



Northamptonshire Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report

2020–2021

“What we do today affects your tomorrow, we promise to walk side by side with you.”

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Foreword



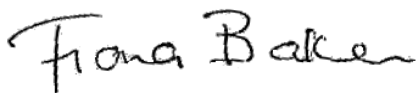
Welcome to the Annual Report of the Northamptonshire Corporate Parenting Board. This report covers the financial year from April 2020 to March 2021, but also discusses more recent developments as we continue to promote the very best outcomes for our children in care and those moving onto to independent adulthood. Bringing a child into the care system is one of the most serious decisions a local authority can make, so as corporate parents we must deliver the same level of care and support we would want for our own children. This responsibility is expressed through the Board's Pledge to Children in Care and Care Leavers and reflects the seven Principles of Corporate Parenting set out in legislation.

It has been a challenging year, with the pandemic continuing to bring massive changes to the way we work and the move to two unitary councils fundamentally changing our structure and governance. The formation of a Trust covering the whole county has however enabled continuity for children's social care, while bringing great opportunities and benefits. There is across the Trust the feeling of a fresh start and a renewed sense of purpose, promoted by our Chief Executive Officer Colin Foster's determination to engage directly with staff through regular staff briefings. Our response to the pandemic has been robust, with individual risk assessments and strong multi-agency collaboration ensuring the needs of every child are met. Lockdown accelerated our adoption of new ways of working with each other and our partners, and our staff deserve an enormous amount of the credit for the resilience and tenacity they have shown.

During their monitoring visit in February 2021, Ofsted recognised that our "stable and committed leadership" had made steady improvements for children in care, including disabled children, and our workforce development strategy had helped to achieve lower caseloads for frontline social workers. It was particularly pleasing that Ofsted recognised how we have used the voice of children and young people to develop our services, especially through our Children in Care and Care Leavers Councils.

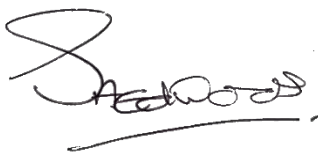
Considerable challenges remain however, as some children still experience too many changes of social worker, and the Board itself needs further development. Since the local elections in May, the Board has a totally new retinue of elected members who were introduced to their new responsibilities through an engaging training session led by our Assistant Director of Corporate Parenting. Shortly after the elections, every councillor received a leaflet setting out their corporate parenting responsibilities. Board councillors will take a much more proactive role, engaging directly with our workforce and children and young people. We are also delighted that we will soon have a care-experienced young person acting as a full member of the Board, and we anticipate that they will bring a fresh and challenging perspective to our work.

Finally, as we look forward to building on the improvements we have already made, we would like to take this opportunity to extend a warm thanks to all of the former elected members of Board who have worked tirelessly to improve outcomes for our children and young people.



Fiona Baker,

West Northamptonshire Council's Executive Member for Children, Families, Education and Skills and Chair of the Northamptonshire Corporate Parenting Board.



Scott Edwards

Council's Executive Member for Children, Families, Education and Skills and Chair of the Northamptonshire Corporate Parenting Board.

Executive Summary

Northamptonshire's Corporate Parenting Board provides oversight and challenge to services for children in care and care leavers. It is made up of elected members from West Northamptonshire Council (WNC) and North Northamptonshire Council (NNC), Northamptonshire Children's Trust officers, and representatives from partner agencies. The Board is not a statutory body, but carries out a number of oversight duties that are required by legislation. Although the former eight councils within the county have been replaced by two new unitary councils, the Board remains a single entity covering the whole of Northamptonshire. Children's services also continue to be delivered across the county by a single entity, the Trust, which is owned by both councils but has independent leadership. The move to a Trust has brought many benefits, including a renewed sense of purpose among staff and continuity for our children and young people. Progress we have made on our improvement journey can be seen in detail in Appendix 2. The Trust also continues to embed and promote the Signs of Safety methodology. This whole-system approach to social work focusses on building strengths and relationships with children and families. Find out more at [Signs of Safety online](#).

