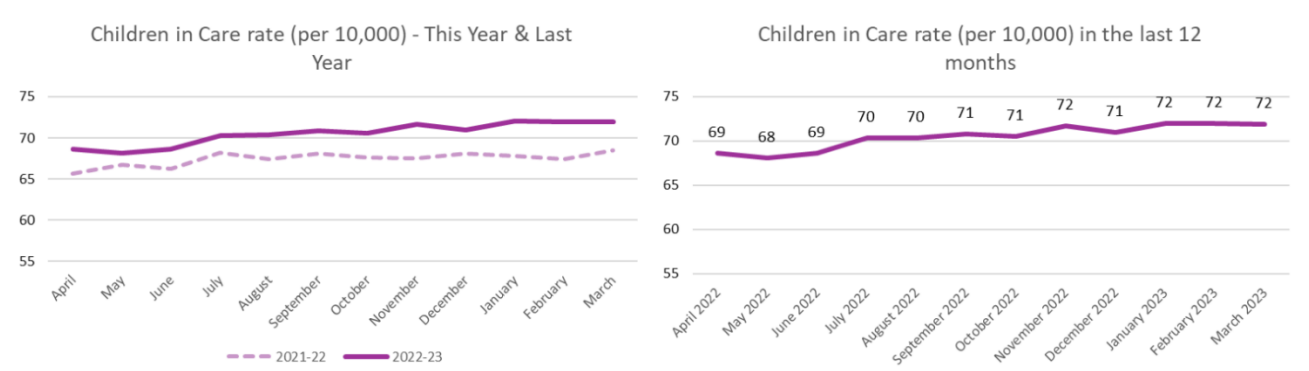

The rate of children in care was 71.9 per 10,000 at end of March 23, an increase from 68.5 in 21/23. This equates to 46 additional children. The rate was above England and statistical neighbours.

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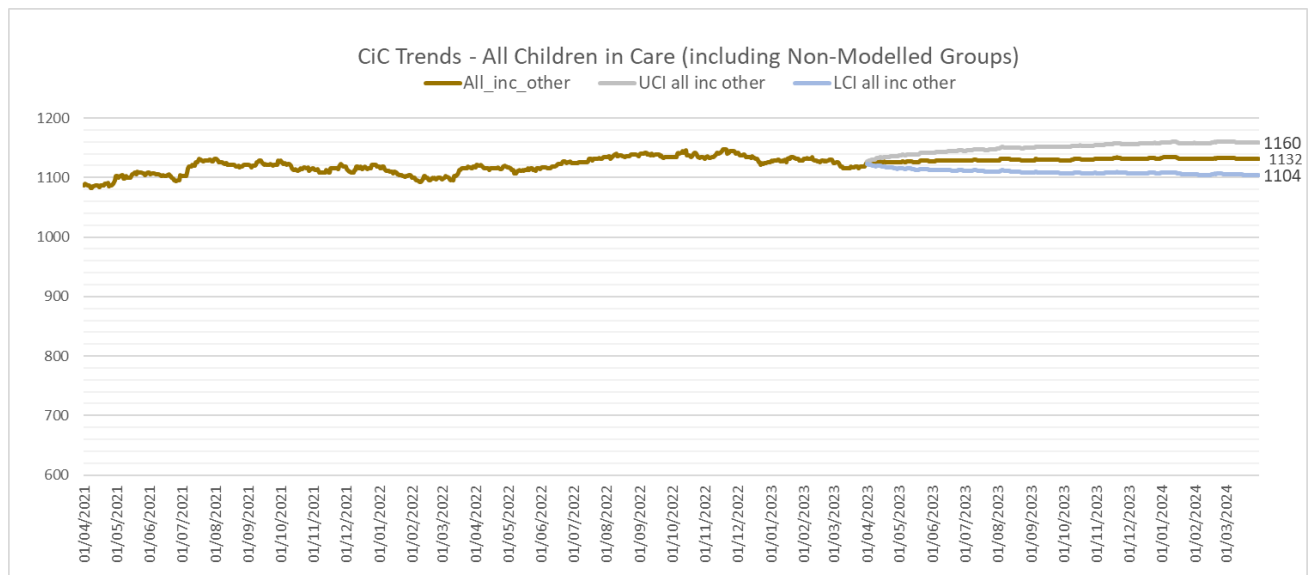
An increase of 1% up to 1132 is forecast to March 2024. We are forecasting an increase of children in care in the 1-4 years and 16-18 years age groups in this period.

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.

NORTHAMPTONSHI
RE 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 picture[3] 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 Care[4] and the Competition and Market's market study of children's social care[5]). 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.

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[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 inadequacies[7] . 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

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[7] Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews - Northamptonshire Safeguarding Children Board (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:

- o 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.
- o This assessment has taken account of the relative materiality of these areas and management's response to agreed actions.
- o 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.

CRPD Gradings Trend - Outcome Improvements / Overall Score
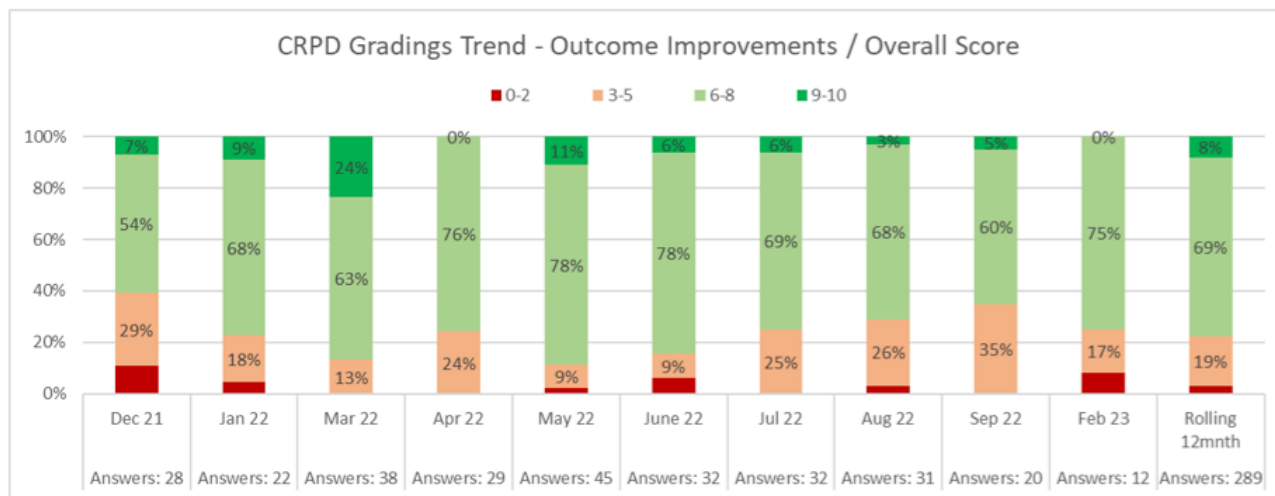
11.4 Equalities surveys

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.
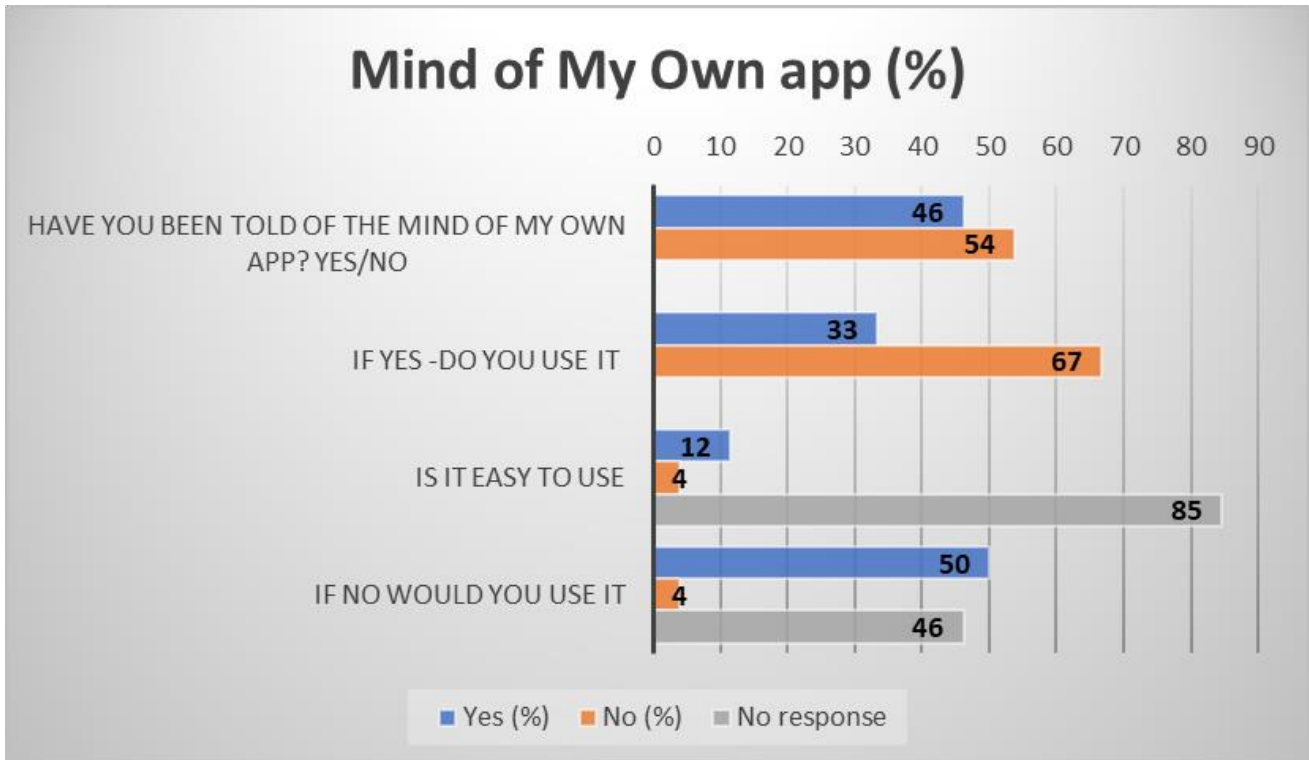
Usage of the MoMO app declined in the early half of 2023. A working group has been established to relaunch the app, and an increase in usage – particularly by children – is being seen. Some of the promotional activities have included promotional leaflets and flyers distributed at the Children in Care 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)

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)
West Northamptonshire 50200026 (ofsted.gov.uk)
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)
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)

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.
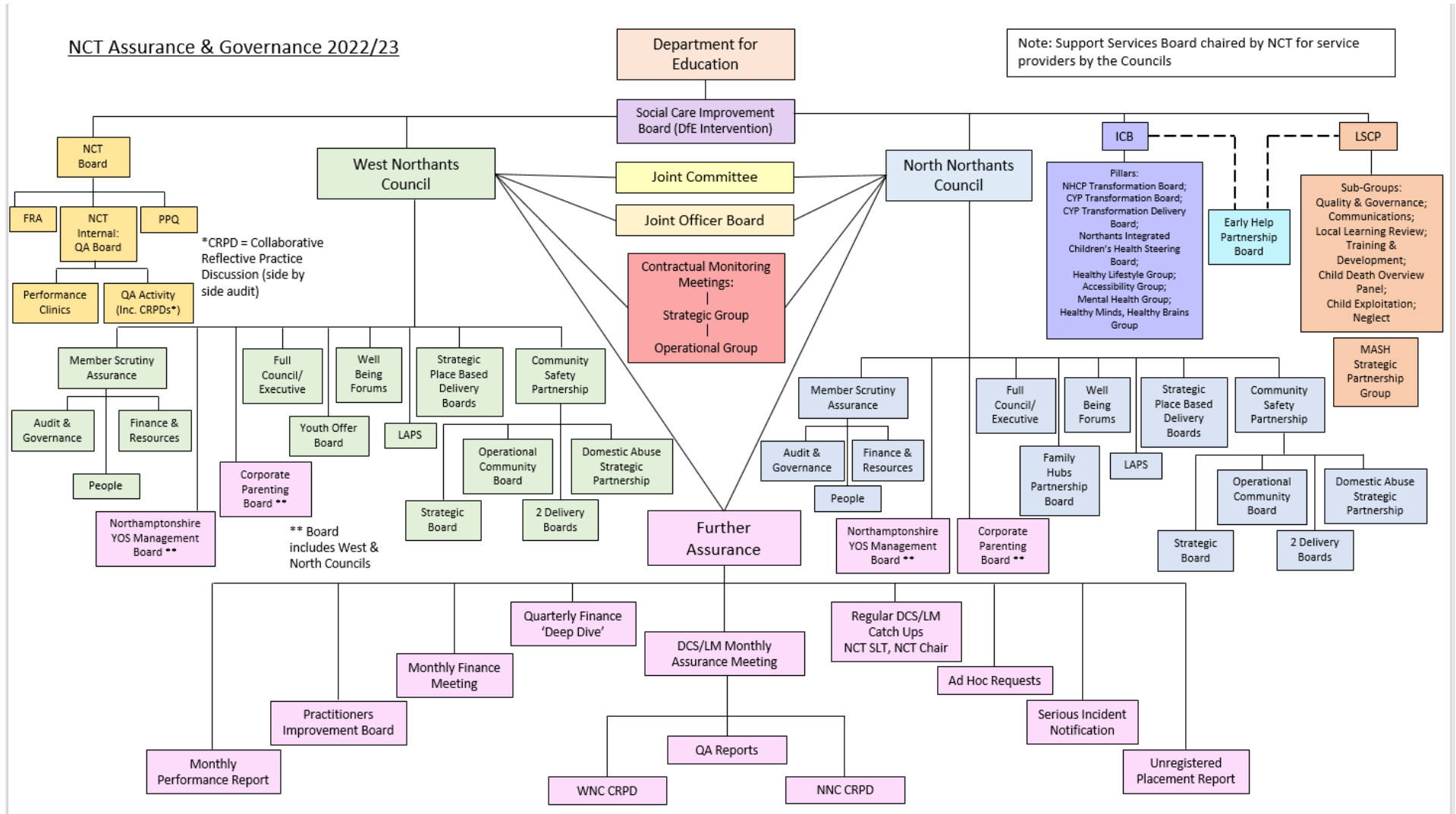
The most significant challenges for 2023/24 are likely to be managing demand, including reducing referrals to children's social care when families do not require a statutory intervention; and increasing costs of delivering services, including the cost of placements that can meet the needs of children. 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, particularity 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.
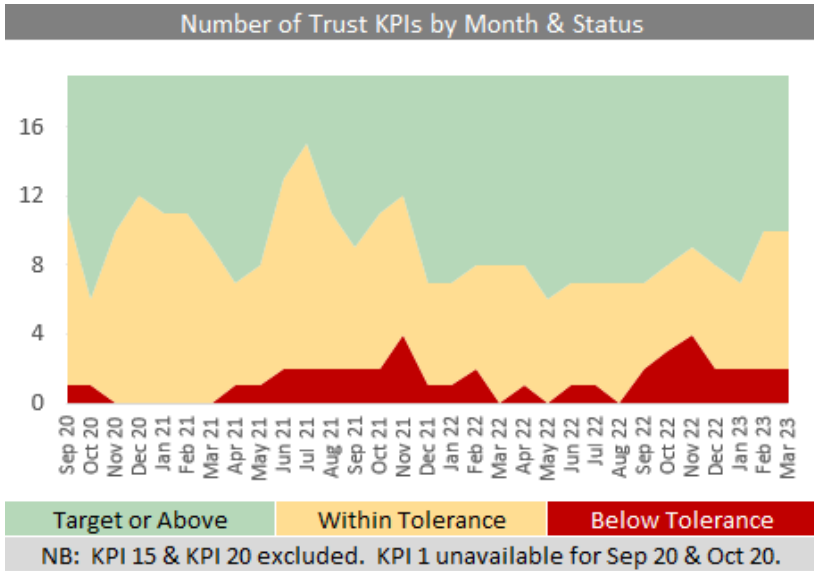
Above all else, NCT will continue to keep children, young people and families at the heart of all we do – in every action we take and every decision we make. NCT will live out the commitment our children asked us to make to them – *What we do today affects your tomorrow, we promise to walk side by side with you.*
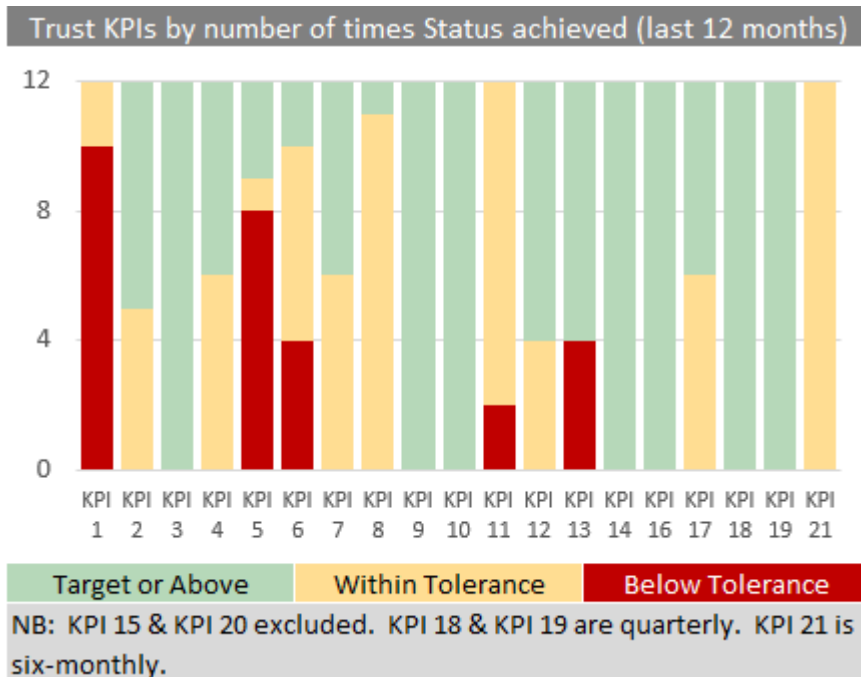
Appendix 1 – NCT Assurance and Governance