The Covid-19 pandemic brought immense challenges to children's services in the county, but also a suite of benefits. A range of measures, including dynamic risk assessments and multi-agency leadership meetings, helped ensure every child and young person open to our services was safe and continued to receive the best possible service. Lockdown accelerated our adoption of technology, sickness levels decreased and staff reported their appreciation for strong communication and leadership from senior management. Successful measures introduced to stabilise accommodation placements during lockdown are now being assimilated into everyday practice. As the country recovers and moves to towards something like normality, face to face contact with all children and families is again our default way of working.

The Board continues to oversee services through the lens of the Pledge to Children in Care and Care Leavers. This is a set of promises we have made directly to our children and young people and it broadly covers the areas of health, accommodation, relationships, education, moving on to independence and participation. Health services have of course been under huge pressure due to Covid-19 and the timeliness of health assessments has been variable as a result. However, the quality of these

assessments remains very high, reasons for late assessments are well understood and colleagues are working hard to improve efficiency. Our multi-agency specialist health teams provide a wide range of services to children and young people, particularly in regards to emotional wellbeing and mental health. Much focus remains on meeting the health needs of particular cohorts of children, including those living out of county, children from overseas who are separated from their families and those at risk of exploitation.

Children and young people need a safe, stable home in order to thrive and in recent years we have tenaciously promoted permanence for all children at the earliest possible stage. Placement breakdowns have decreased and we have seen increasing numbers of children leaving care due to having a permanent arrangement, such as a special guardianship order. Most of our children in care live in a family environment, many of those with extended family members. Only around a quarter of children in care are living out of the county which compares well with our statistical neighbours. New Resilience Foster Carers are helping to provide high level care in-county for children with complex issues and we have increased the scrutiny upon placements that are not regulated by Ofsted.

Coming into care can have a profound impact on children's relationships with the people and places that are important to them, and we know that having a trusted adult to turn to can mitigate the effects of trauma in early life. Lockdown opened up new ways of facilitating contact for children with their workers and families but we have now returned to face to face contact as the default option. Our stable team of Independent Reviewing Officers and our increasing numbers of Independent Visitors provide children and young people with consistent adults who will listen to them, provide mentorship and act on their behalf to challenge the services they receive. Developments within our workforce have meant lower caseloads for social workers and personal advisers, meaning they can devote more time to doing what they do best: working with children and young people. *How* we do this is of course of paramount importance, and the Signs of Safety methodology helps us meet children's needs by building relationships with them and their families.

As with the Trust, Northamptonshire's Virtual School remains a single entity covering the whole county, promoting the educational attainment of children and young people. This means challenging education settings and the Trust where necessary, ensuring Personal Education Plans are aspirational, scrutinising

the use of government funding and providing a range of training and participation activities.

As children in care move on to independence, they receive a high level of support from our specialist leaving care teams. Personal advisers work with young people to develop an individual pathway plan which sets out their needs, future goals and how to achieve them. Complementing the Signs of Safety approach, we have adopted the New Belongings programme, which simply means utilising the experience and knowledge of young people themselves to help develop our services. Two care-experienced young people have joined the services as Apprentice Champions, one focussed on accommodation, the other on emotional wellbeing. A huge range of support is available for these young people, such as financial support for education equipment, help with preparing for job interviews, wellbeing sessions, the Independent Living Programme and support with finding a place to live. We have also secured agreement for care leavers to be exempt from council tax up to the age of 25. All such support is set out in the Local Offer to Care Leavers, available online. We continue to compare well with statistical neighbours and England as a whole in terms of the proportion of care leavers who are in suitable accommodation and in employment, education or training.

It is vital that we continue to centre the voices of children and young people in everything we do, both in terms of individual case-work and in developing our services. The Children in Care and Care Leavers Councils provide strong representation for children in care and it was pleasing that Ofsted recognised how the groups have helped shape our work. Our children and young people can communicate with us in a number of ways, including through their statutory reviews, online resources, through the fostering panel review process and of course through the relationship building of good social work practice. We are also pleased to soon be rolling out the Mind of My Own mobile app across the Trust which will help children and young people share their feelings in a way that is comfortable for them at a time of their choice.

Children and young people continue to help us develop our services through, for example: helping to interview potential new members of staff, assessing accommodation providers and developing the trust's Vision and business plan. We will soon have a care-experienced young person as a full member of Board and we continue to promote our participation schemes such as the Young Inspectors Programme.

Nationally foster carers and adopters are in all too short supply, and our adoption and fostering services work hard to make sure there are sufficient homes available for children. Through innovative recruitment, retention campaigns and service developments, we have increased the proportion of children placed with people already known to them and have more carers who are able to care for children with complex needs. More of our foster carers are now in-house compared to the previous year and children are matched with adopters in a timely way. While the number of newly approved adopters has decreased from the previous year, this is in the context of pressures on the courts brought by Covid-19 and a shift towards other means of permanence such as special guardianship orders. All carers have access to a suite of mandatory and optional training modules and we continue to access the Adoption Support Fund in order to provide therapeutic interventions to children with particularly acute needs.

Our children's homes continue to provide valuable support to young people, whether helping them achieve independence, manage their emotions, or return to the care of their families. Arnold House provides specialist care for children on the autistic spectrum and Thornton House provides short term

emergency provision with intensive support. Phoenix House, Welford House and Raven House provide a more mainstream function while still meeting the needs of young people with emotional and behavioural issues through individualised packages of support.

Our dynamic commissioning services continue to undertake a wide range of functions, including overseeing our participation groups, identifying needs, monitoring accommodation providers and implementing new services. Working with young people is central to these processes, and they have helped to create new commissioning frameworks and evaluate our providers. Lockdown has led to stronger working relationships with the organisations we commission, and we continue to hold training events and workshops to ensure that through them we provide the best possible care to children and young people.

All the activity outlined above has been dependent on a stable, skilled and motivated workforce. Through a range of initiatives, we have made the Trust a great place to work, where staff feel supported and able to share concerns and good practice. The positive benefits can be seen in our increased level of permanent staffing, lower staff turnover and caseloads and positive feedback from staff surveys.

Governance and Statutory Context

What is corporate parenting? Local authorities and their partners are responsible for ensuring that children in care are as safe and well cared for as any other child. This responsibility is called “corporate parenting” and applies equally to children who have entered the UK from overseas and are separated from their families. Corporate parenting duty rests not only with social workers and their managers, but also any other agency that provides services and support to children in care such as health services, housing departments, the police and schools. Corporate parents actively promote the same goals that any good parent wants for their child. Good parenting does not simply stop once a child turns 18, so corporate parents also have specific duties to those young people leaving care and making the journey to independence.

Legal background. The collective responsibility for local authorities was first laid out in the Children Act 1989 and the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000. The central role of the council as an effective corporate parent has been emphasised by government in the publications *Care Matters: Time for Change* (DCSF 2007), *Care Matters: Time to Deliver* (DCSF 2008), and consolidated in aspects of the Children and Young Persons Act (2008). Other legislation and statutory guidance that determine our duties include:

- Adoption and Children Act 2002
- Care Leavers (England) Regulations 2010 Children and Adoption Act 2006
- Children and Families Act 2014
- Children and Social Work Act 2017
- Human Rights Act 1998
- The Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005 (as amended by the Adoption and Care Planning (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2014
- The Children’s Homes (England) Regulations 2015
- The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review and Fostering Services (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013
- Adoption and Care Planning (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2014
- The Care Planning and Fostering (Miscellaneous Amendments) (England) Regulations 2015
- Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018
- Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Act 2000

Principles of corporate parenting. The Children and Social Work Act 2017 provided a welcome distillation of corporate parenting responsibilities through seven principles of corporate parenting. Local authorities and their partners are required:

1. To act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and well-being of those children and young people;
2. To encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings;
3. To take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people;
4. To help those children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners;
5. To promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people;
6. For those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work; and
7. To prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.