NCT Assurance & Governance 2022/23

Note: Support Services Board chaired by NCT for service providers by the Councils

Department for Education

Social Care Improvement Board (DfE Intervention)

NCT Board

West Northants Council

Joint Committee

Joint Officer Board

North Northants Council

ICB

LSCP

FRA — NCT Internal: QA Board — PPQ

*CRPD = Collaborative Reflective Practice Discussion (side by side audit)

Performance Clinics — QA Activity (Inc. CRPDs*)

Contractual Monitoring Meetings:
|
Strategic Group
|
Operational Group

Pillars:
NHCP Transformation Board;
CYP Transformation Board;
CYP Transformation Delivery Board;
Northants Integrated Children's Health Steering Board;
Healthy Lifestyle Group;
Accessibility Group;
Mental Health Group;
Healthy Minds, Healthy Brains Group

Early Help Partnership Board

Sub-Groups:
Quality & Governance;
Communications;
Local Learning Review;
Training & Development;
Child Death Overview Panel;
Child Exploitation;
Neglect

Member Scrutiny Assurance

Full Council/ Executive

Well Being Forums

Strategic Place Based Delivery Boards

Community Safety Partnership

MASH Strategic Partnership Group

Member Scrutiny Assurance

Full Council/ Executive

Well Being Forums

Strategic Place Based Delivery Boards

Community Safety Partnership

Audit & Governance — Finance & Resources

Youth Offer Board

LAPS

Operational Community Board

Domestic Abuse Strategic Partnership

Audit & Governance — Finance & Resources

Family Hubs Partnership Board

LAPS

Operational Community Board

Domestic Abuse Strategic Partnership

People

Corporate Parenting Board **

Strategic Board

2 Delivery Boards

People

Strategic Board

2 Delivery Boards

Northamptonshire YOS Management Board **

** Board includes West & North Councils

Further Assurance

Northamptonshire YOS Management Board **

Corporate Parenting Board **

Quarterly Finance 'Deep Dive'

Regular DCS/LM Catch Ups NCT SLT, NCT Chair

Monthly Finance Meeting

DCS/LM Monthly Assurance Meeting

Ad Hoc Requests

Practitioners Improvement Board

QA Reports

Serious Incident Notification

Monthly Performance Report

WNC CRPD

NNC CRPD

Unregistered Placement Report

Appendix 2 – 2022/23 Performance against KPI's

Overview of KPI Performance

Number of Trust KPIs by Month & Status

Target or Above   Within Tolerance   Below Tolerance

NB: KPI 15 & KPI 20 excluded. KPI 1 unavailable for Sep 20 & Oct 20.

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.*
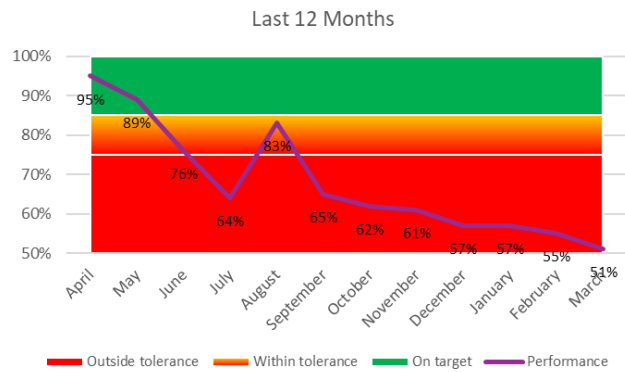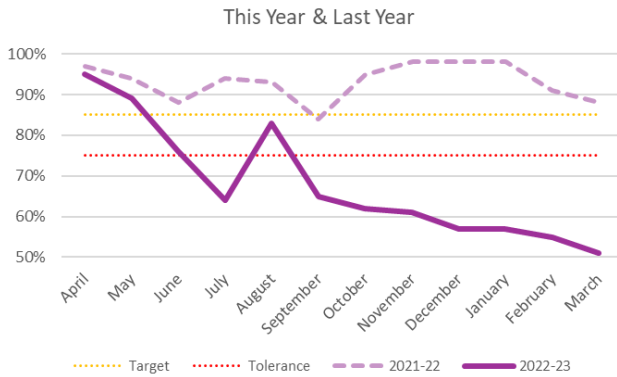

Trust KPIs by number of times Status achieved (last 12 months)

Target or Above   Within Tolerance   Below Tolerance

NB: KPI 15 & KPI 20 excluded. KPI 18 & KPI 19 are quarterly. KPI 21 is six-monthly.

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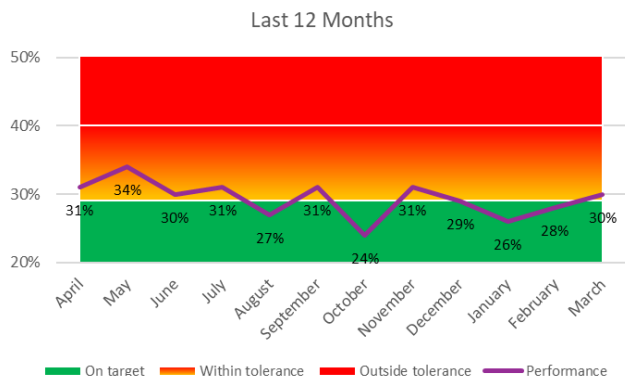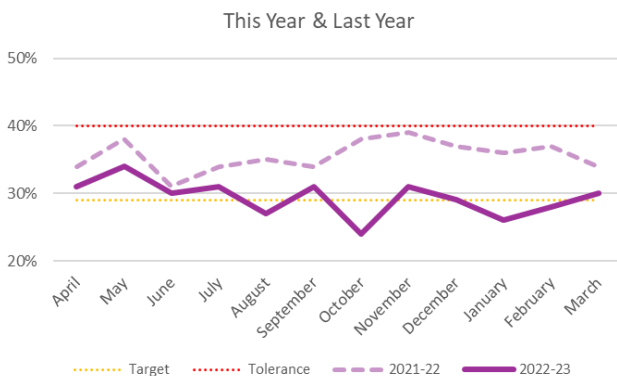
Individual KPI Performance

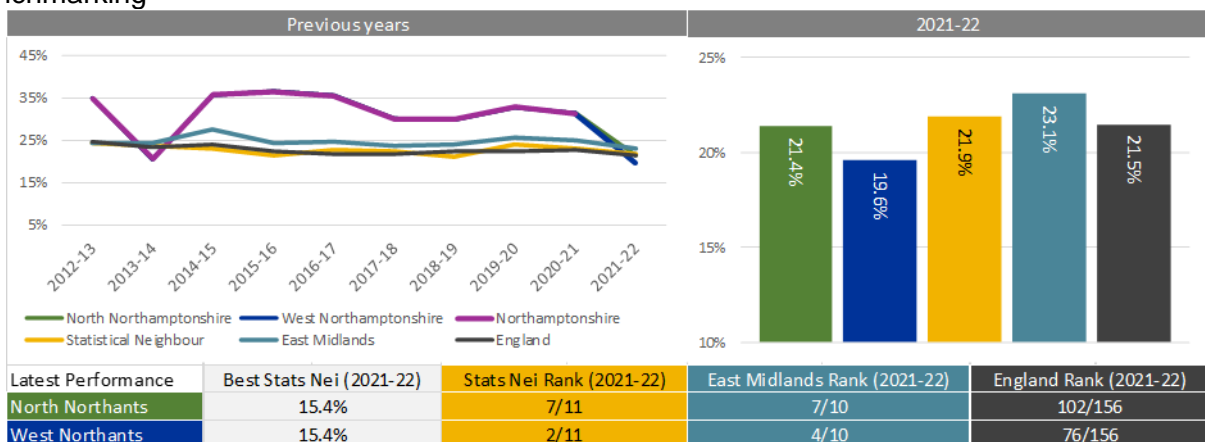### KPI 1 - % all referrals with a decision within 2 working days

2022/23 Overview

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

2022/23 Overview

Benchmarking

Latest Performance	Best Stats Nei (2021-22)	Stats Nei Rank (2021-22)	East Midlands Rank (2021-22)	England Rank (2021-22)
North Northants	15.4%	7/11	7/10	102/156
West Northants	15.4%	2/11	4/10	76/156

Contextual data

Referrals with a previous referral within 12 months

Legend:
- Initial contacts received by the MASH (grey bars)
- % referrals with a previous referral within 12 months (purple line)

Bar values:
April 2022: 3186, May 2022: 4423, June 2022: 4188, July 2022: 4225, August 2022: 3778, September 2022: 4019, October 2022: 3904, November 2022: 4152, December 2022: 3071, January 2023: 3617, February 2023: 3840, March 2023: 4201

Line values: 31%, 34%, 30%, 31%, 27%, 31%, 24%, 31%, 29%, 26%, 28%, 30%

Repeat Referrals - Local v Comparators

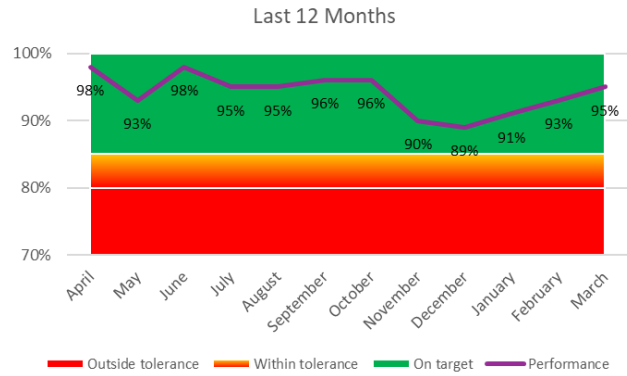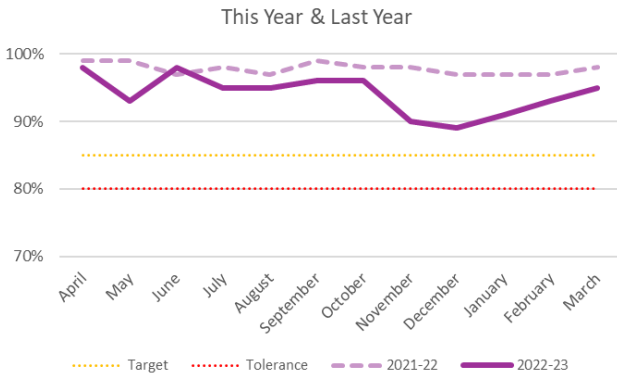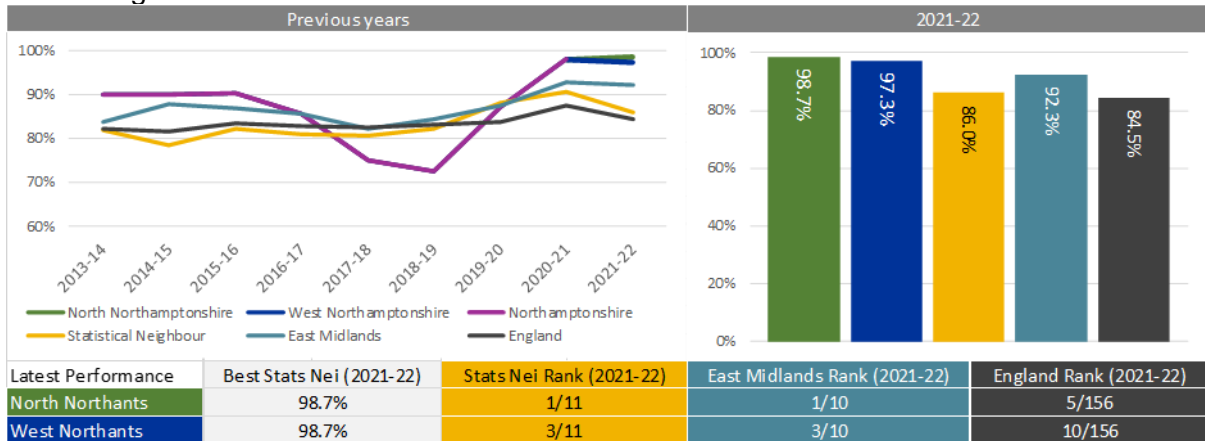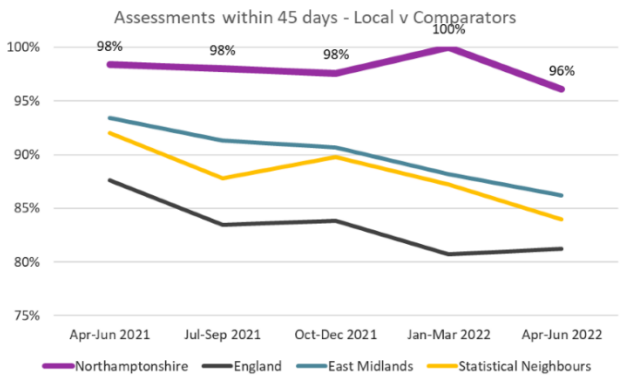Values: Apr-Jun 2021: 34%, Jul-Sep 2021: 34%, Oct-Dec 2021: 37%, Jan-Mar 2022: 35%, Apr-Jun 2022: 32%
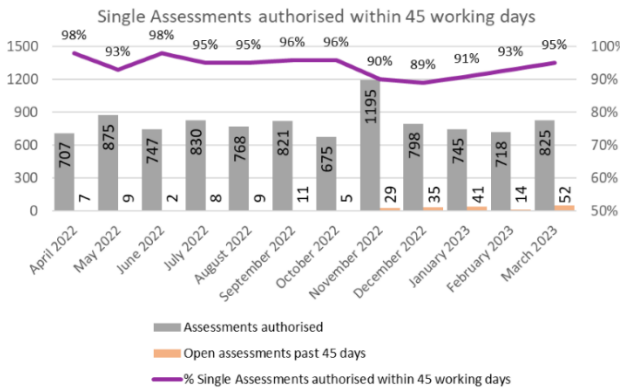
KPI 3 - % Single Assessments authorised within 45 working days