The principles do not represent new duties as such, but are designed to help local authorities and their partners fully comply with the existing duties. The Act did however introduce some new responsibilities relating to children in care and care leavers. These include a requirement to publish a 'Local Offer to Care Leavers,' setting out the services available to young people leaving care, extend the provision of personal adviser support to all care leavers up to the age of 25 and to provide education advice and guidance to young people formerly in care. The Act also introduces a number of requirements to ensure that court processes are focussed on long term plans for and specific needs of the child.

The Care Leavers Charter. The Care Leavers' Charter is a set of promises to care leavers, published by the Government in 2012. It is "Designed to raise expectation, aspiration and understanding of what care leavers need and what the government and local authorities should do to be good corporate parents." The Charter will "Remain constant through any changes in legislation, regulation and guidance."

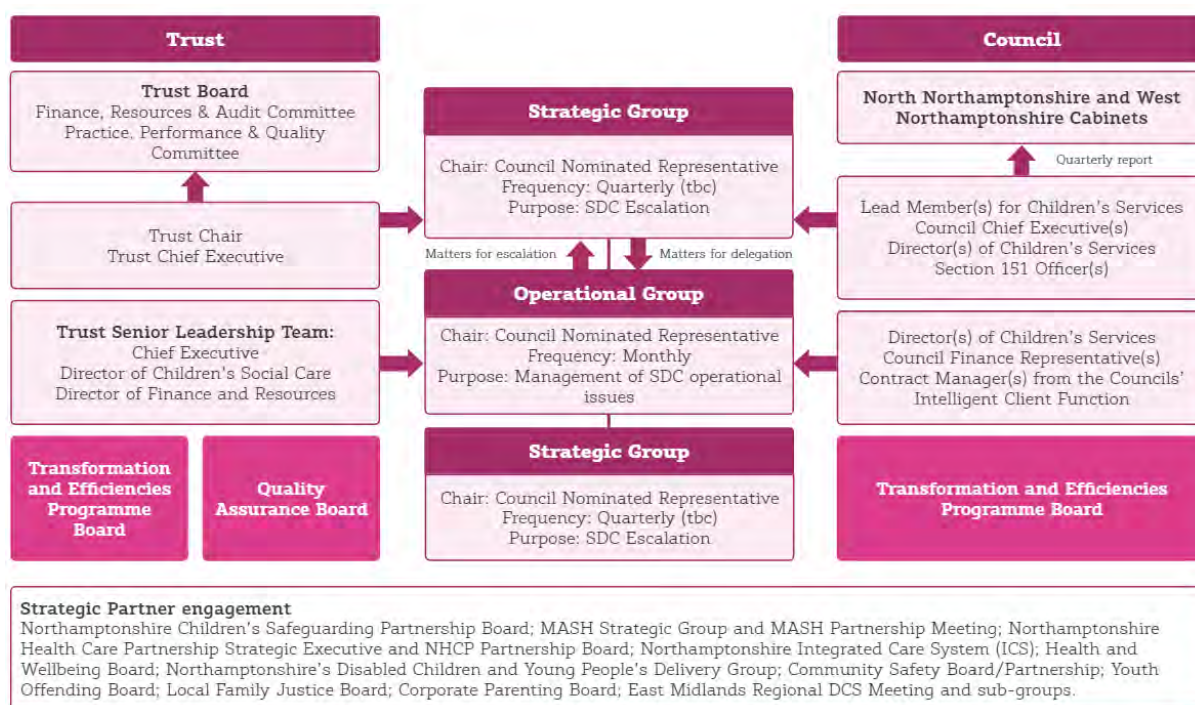
We promise:

- To respect and honour your identity
- To listen to you
- To believe in you
- To inform you
- To be a lifelong champion
- To support you
- To find you a home

The Trust and the move to unitary authorities. Government legislation passed in February 2020 determined that from April 2021, Northamptonshire County Council and the seven district and borough councils would be formally replaced by two new councils, NNC and WNC. The priority during this enormous undertaking was to ensuring that our vital services were safe and legal from day one. Some services which were delivered by different councils were brought together through the process (aggregated), whereas others which were delivered by the county council were split (disaggregated).

Northamptonshire Children's Trust was established on the 1st of November 2020 to deliver children's social care across the county. It is owned by West and North Northamptonshire councils but in order to achieve operational independence it has its own board of directors which sets strategic aims for the Trust, oversees its management and holds the executive team to account. Cathi Hadley fulfils the statutory role of Director of Children's Services for both councils and Colin Foster is the Chief Executive Officer for the Trust.

Northamptonshire Children's Trust governance arrangements



Our Corporate Parenting Board. The Northamptonshire Corporate Parenting Board is a non-statutory body which meets at least every two months to ensure that through the Trust, the councils and their partners are meeting their corporate parenting responsibilities. The Board is made up of a cross-party selection of councillors, Trust officers and external partners and is accountable to the full councils.

Updates from service leads are presented to the Board in the context of how we are fulfilling our Pledge to Children in Care and Care Leavers. A number of reports are presented to the Board such as annual reports from the Virtual School, health colleagues and our Independent Reviewing Officers. One-off reports based on discussions at Board are also presented, for example when a councillor seeks reassurance around a particular area of service. Although the Board itself is not a statutory body, statute requires that certain areas of children's services supply regular reports to an appropriate oversight body, so the Board fulfils this function. The Board links closely with the quarterly Health Network Meeting, the Virtual School Advisory Group and of course our young people's participation groups.

The Board holds “deep dive” thematic sessions around specific topics, such as youth offending services for our children and young people. Led by invited subject experts including young people, these serve an educative function as well as driving discussion and service development. An important function of the Board that should not be underestimated is also to celebrate the achievements of children and young people, as any good parent would.

Life During Lockdown

The Covid-19 pandemic has posed challenges to all of us. While children are mercifully at lower risk from the virus itself, lockdown may exacerbate the risks to the most vulnerable members of society. Young people leaving care for example all too often experience loneliness as they move into independent living, and lockdown may increase their sense of isolation. From the time of the first lockdown, our children's services were acutely aware of the need to ensure that services to our children and young people were maintained, while protecting our staff.

As lockdown descended, a multidisciplinary team of senior officers from a range of agencies formed a working group that focussed on the needs of our children and young people. The group initially met on a daily basis, later moving to weekly. All children and young people who were receiving a service from us were assigned a risk rating of high, medium or low which was used to determine the level and means of ongoing contact with them. Risk assessments were of course subject to ongoing assessment, rather than being static.

High risk cases were those:

- Who were subject to a child protection plan.
- Who were deemed to be children in need receiving support under Section

17 of the Children's Act.

- Who were living in placements unregulated by Ofsted or living in a placement with safeguarding concerns.

Face to face meetings, assessments and meetings were prioritised for this group.

Medium risk were those:

- Who required specific support, without which their health and development may be affected.
- Were part of a family which would fall into a category of greater need without support.
- Were children in care at risk of placement breakdown or where there were complicating factors and the child and carers needed social work support.
- With limited support networks or who had recently left care establishments.

For these children and young people, we used technology to facilitate virtual visits where appropriate.

Low risk children and young people were those:

- Who were children in care in settled and stable placements.
- With established support networks, income and safe homes.

Critical roles within children's services were established to determine which members of staff needed to remain centrally located, and a number of staff were redeployed temporarily to meet service need. Changes of placements for children in care were halted unless absolutely necessary to maintain continuity of care while foster carers were supported in their roles. Independent visitors were also supported to explore new ways of maintaining contact with their children and young people. Our commissioning services arranged weekly calls to key accommodation providers to ensure they were supported, particularly when they reported cases of Covid-19. Education represents, for many vulnerable children, a haven of safety and stability. Therefore, promoting school attendance where possible was a priority, along with ensuring children had the right equipment to work at home if necessary.