2022/23 Overview

This Year & Last Year

Legend: Target, Tolerance, 2021-22, 2022-23

Last 12 Months

Performance values: April 98%, May 93%, June 98%, July 95%, August 95%, September 96%, October 96%, November 90%, December 89%, January 91%, February 93%, March 95%

Legend: Outside tolerance, Within tolerance, On target, Performance

Benchmarking

Previous years

Legend: North Northamptonshire, West Northamptonshire, Northamptonshire, Statistical Neighbour, East Midlands, England

2021-22

Bar values: 98.7%, 97.3%, 86.0%, 92.3%, 84.5%

Latest Performance	Best Stats Nei (2021-22)	Stats Nei Rank (2021-22)	East Midlands Rank (2021-22)	England Rank (2021-22)
North Northants	98.7%	1/11	1/10	5/156
West Northants	98.7%	3/11	3/10	10/156

Contextual data

Single Assessments authorised within 45 working days

DAAT children visited within 5 days of referral

Assessments within 45 days - Local v Comparators
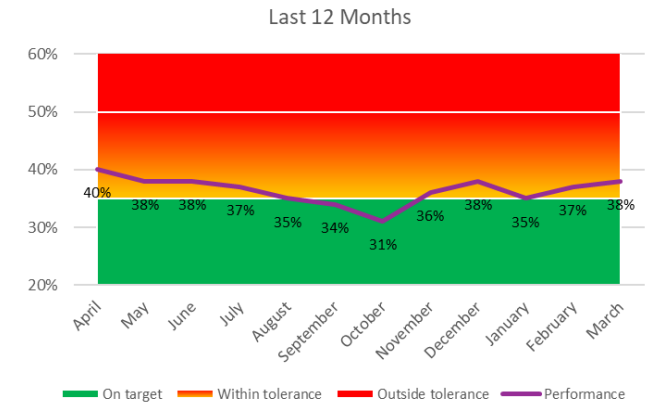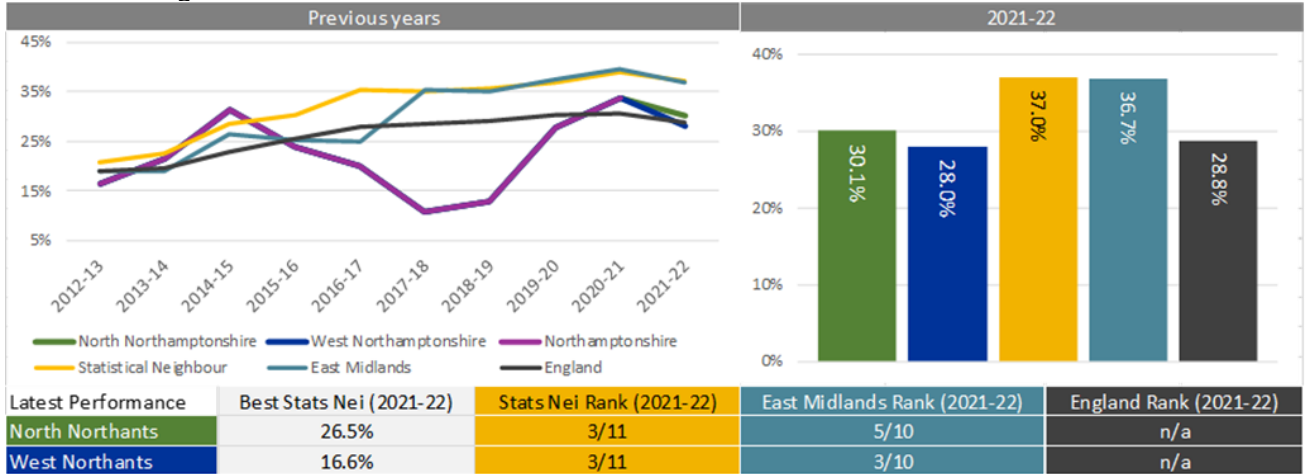
KPI 4 - % Single Assessments closing with no further action

2022/23 Overview

This Year & Last Year

Last 12 Months

Benchmarking

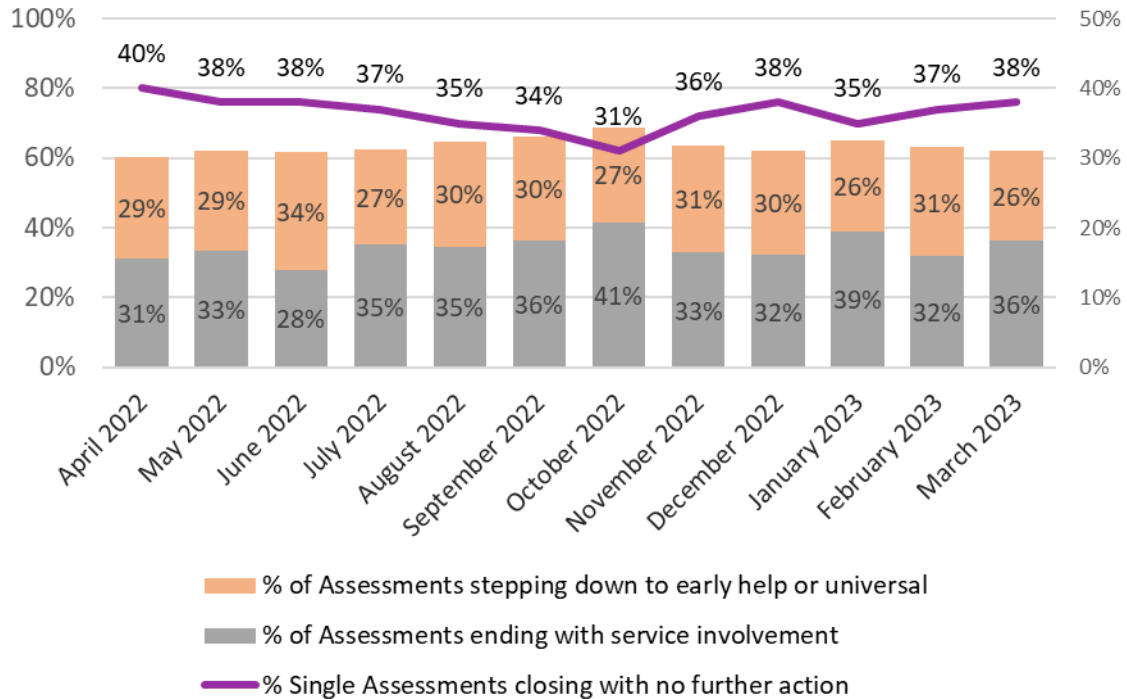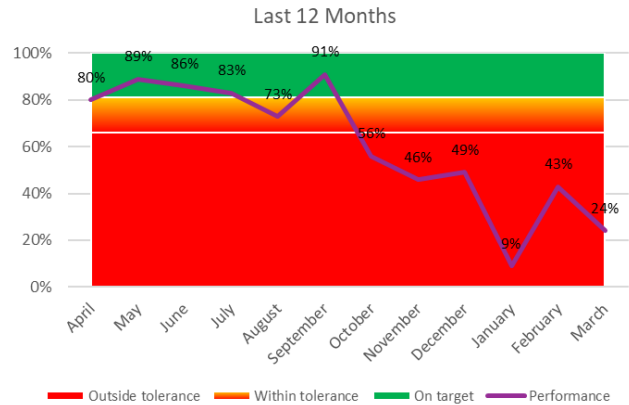| Latest Performance	Best Stats Nei (2021-22)	Stats Nei Rank (2021-22)	East Midlands Rank (2021-22)	England Rank (2021-22)
North Northants	26.5%	3/11	5/10	n/a
West Northants	16.6%	3/11	3/10	n/a
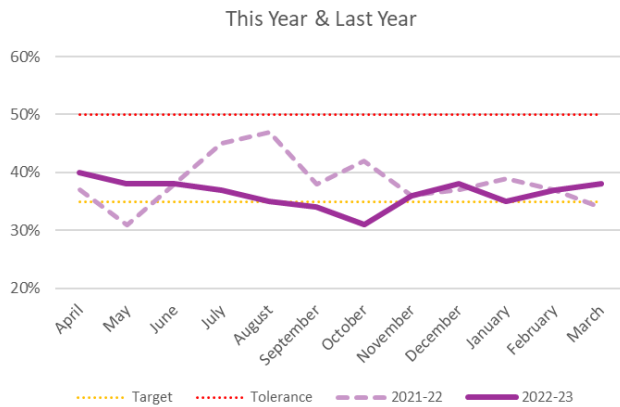
Contextual data

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

Latest Performance	Best Stats Nei (2021-22)	Stats Nei Rank (2021-22)	East Midlands Rank (2021-22)	England Rank (2021-22)
North Northants	95.5%	9/11	7/10	88/156
West Northants	92.9%	7/11	5/10	68/156

Contextual data

Section 47s authorised & ICPCs held

Bar chart showing Section 47s authorised (orange) and ICPCs held (grey) with line percentages from April 2022 to March 2023:

- April 2022: 257, 83, 80%
- May 2022: 262, 99, 89%
- June 2022: 251, 77, 86%
- July 2022: 336, 98, 83%
- August 2022: 279, 108, 73%
- September 2022: 313, 105, 91%
- October 2022: 268, 91, 55%
- November 2022: 364, 109, 46%
- December 2022: 304, 85, 49%
- January 2023: 193, 107, 9%
- February 2023: 301, 54, 43%
- March 2023: 295, 70, 24%

Legend: Section 47s authorised / ICPCs held

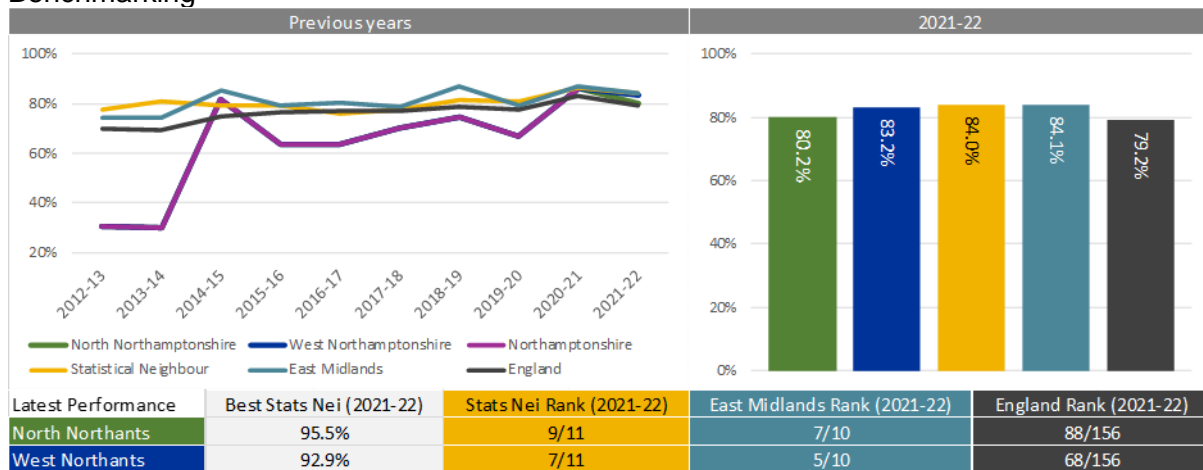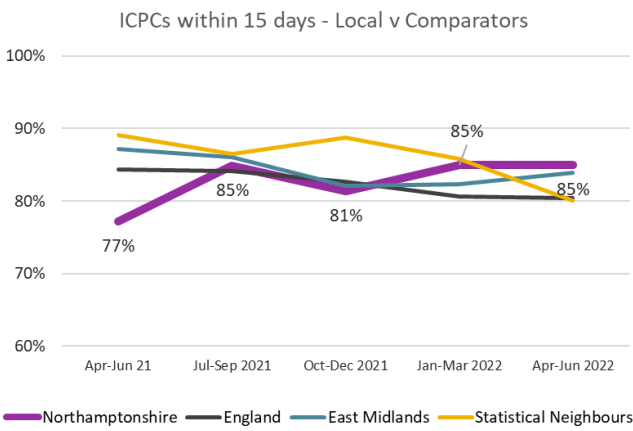### ICPCs that result in CP Plans

Line chart from April 2022 to March 2023:

% Initial Child Protection Conferences held within 15 days of a strategy discussion being initiated (purple):
- 80%, 89%, 86%, 83%, 73%, 91%, 77%, 63%, 72%, 77%, 91%, 63%

ICPCs that result CP plans (orange):
- 70%, 81%, 78%, 79%, 69%, 77%, 75%, 63%, 72%, 77%, 91%, 63%

Legend: % Initial Child Protection Conferences held within 15 days of a strategy discussion being initiated / ICPCs that result CP plans

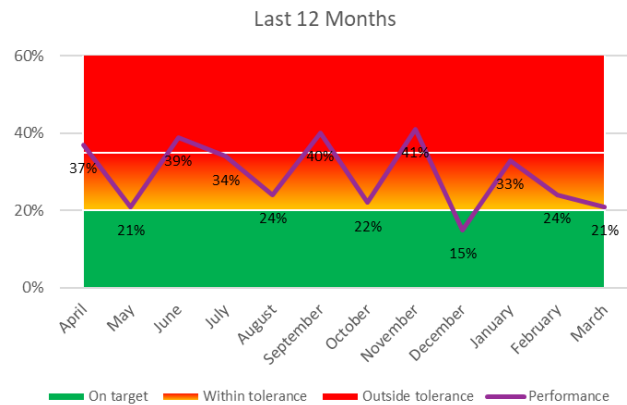### ICPCs within 15 days - Local v Comparators

Line chart from Apr-Jun 21 to Apr-Jun 2022:

Northamptonshire (purple): 77%, 85%, 81%, 85%, 85%

Legend: Northamptonshire / England / East Midlands / Statistical Neighbours
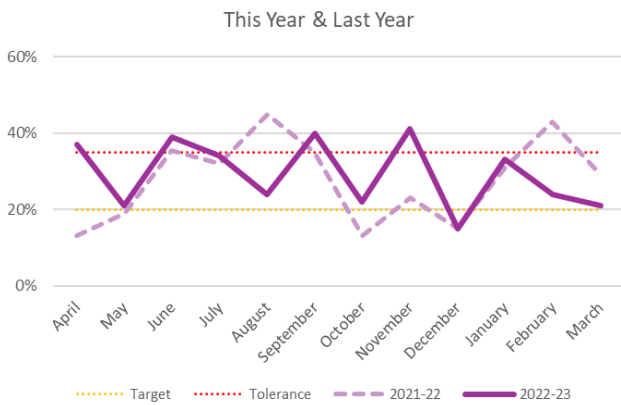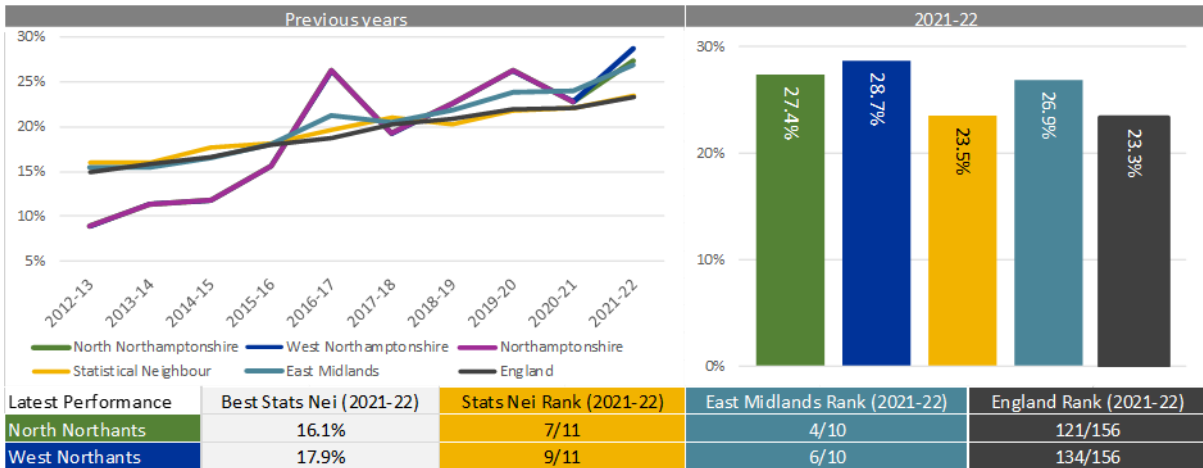
KPI 6 - % children that became the subject of a Child Protection Plan for the second or subsequent time

2022/23 Overview

This Year & Last Year

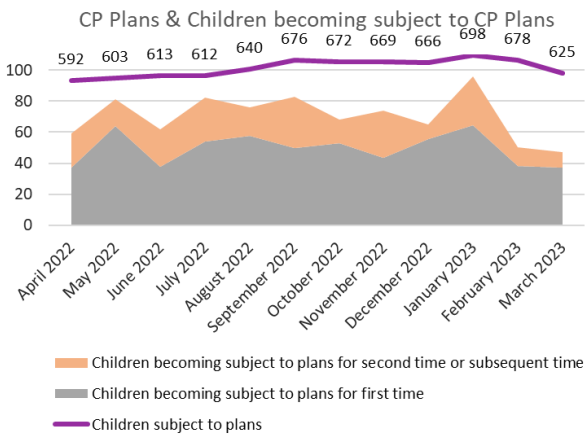Legend: Target / Tolerance / 2021-22 / 2022-23

Last 12 Months

Performance line (purple) April to March:
- 37%, 21%, 39%, 34%, 24%, 40%, 22%, 41%, 15%, 33%, 24%, 21%

Legend: On target / Within tolerance / Outside tolerance / Performance

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Benchmarking

Latest Performance	Best Stats Nei (2021-22)	Stats Nei Rank (2021-22)	East Midlands Rank (2021-22)	England Rank (2021-22)
North Northants	16.1%	7/11	4/10	121/156
West Northants	17.9%	9/11	6/10	134/156

Contextual data

CP Plans & Children becoming subject to CP Plans

- Children becoming subject to plans for second time or subsequent time
- Children becoming subject to plans for first time
- Children subject to plans

Families becoming subject to CP Plans - previously subject

- Families subject to plans before (0-2 years ago)
- Families subject to plans before (2+ years ago)

Repeat CP Plans (ever) - Local v Comparators

Northamptonshire — England — East Midlands — Statistical Neighbours

Repeat CP Plans (last 2 years) - Local v Comparators
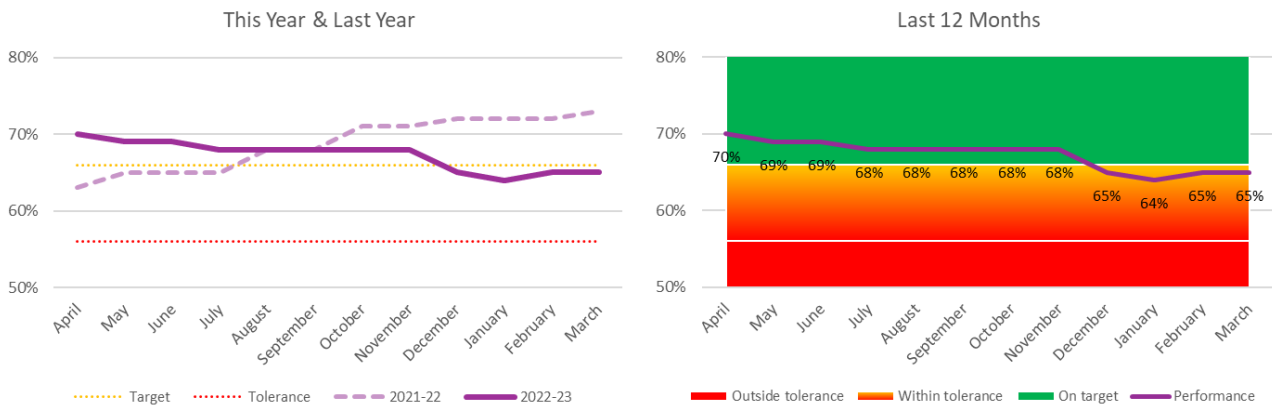
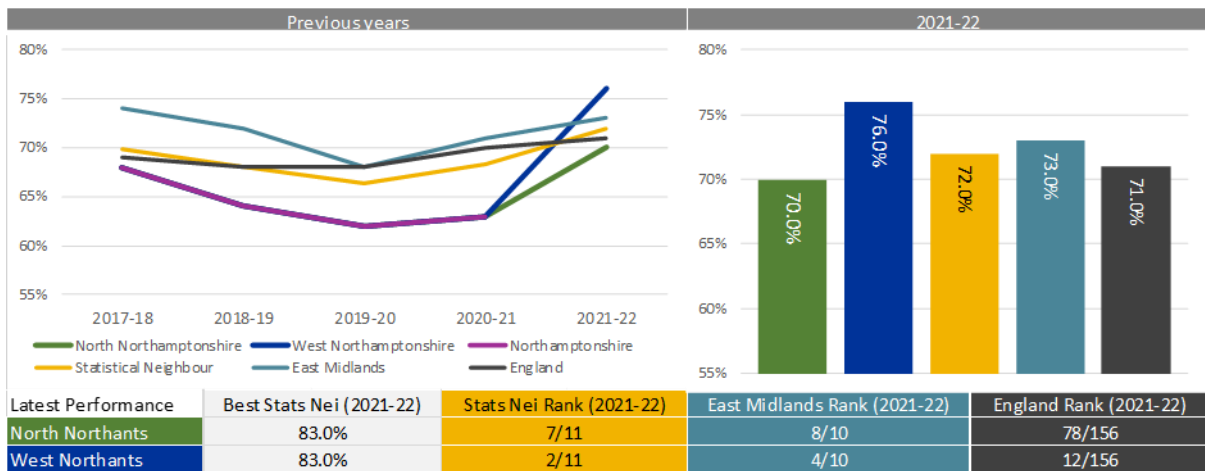Northamptonshire — England — East Midlands — Statistical Neighbours

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

This Year & Last Year

Last 12 Months

Benchmarking

Previous years

2021-22

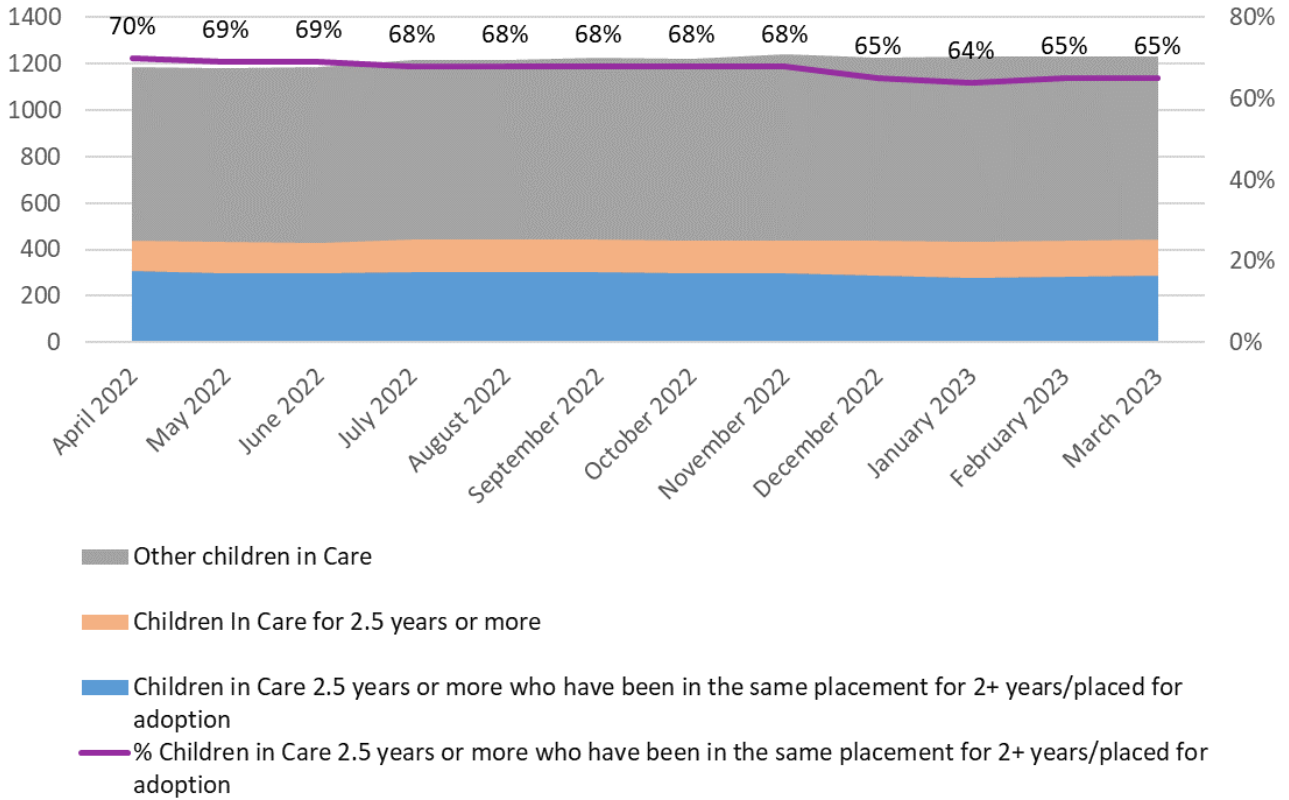| Latest Performance	Best Stats Nei (2021-22)	Stats Nei Rank (2021-22)	East Midlands Rank (2021-22)	England Rank (2021-22)
North Northants	83.0%	7/11	8/10	78/156
West Northants	83.0%	2/11	4/10	12/156

Contextual data

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

Values above the line (left to right): 70%, 69%, 69%, 68%, 68%, 68%, 68%, 68%, 65%, 64%, 65%, 65%

Legend:
- Other children in Care
- Children In Care for 2.5 years or more
- Children in Care 2.5 years or more who have been in the same placement for 2+ years/placed for adoption
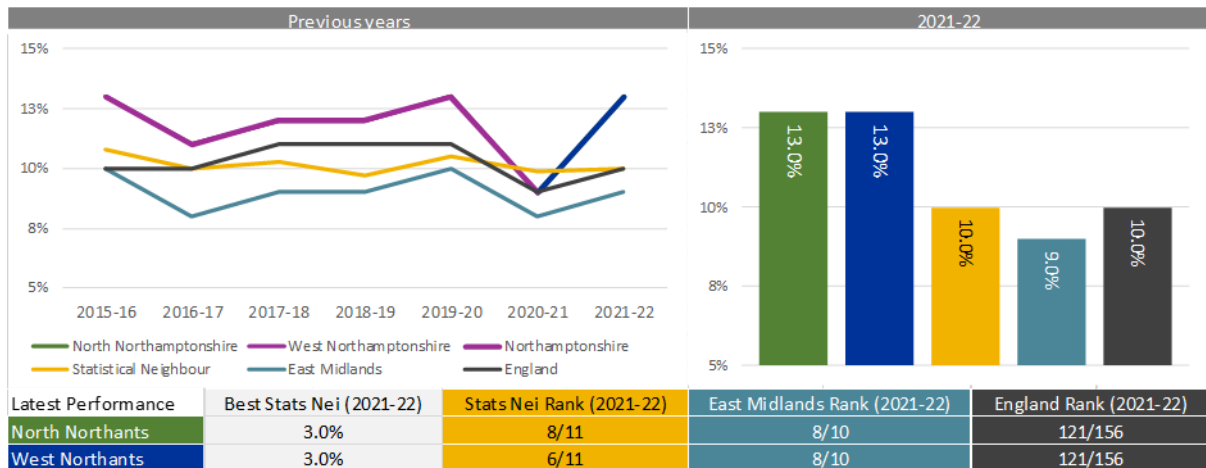- % Children in Care 2.5 years or more who have been in the same placement for 2+ years/placed for adoption

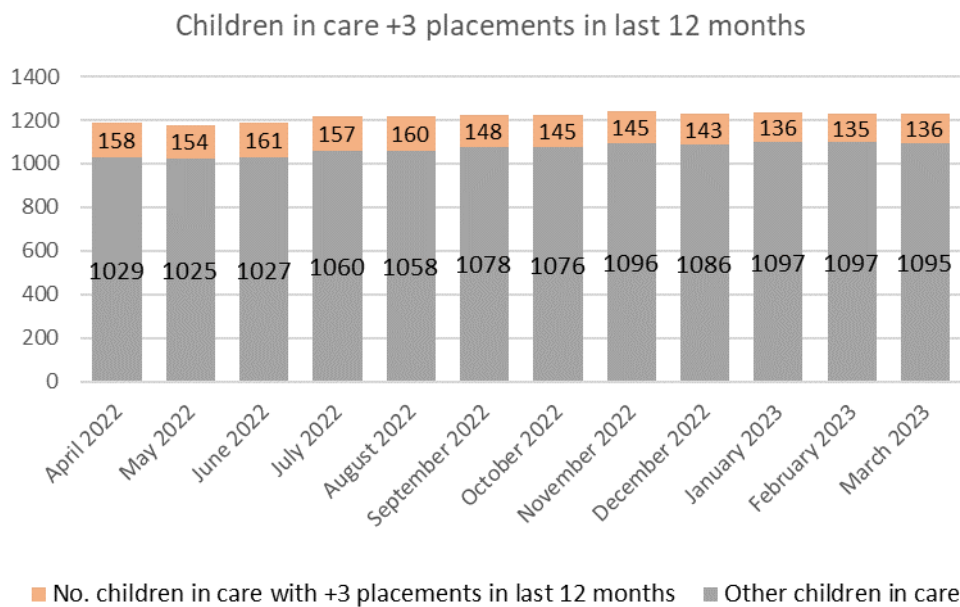## KPI 8 - % Children in Care with three or more placements in the previous 12 months
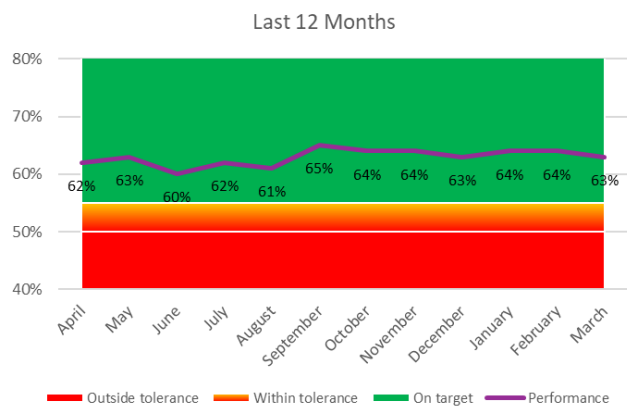
2022/23 Overview