We continue to learn and implement the lessons from the pandemic as the country moves towards recovery. Since September 2020 we have returned to face to face contact as the default way of working with children and young people, with technology remaining an option. As at 20th of April 2020, 93per cent of education settings were open for

vulnerable children and children of key workers, which compared well with national figures. For September 2020, 89per cent of vulnerable learners were attending school. Practice Week during July 2020 included analysing the impact of the pandemic upon children in care and the young people involved provided great insights into the quality of our work and where we need to strengthen.

While bringing great pressures, lockdown presented an opportunity to test the strengths and limitations of new virtual ways of working and improve staff familiarity with new technologies. Workforce stability and performance in many areas improved during this period: caseloads were reduced for example through better use of resources, partnership working with other agencies improved, and sickness levels decreased. Through staff surveys, many workers have spoken of their appreciation for the strong communication and leadership from senior managers. Collaboration with our key accommodation providers is ongoing in order to understand and build upon the factors that allowed us to reduce changes of placement for children while maintaining safety and high quality care.

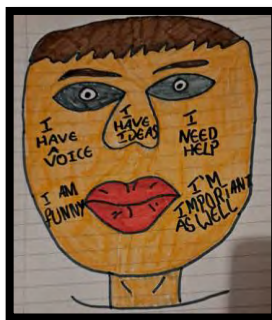
The Voice of Children and Young People

Children and young people are at the centre of everything we do, so we make sure they have a voice both in their own lives and more widely in how the services that affect them are shaped. The Children in Care Council, (known as Speak Out Together) and the Care Leavers' Councils (Shout Out Loud), are our two main participation groups for any children and young people with experience of being in care. We also have our brilliant Shooting Stars group for children and young people with special educational needs or disabilities. During the year, the groups have been involved in all sorts of activities and produced a lot of brilliant work, some of which is set out below.

Artwork created by the Shooting Stars group



Artwork created by the Children in Care and Care Leavers Councils for the Family Justice Conference in January 2021, highlighting how it feels to be in care and what the courts need to know about what is important to them.



Artwork submitted for the 2020 children and young people's creative arts festival. A showcase event to celebrate our young people's work was held on YouTube in December, hosted by CEO Colin Foster.



Our Pledge and what we have achieved

The Board's Pledge to Children in Care and Care Leavers reflects our aspirations for them and what they have told us is important. Each section of the Pledge has a lead officer responsible for ensuring it is met and Board members are expected to consider how their work helps meet the Pledge and has a demonstrable impact in the real world. The sections below set out the work that has been undertaken to meet each section of the Pledge during the reporting period.

A note on statistical neighbours. Every local authority is designated a number of other authorities with similar demographics, known as statistical neighbours. Where available, authorities can compare their own data with the average of these similar authorities. For the reporting period Northamptonshire's statistical neighbours were Kent, Nottinghamshire, Swindon, Staffordshire, Derbyshire, Essex, Warwickshire, Worcestershire, Lancashire and Medway.

We will help you be physically and emotionally healthy

We will have achieved this when:

- You have the right support for your physical, mental and emotional wellbeing and you do not have to wait too long for it.
- The adults close to you understand your needs.
- You have a good understanding of your health needs and history, when you are in care and when you leave care.

Sadly, children in care nationally are more likely to experience poor physical and emotional health outcomes. Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), such as abuse and neglect, can have a profoundly deleterious effect upon physical development, emotional wellbeing and even life expectancy. However, protective factors, particularly consistent, trusted adults can mitigate this, and as corporate parents we must ensure the health needs of our children are understood

and addressed through tailored, high quality health assessments and plans. Our specialist health team includes a Designated Nurse for Looked After Children who links closely with the Board and the Safeguarding Partnership and supplies an annual report to the Board. All emotional wellbeing and mental health referrals are discussed at the weekly ATLAS meeting, a multiagency forum which includes representatives from the fostering service, senior Trust managers and psychologists. The quarterly Health Network Meeting is another

multiagency forum, in which health performance is reviewed and strategies are implemented to improve health outcomes for children.

Young people consistently tell us that their mental health and emotional wellbeing are hugely important to them.