This Year & Last Year

Legend: Target · Tolerance · 2021-22 · 2022-23

Last 12 Months

Values (left to right): 13%, 13%, 14%, 13%, 13%, 12%, 12%, 12%, 12%, 11%, 11%, 11%

Legend: On target · Within tolerance · Outside tolerance · Performance

Benchmarking

Previous years							2021-22				

Legend (Previous years chart):
North Northamptonshire · West Northamptonshire · Northamptonshire · Statistical Neighbour · East Midlands · England

2021-22 bars: North Northamptonshire 13.0%, West Northamptonshire 13.0%, Statistical Neighbour 10.0%, East Midlands 9.0%, England 10.0%

Latest Performance	Best Stats Nei (2021-22)	Stats Nei Rank (2021-22)	East Midlands Rank (2021-22)	England Rank (2021-22)
North Northants	3.0%	8/11	8/10	121/156
West Northants	3.0%	6/11	8/10	121/156

Contextual data

Children in care +3 placements in last 12 months

	April 2022	May 2022	June 2022	July 2022	August 2022	September 2022	October 2022	November 2022	December 2022	January 2023	February 2023	March 2023
No. children in care with +3 placements in last 12 months	158	154	161	157	160	148	145	145	143	136	135	136
Other children in care	1029	1025	1027	1060	1058	1078	1076	1096	1086	1097	1097	1095

■ No. children in care with +3 placements in last 12 months   ■ Other children in care

47

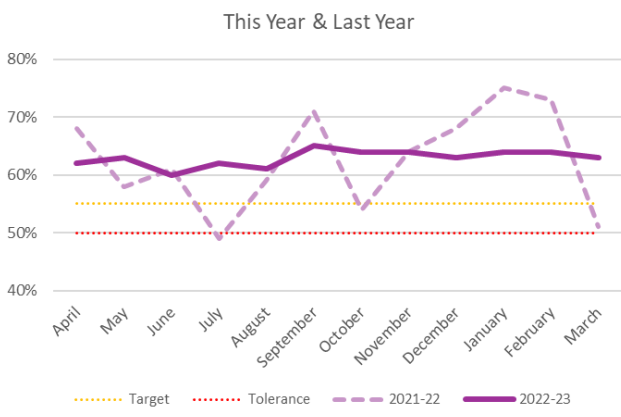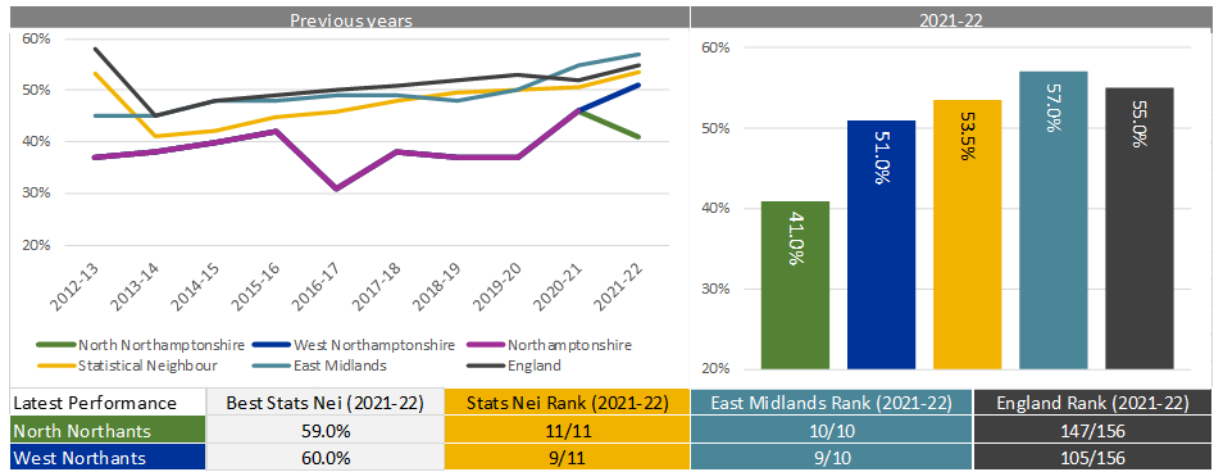**KPI 9 - % young people aged 17-21 in employment, education or training who were looked after when aged 16**

2022/23 Overview

Benchmarking
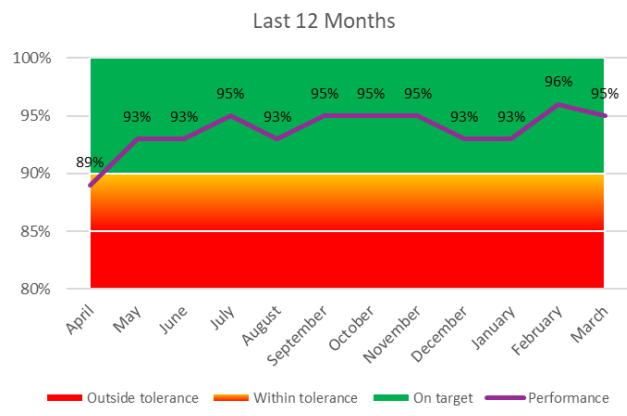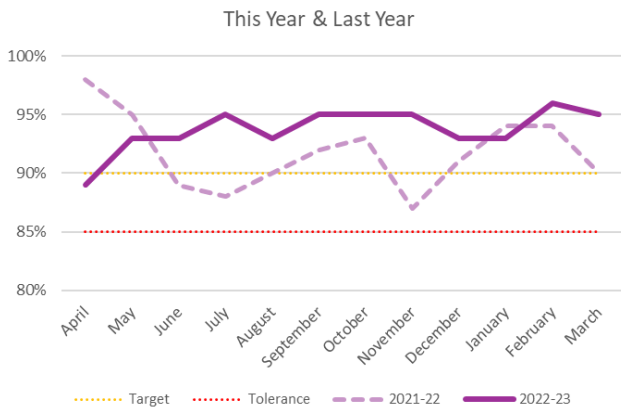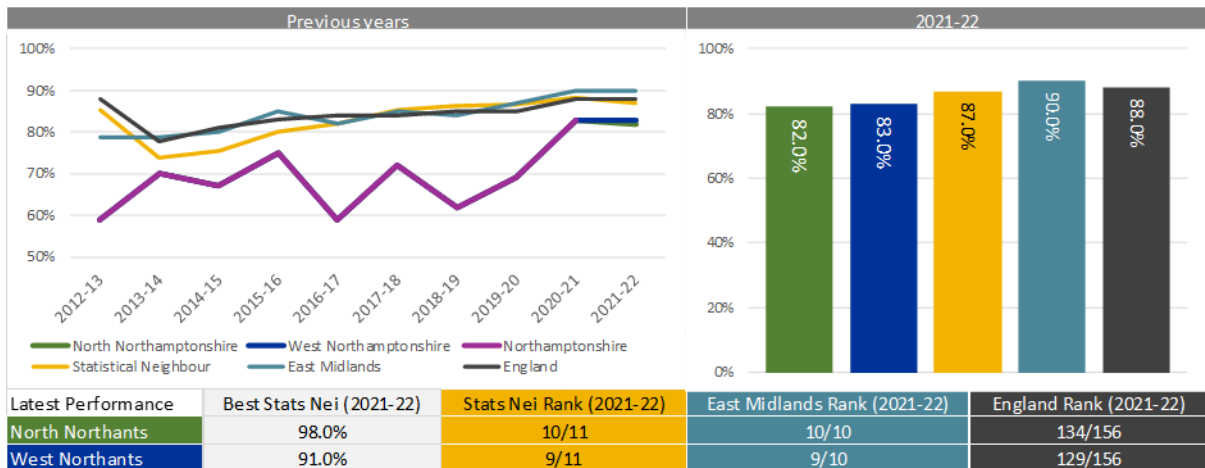

Latest Performance	Best Stats Nei (2021-22)	Stats Nei Rank (2021-22)	East Midlands Rank (2021-22)	England Rank (2021-22)
North Northants	59.0%	11/11	10/10	147/156
West Northants	60.0%	9/11	9/10	105/156

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

2022/23 Overview

Benchmarking

Latest Performance	Best Stats Nei (2021-22)	Stats Nei Rank (2021-22)	East Midlands Rank (2021-22)	England Rank (2021-22)
North Northants	98.0%	10/11	10/10	134/156
West Northants	91.0%	9/11	9/10	129/156

KPI 11 - % qualified social workers with caseloads above target

2022/23 Overview

Benchmarking

Northamptonshire		Statistical Neighbours		East Midlands		England	
Best Stats Nei (2020-21		Rank (2020-21)		Rank (2020-21)		Rank (2020-21)	

Contextual data

Qualified social workers with caseloads above target

Legend:
- Workers with caseloads above the target in Safeguarding Teams
- Workers with caseloads above the target in Assessment Teams
- Workers with caseloads above the target in LAC Teams
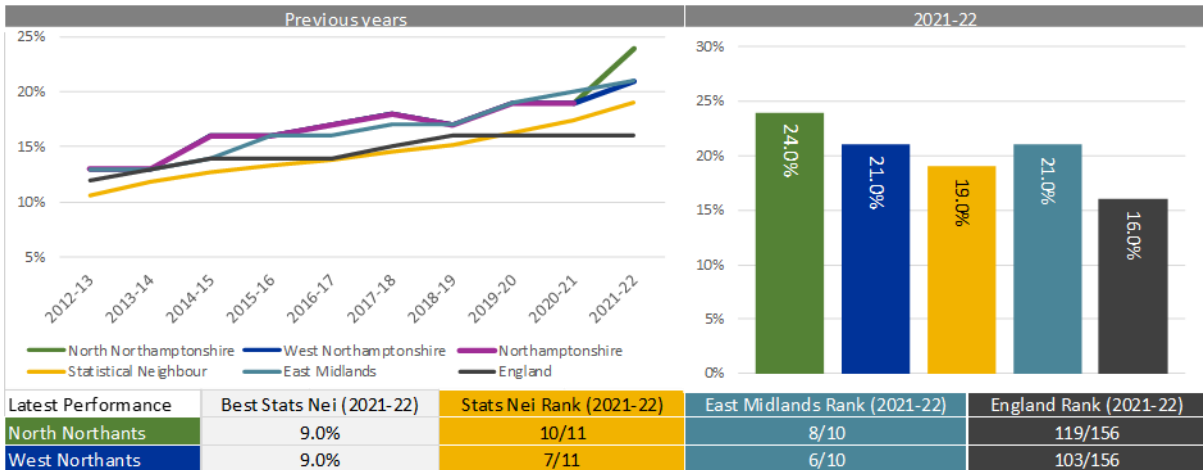- % of qualified social workers with caseloads above target

KPI 12 - % of children placed more than 20 miles from their homes, outside LA boundary
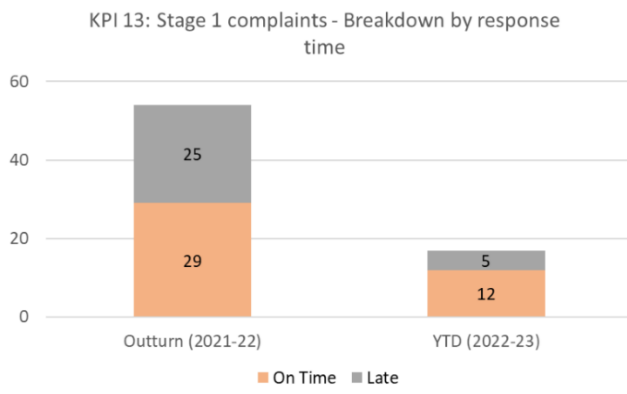
2022/23 Overview

This Year & Next Year

Legend: Target, Tolerance, 2021-22, 2022-23

Last 12 Months

Legend: On target, Within tolerance, Outside tolerance, Performance

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Benchmarking

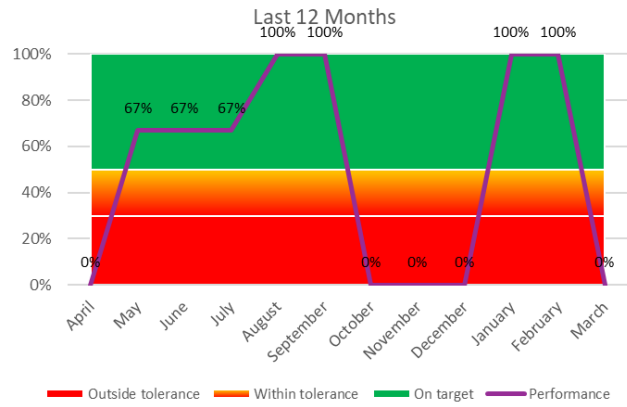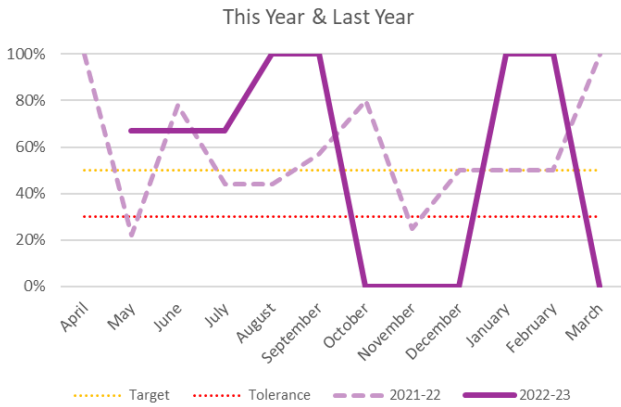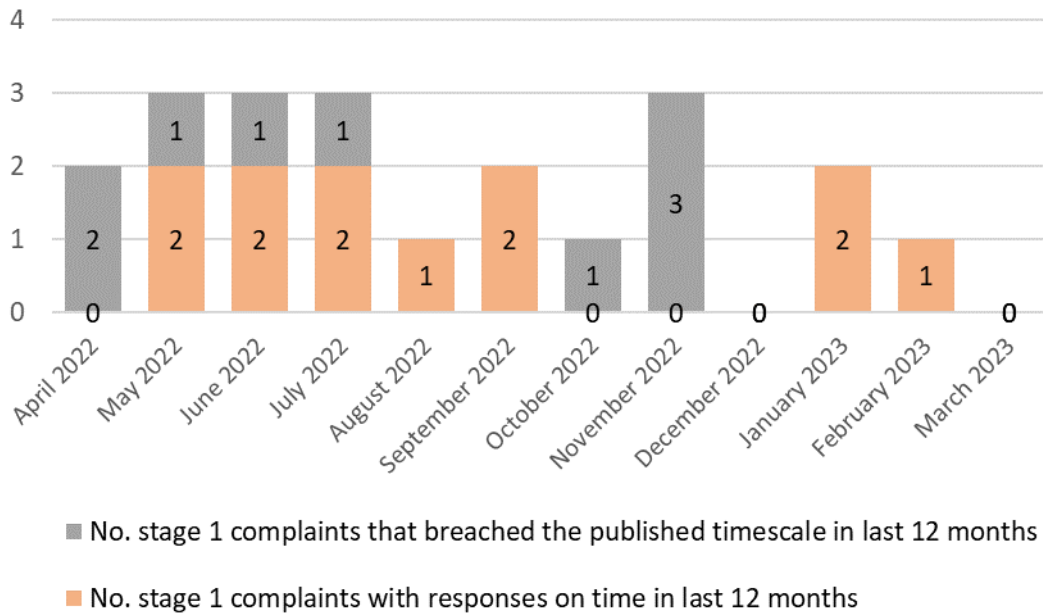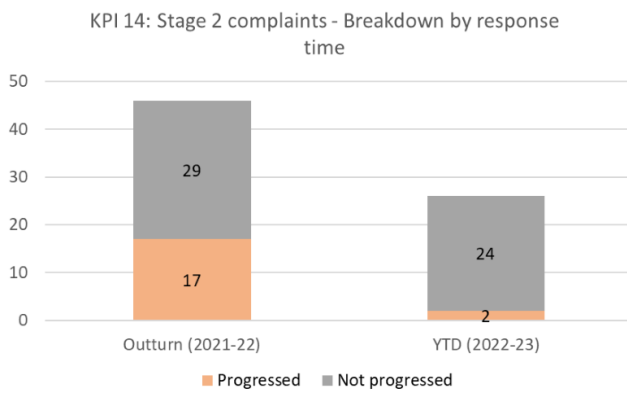| Latest Performance	Best Stats Nei (2021-22)	Stats Nei Rank (2021-22)	East Midlands Rank (2021-22)	England Rank (2021-22)
North Northants	9.0%	10/11	8/10	119/156
West Northants	9.0%	7/11	6/10	103/156
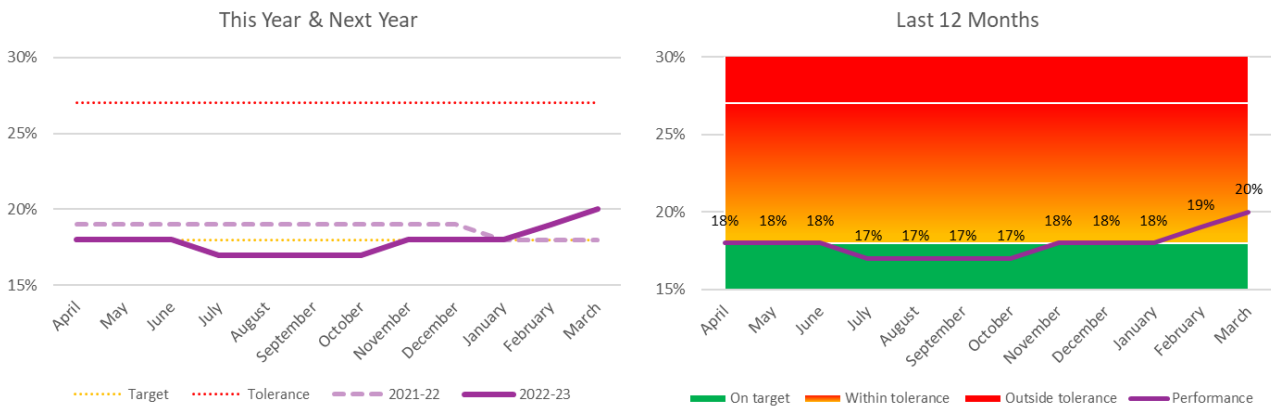
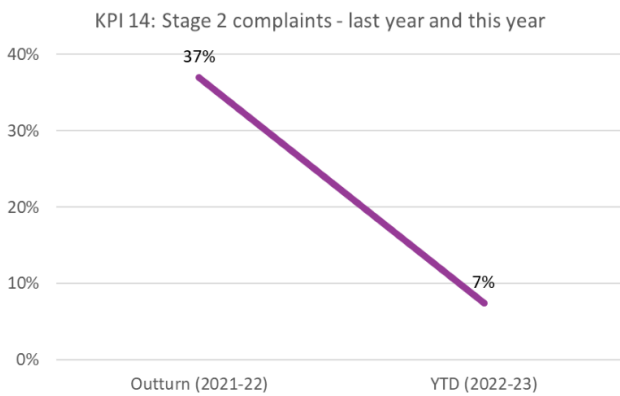## KPI 13 - % stage 1 complaints responded to within 10 working days

2022/23 Overview
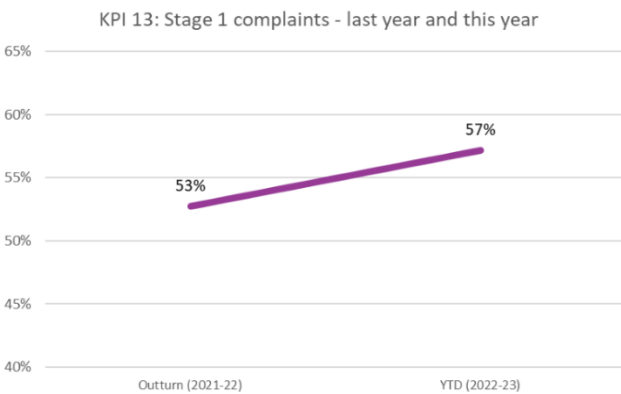
Stage 1 complaints in the last 12 months

■ No. stage 1 complaints that breached the published timescale in last 12 months

■ No. stage 1 complaints with responses on time in last 12 months
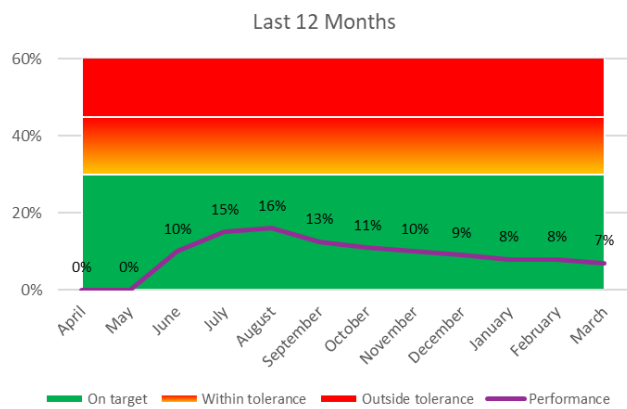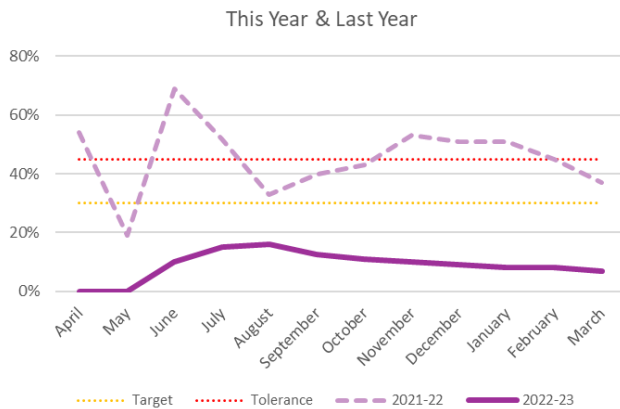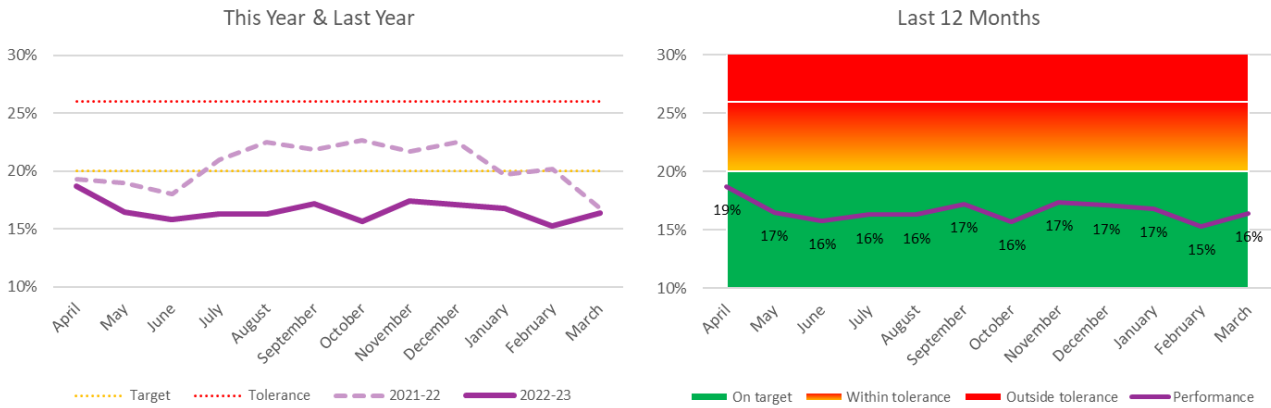
KPI 14 - Stage 2 investigations as a % of stage 1 complaints received within the year

2022/23 Overview

This Year & Last Year

······· Target ······· Tolerance ═ ═ 2021-22 ── 2022-23

Last 12 Months

■ On target ■ Within tolerance ■ Outside tolerance ── Performance

KPI 14: Stage 2 complaints - last year and this year

KPI 14: Stage 2 complaints - Breakdown by response time
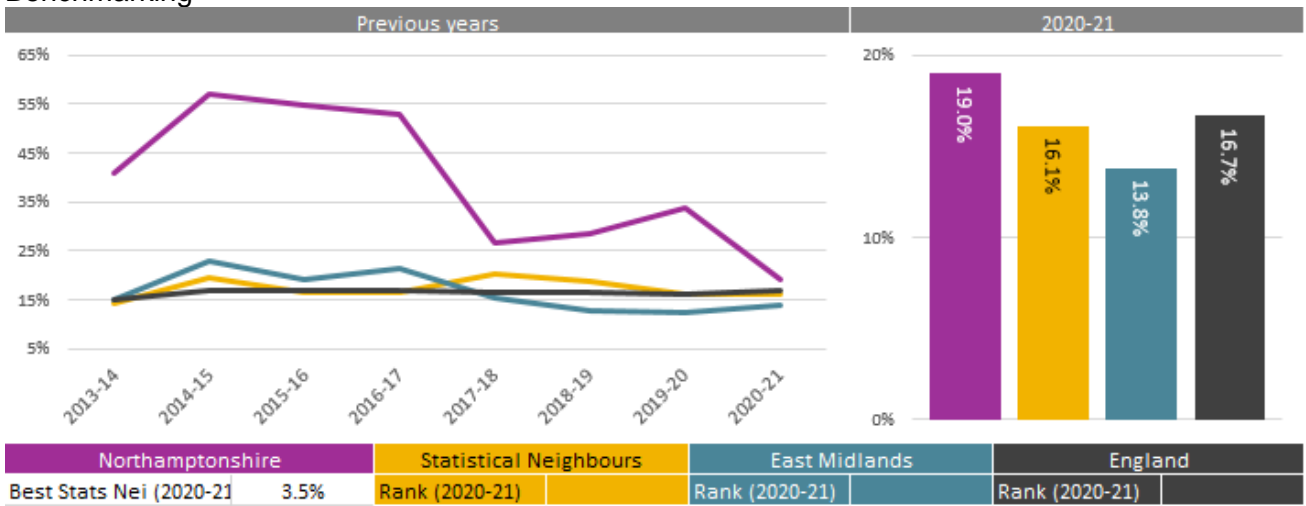
■ Progressed ■ Not progressed

52

KPI 16 - % social worker vacancies

2022/23 Overview

Benchmarking

Northamptonshire		Statistical Neighbours		East Midlands		England	
Best Stats Nei (2020-21	3.5%	Rank (2020-21)		Rank (2020-21)		Rank (2020-21)	

53

Contextual data

Social Worker vacancies in the last 12 months

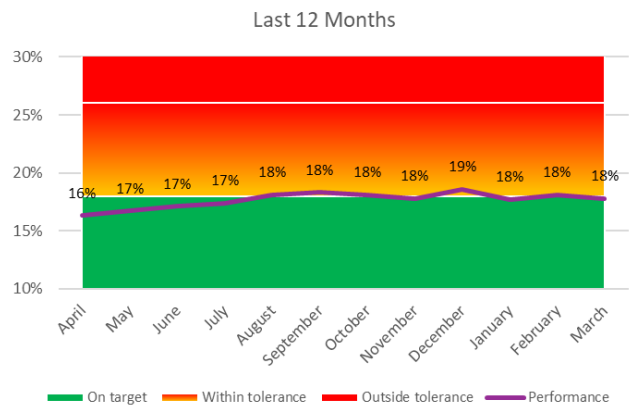Legend: No. Children Social Care caseload — % Social Worker posts filled with agency staff
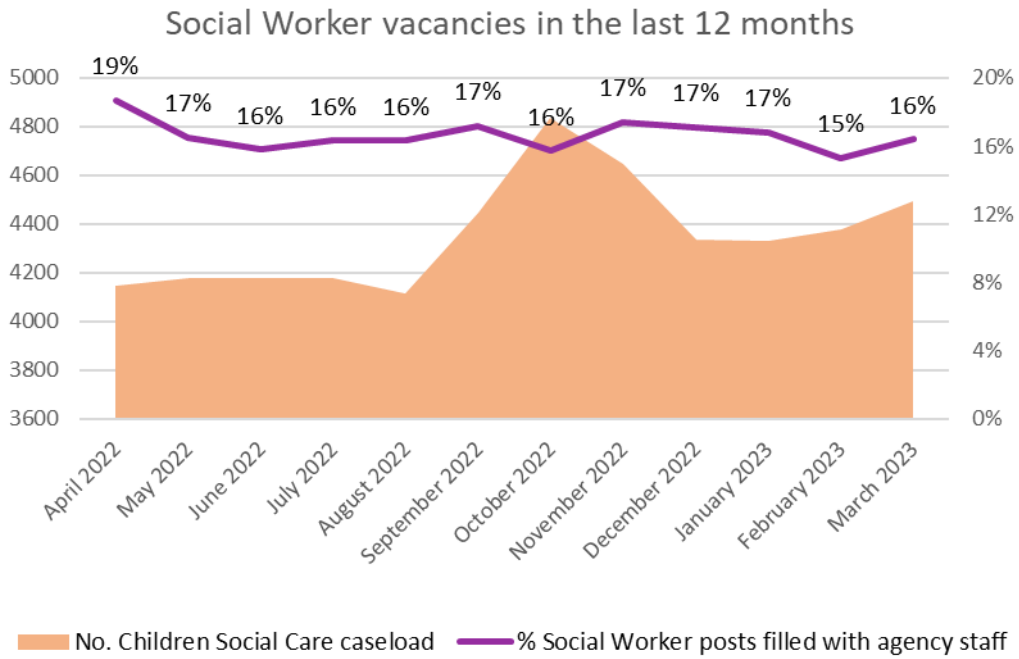
KPI 17 - % Social Worker posts filled with agency staff