Northamptonshire's specialist Looked After Child Mental Health Team provides specialist support to our children and young people. It is a multi-agency team incorporating Trust colleagues, paediatricians, specialist nurses and professionals from the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS). The service has no specific referral criteria and carries out a range of interventions tailored to the individual. At the time of writing the service has around 300 cases. Complementing this service is a range of other provision in the county such as wellbeing cafes, youth counselling services and the Ask Normen website for advice and signposting to services. A chat health service is also available and more recently a new service, Mental Health in Schools, has been rolled out to address lower level emotional wellbeing concerns. Young people leaving care receive a written Health Summary which provides them with details of their health history and ongoing needs, as well as contact details of their health professionals and how to access help. The summary is accompanied by the new Useful Tips for a Healthy You guide which features

advice written specifically for young people to help them stay well.

Northamptonshire children in care continue to receive high quality initial and annual health assessments which are used to inform an individual health plan, which in turn feeds in to the overall care plan. Perhaps unsurprisingly the timeliness of health assessments has been highly variable during the pandemic due to the enormous pressures faced by NHS staff. While the majority of late assessments were due to staff availability, some were due to children or their carers having to self-isolate. All exceptions are well understood on a case by case basis and we continue to work with health colleagues to overcome barriers to timeliness, not least through increased staffing and improved data-sharing so needs are anticipated. Improved processes now in place mean that children in care who arrive from out of the county are flagged by specialist nurses or health visitors to our specialist team. Health visitor champions have also helped promote a greater understanding of the needs of children in care, improving the quality of information from that service. Similarly, NHS England has written to all NHS dentists to urge them to prioritise the needs of children in care, for example by accommodating short notice requests for appointments by foster carers.

As a demographic, the health profile of Northamptonshire children in care shows that:

- 8.3 per cent live with asthma, the biggest single health condition,
- 4 per cent have attention deficit hyperactivity disorder,
- just under 3 per cent have an autistic spectrum disorder, and
- 0.7 per cent have special educational needs or a disability.

The health needs of children from overseas who are separated from their families remain an acute concern. These young people, who are often among those most aspirational in our population, have sometimes suffered the most profound trauma and are more likely to suffer physical ailments such as blood borne diseases. Support for these children includes counselling from NHS Service Six, community

based support and sleep packs to help them feel settled. During the reporting period, a new health pathway was developed to ensure that children from overseas in the north of the county are screened for blood borne diseases.

Current health priorities include improving our capacity to meet the needs of children living out of the county, improving follow-up care for children referred to the Reducing Instances of Sexual Exploitation (RISE) team and developing a more detailed understanding of the health needs of the local population. The fortnightly multidisciplinary meeting of senior managers, instigated in response to the pandemic, has continued to work well in identifying cases of concern.

We will make sure you are living in the right place

We will have achieved this when:

- You are living with people who understand you, care for you well and build a positive relationship with you.
- You have a safe and stable home life.
- Where you are living does not affect how well you are looked after.

Every child has the right to a safe, stable and loving home. Preferably, this means living with their family. If this is not possible, then exploring the caring potential of the wider

family is thoroughly assessed before a placement in foster or residential care is arranged. When a child comes into care every effort is made to keep them close to the

people and places that matter to them. To avoid drift and delay for children, different accommodation options are planned in parallel.

At the end of March 2021:

- 72 per cent of our children in care were living in foster placements,
- nearly 20 per cent of those with family or people already connected to them.

During the reporting period:

- 29 per cent of children leaving care left due to having a permanent arrangement, such as adoption or a special guardianship order. This is a rise from 24.4 per cent the previous year.

The percentage of children who have in been in care for more than 2.5 years who have lived in the same placement for over two years dipped slightly, from 63 per cent to 62.4 per cent. Moving children back to their birth families has been more difficult due to the pandemic, however this period has helped to improve the stability of our placements, with breakdowns having reduced. Analysis of this trend is being used to turn actions taken during the pandemic into improved business-as-usual practice.

We continue to compare well with our statistical neighbours in terms of how many children live out of the local authority area. This figure has remained stable at around 25 per cent compared with 32 per cent for our statistical neighbours. However, when our children live out of the county they are more likely than those looked after by our statistical neighbours to be living over 20 miles from their original home. This is in part a consequence of the different local authority sizes in question.