2022/23 Overview

This Year & Last Year

Legend: Target — Tolerance — 2021-22 — 2022-23

Last 12 Months

Legend: On target — Within tolerance — Outside tolerance — Performance
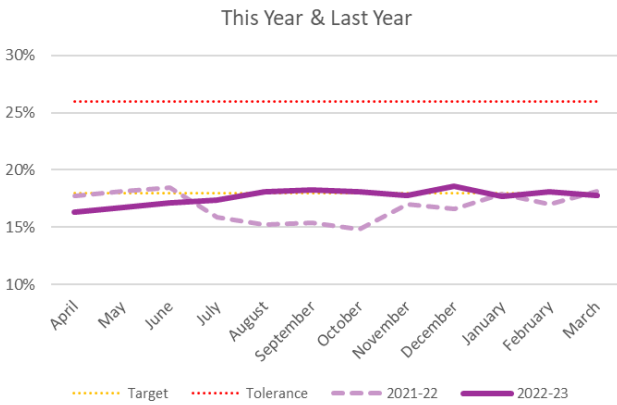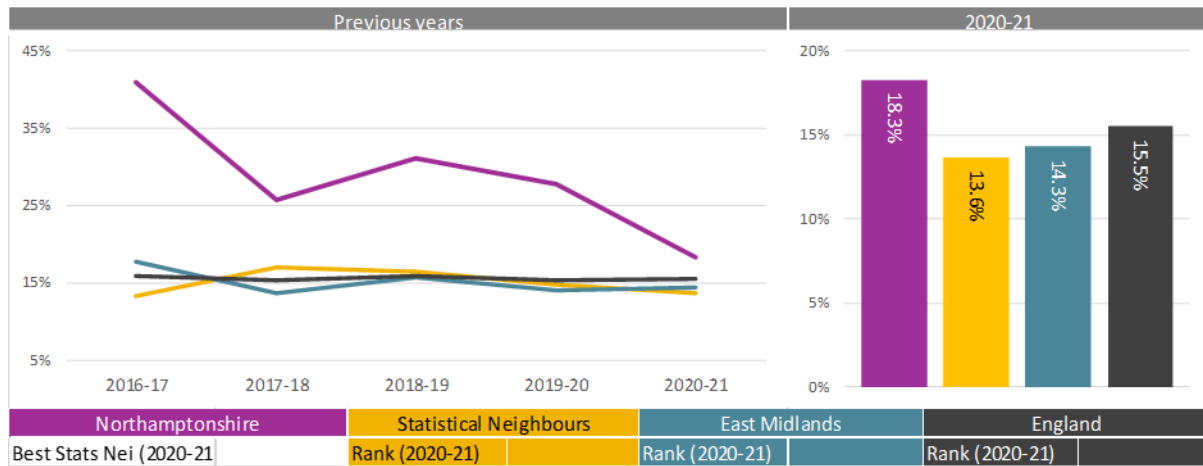
Benchmarking

Contextual data

Social Worker vacancies filled with agency staff in the last 12 months
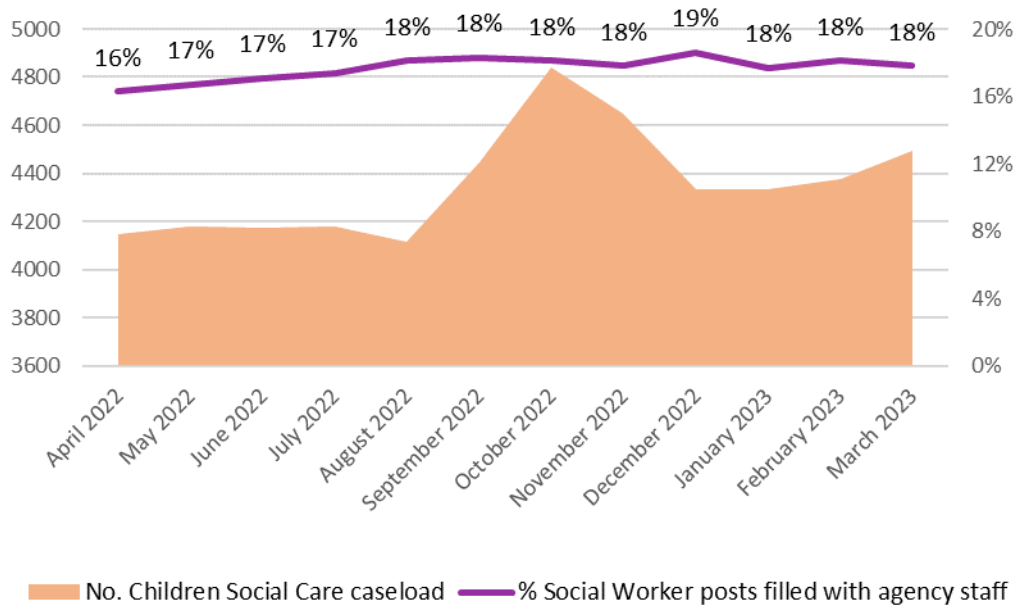
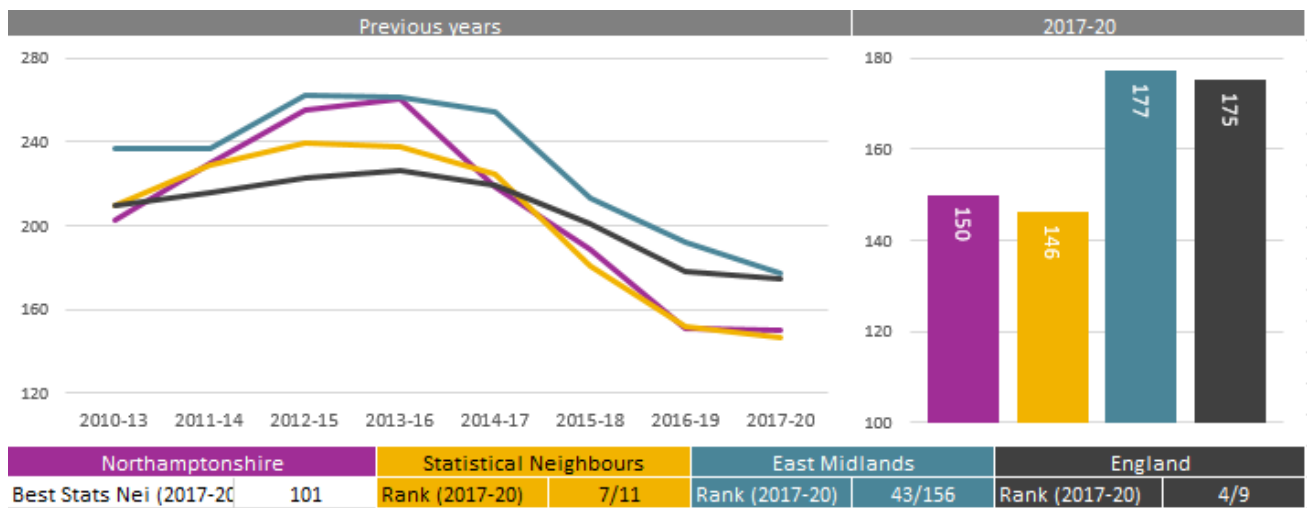Legend: No. Children Social Care caseload — % Social Worker posts filled with agency staff

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

2022/23 Overview

This Year & Last Year

Legend: Target · Tolerance · 2021-22 · 2022-23

Last 24 Months

192, 251, 86, 86, 144, 97, 102, 145

Legend: On target · Within tolerance · Outside tolerance · Performance

Benchmarking

Previous years		2017-20	

150, 146, 177, 175

Northamptonshire		Statistical Neighbours		East Midlands		England	
Best Stats Nei (2017-20)	101	Rank (2017-20)	7/11	Rank (2017-20)	43/156	Rank (2017-20)	4/9

Contextual data

Adoption orders granted in the last 12 months

June 2022: 24, 5; September 2022: 35, 9; December 2022: 44, 7; March 2023: 35, 9

Legend: No. children exiting care · No. adoption orders granted

Average days between LA placing a child and deciding on a match

144, 97, 102, 145

Legend: Avg. days between children entering care and being placed for adoption · Avg. days between the LA receiving court authority to place a child and deciding on a match

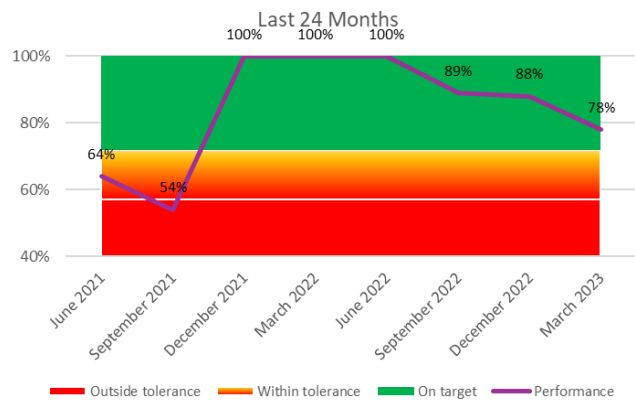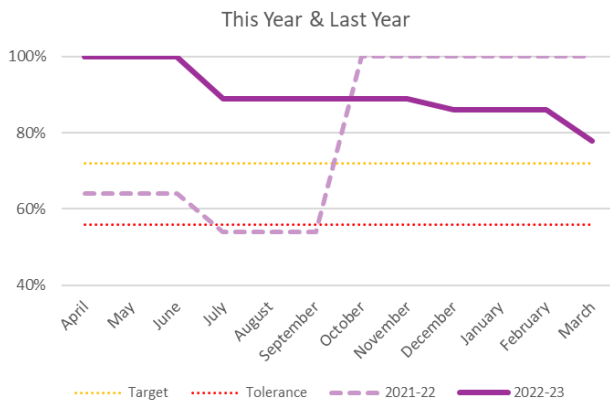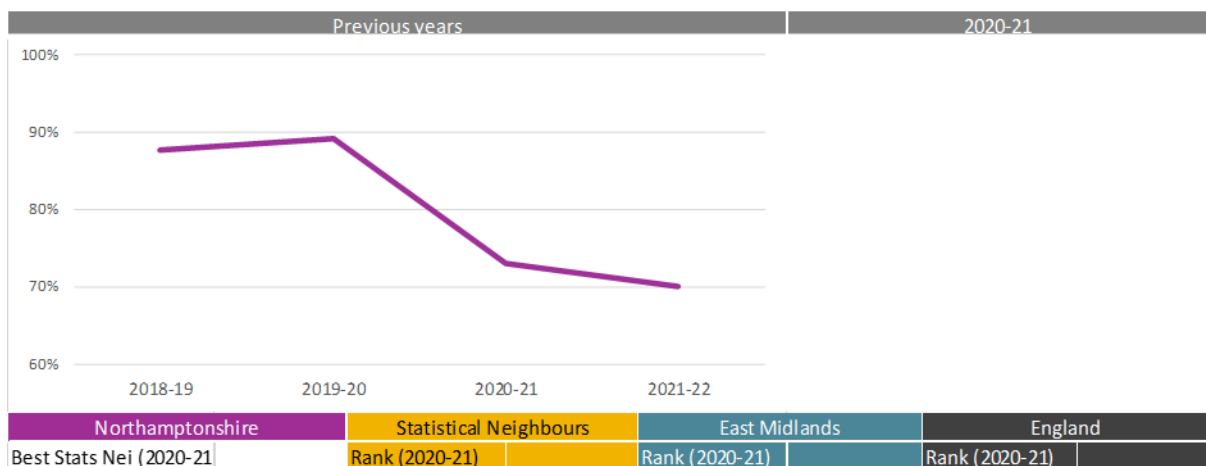**KPI 19 - % children in care placed for adoption within 12 months of an agency decision that they should be adopted**

2022/23 Overview

Benchmarking

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

2022/23 Overview
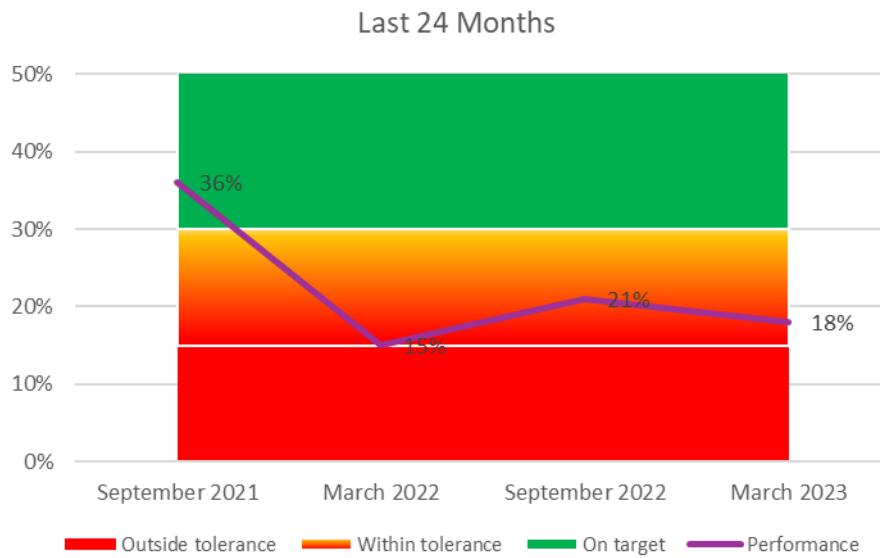
Benchmarking

Children leaving care due to permanence

Legend:
- No. children exiting care
- No. children exiting care for permanence

Month	No. children exiting care	No. children exiting care for permanence
April 2022	40	7
May 2022	35	8
June 2022	24	5
July 2022	20	4
August 2022	21	6
September 2022	35	6
October 2022	37	6
November 2022	31	5
December 2022	44	11
January 2023	42	4
February 2023	34	7
March 2023	35	8
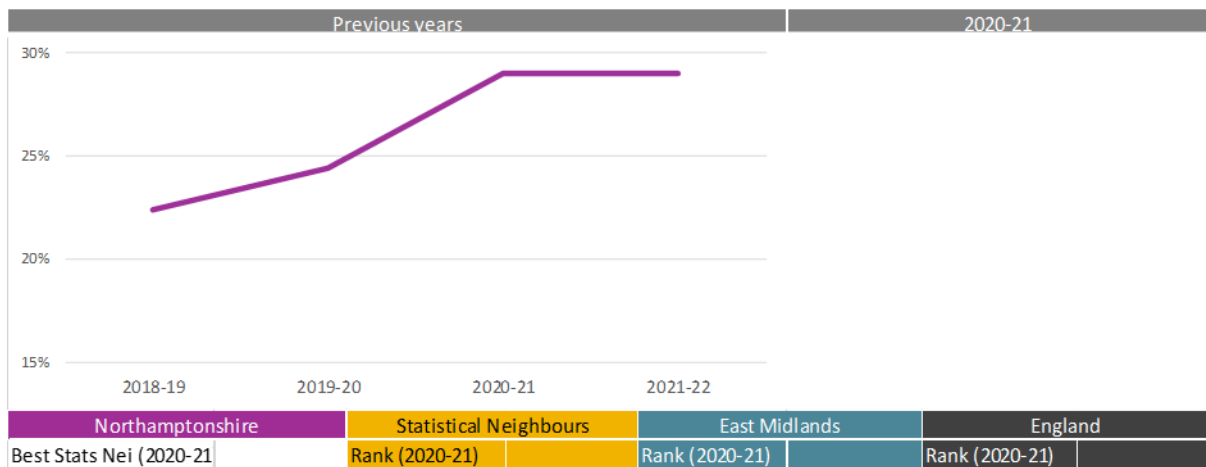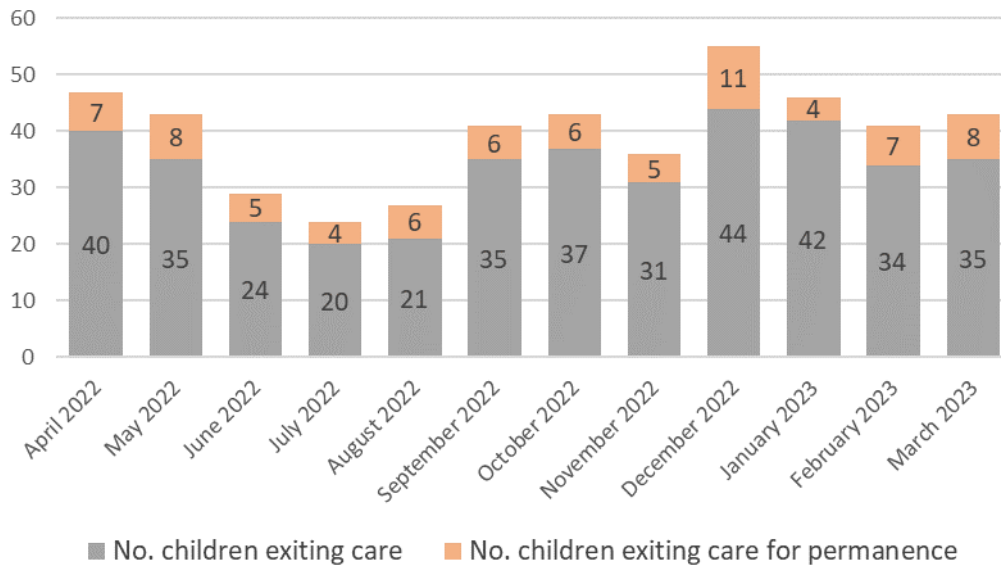
Appendix 2 – Supporting data analysis and NCT Performance Scorecard as at March 2023

Children in Care

2022/23 Overview

Children in Care rate (per 10,000) - This Year & Last Year

- - - 2021-22 ——— 2022-23

Children in Care rate (per 10,000) in the last 12 months

Benchmarking

Latest Performance	Best Stats Nei (2021-22)	Stats Nei Rank (2021-22)	East Midlands Rank (2021-22)	England Rank (2021-22)
North Northants	36.0%	9/11	8/10	n/a
West Northants	36.0%	9/11	8/10	n/a

Contextual data

Children in Care with up to date visits

No. children in care   ——— % children in care with up to date visits

Children exiting & entering care in the last 12 months

No. children entering care   No. children exiting care

Separated Children

Benchmarking

Latest Performance	Best Stats Nei (2021-22)	Stats Nei Rank (2021-22)	East Midlands Rank (2021-22)	England Rank (2021-22)
North Northants	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
West Northants	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
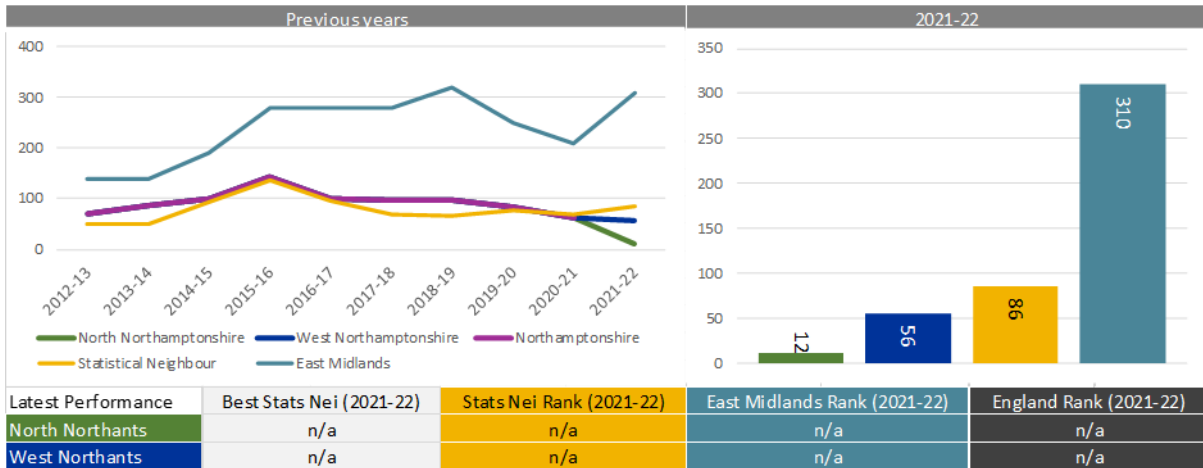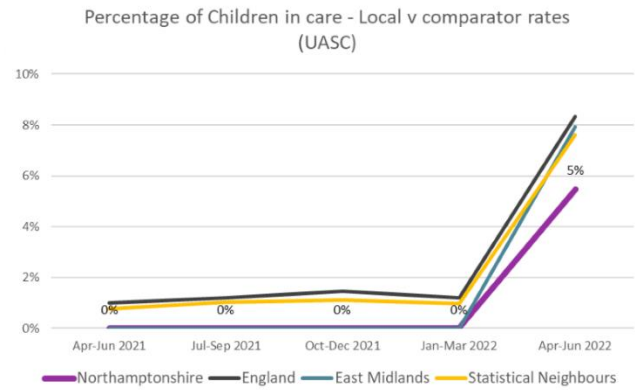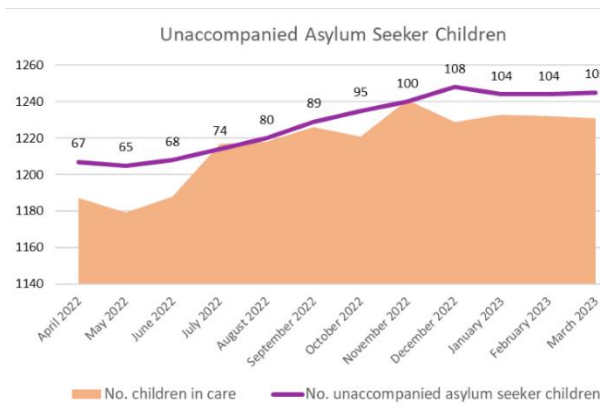
Contextual data

Child Protection Plans

2022/23 Overview
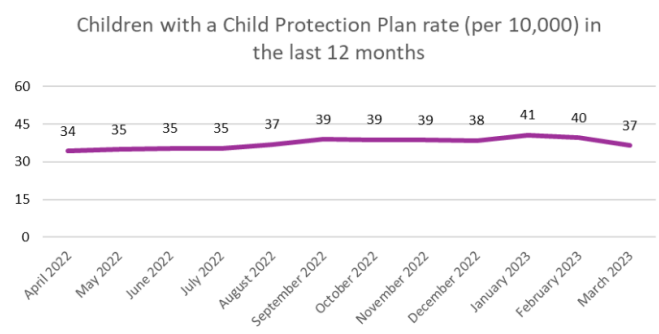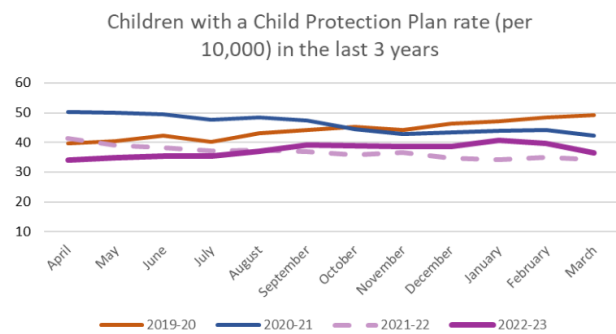
Benchmarking

Contextual data

Child Protection Plans
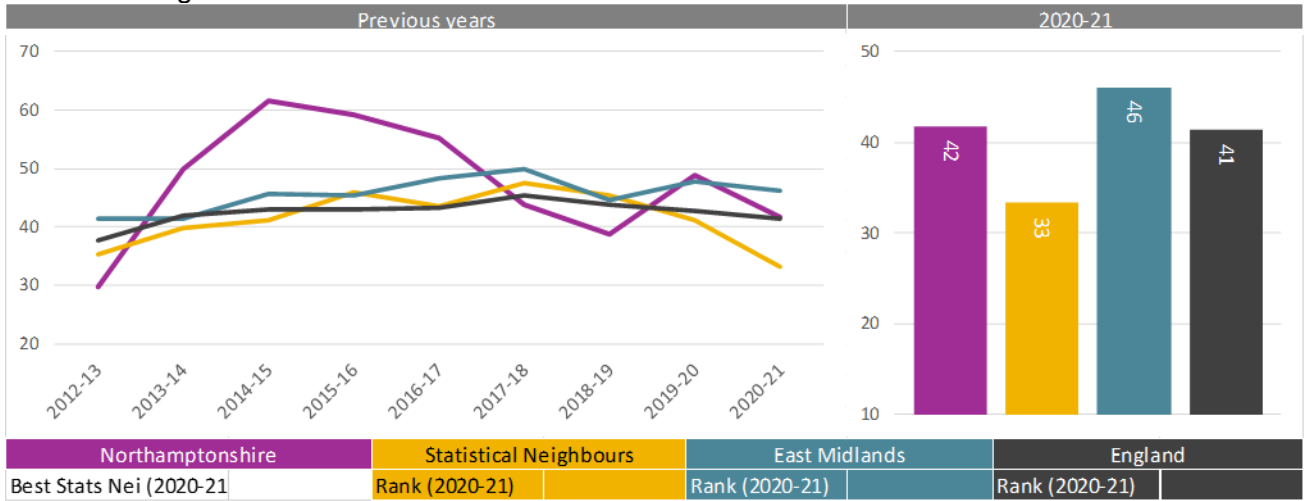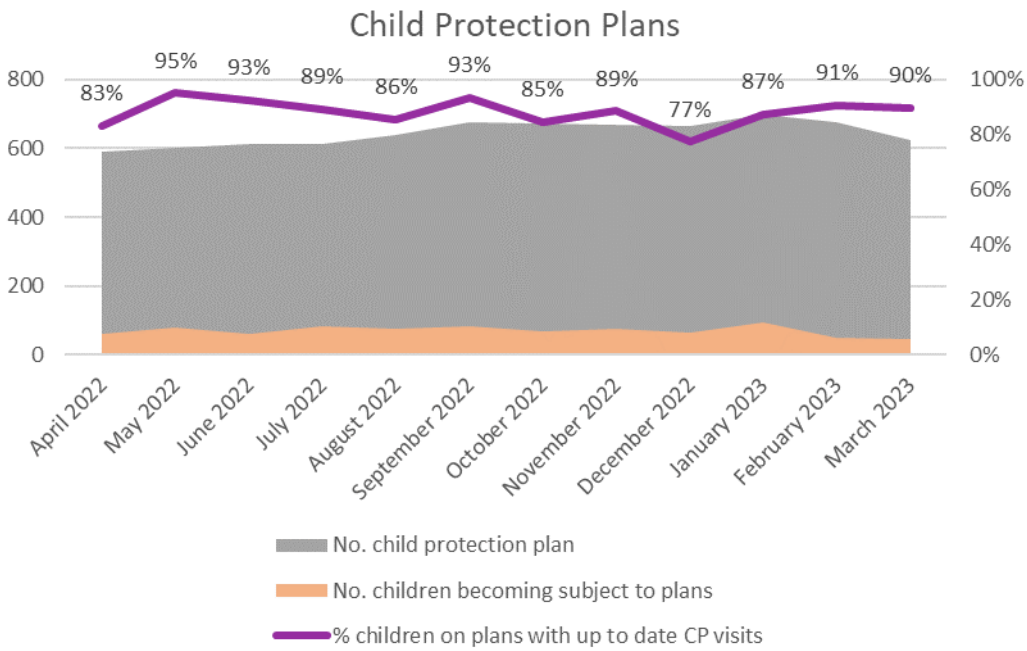
Children in Need

2022/23 Overview

Number of children in need in the last 12 months

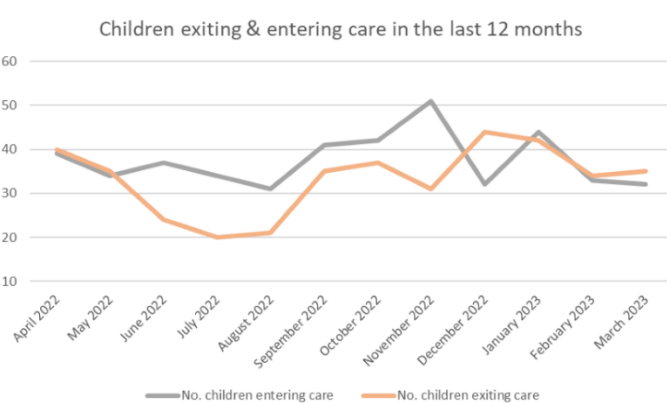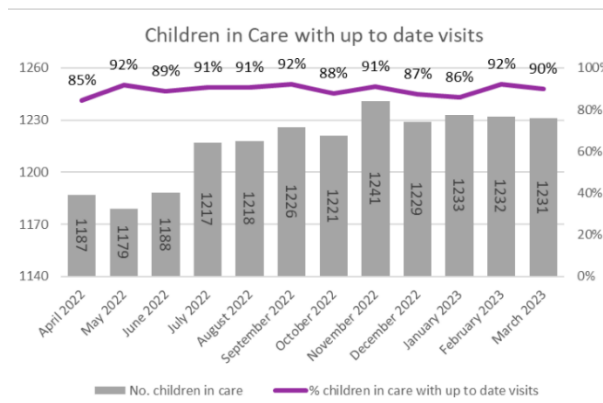| Month	Value
April 2022	1596
May 2022	1548
June 2022	1528
July 2022	1538
August 2022	1487
September 2022	1534
October 2022	1599
November 2022	1627
December 2022	1591
January 2023	1549
February 2023	1641
March 2023	1690

Benchmarking

	Previous years		2021-22
Northamptonshire	Statistical Neighbours	East Midlands	England
Best Stats Nei (2021-22	Rank (2021-22)	Rank (2021-22)	Rank (2021-22)

2021-22 values: Northamptonshire 282, Statistical Neighbours 293, East Midlands 290, England 321

Contextual data

Children In Need with up to date CIN visits

Legend: No. children in need — % children in need with up to date CIN visits

Data labels on the purple line: 74%, 84%, 79%, 80%, 82%, 83%, 75%, 73%, 72%, 78%, 82%, 77%

X-axis: April 2022, May 2022, June 2022, July 2022, August 2022, September 2022, October 2022, November 2022, December 2022, January 2023, February 2023, March 2023

Left Y-axis: 1350, 1400, 1450, 1500, 1550, 1600, 1650, 1700, 1750

Right Y-axis: 60%, 80%, 100%

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 form 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/profiteering 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:

- o 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.

- o This assessment has taken account of the relative materiality of these areas and management's response to agreed actions.

- o 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	• 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	• 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	• 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.

			APPENDIX A					
Assignment	**Audit Status**	**Assurance Rating**			**Recommendations**			
		Control Environment	**Compliance**	**Org Impact**	**E**	**I**	**S**	**Key findings / Comments**
								• 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	• 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				• 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	• 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						Strategic level review • 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 | | | APPENDIX A |
		Control Environment	Compliance	Org Impact	E	I	S	Key findings / Comments
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							