Finding the right place to live for the increasing numbers of children with complex needs is a major challenge, however Northamptonshire has recruited specialised Resilience Foster Carers trained to meet the needs of children aged 10 to 18 who need extra support. So they can provide the best level of care, all Trust foster carers undergo a high level of training, including around child sexual exploitation, child development and safeguarding. All foster carers also receive close support from a named supervising social worker. 35 per cent of our foster places are in-house as opposed to supplied by an agency, compared to 30 per cent the previous year.

Increased scrutiny upon unregulated placements with fortnightly meetings of senior management is helping to minimise such placements and oversee risk

management plans. Any emergency placements at unregulated venues must be authorised at director level. For more details around how we ensure children have a safe

and stable home, see the fostering and adoption sections of this report.

We will make sure you have great relationships in your life

We will have achieved this when:

- You have regular contact with those who are important to you, as long as it's safe.
- You understand why you are in care and are involved with the plans that affect your life.
- We are warm and courteous towards you, do what we say we will, and respect your culture and identity.
- You have enough quality time with the adults (social worker, personal adviser, teacher, doctor, nurse) who are there to support you, at a time that is convenient to you.
- Changes of social worker or personal adviser are avoided wherever possible. Any changes are explained to you and you are introduced to the new person properly.

Many of our children and young people have been badly let down by the adults in their lives, so it is vital that as corporate parents we ensure they have trusted adults they can turn to. Research demonstrates that this is a major protective factor for children who have undergone adverse childhood experiences. In practice this means developing new relationships between children and their social workers and independent visitors for example, as well as strengthening or repairing pre-existing relationships with family members.

Every effort must also be made to make sure that coming into care does not adversely

affect children's valued relationships with siblings, pets and school. To reflect the views of children and young people, our dedicated contact service has been renamed the Family Time Service. Lockdown meant that interactions between children and young people in care and their family took place via technology in many cases, based on risk assessment. The impact of this virtual contact was closely monitored in cooperation with CAFCASS, the judiciary and parents. As of September 2021, face to face contact is now the default position.

Young people have told us that their relationships with their workers are really important to them. They want adults they can

trust and they do not want to have to tell their story to multiple workers over and over again. This is why having a stable, capable workforce is so important and why every interaction with children and young people must count. Social care recruitment is a national issue, however our specialist recruitment team and campaigns have seen ongoing increases in the proportion of our social care staff who are permanently employed (see Workforce Development section for more details). A stable workforce has meant that within the specialist children in care teams, caseloads have consistently remained below the target maximum of 22 and there have been no unallocated cases across the Trust since December 2019. Our highly experienced Independent Reviewing Officers continue to work as part of a stable team, providing a valuable source of consistency to children and young people. We continue to develop the next generation of talent through our Social Work Academy.

Our social workers work hard to build trusting, positive relationships with their children and young people. Understandably however, many children are wary of the adults in their lives and feel their worker is only taking an interest in them because they are paid to do so. This is why voluntary independent visitors (IVs) are so valuable, as they act as an independent person who is

simply there to be a friend. Our IV team matches young people with an IV based on hobbies, needs and personality. IVs commit to linking with a young person for at least two years but the relationship usually lasts much longer. Currently 47 young people are matched with an IV and we are about to launch a recruitment campaign via social media.

While harder to quantify, the way we interact with children and young people is just as important as meeting targets. Our Signs of Safety approach was launched across children's services in 2017 and since then we have continued working hard to embed and develop the methodology, led by our Principal Social Worker and Signs of Safety Ambassadors. Signs of Safety is a whole-system approach which seeks to build relationships with children and families. This means adapting existing processes and forms (for example addressing children directly in statutory review reports) and developing new tools and ways of working. Helping children to understand their situation and providing reassurance is central to the methodology, and a large suite of tools is used for this purpose, such as the three houses model in which children express how they feel through their House of Worries, House of Good Things and House of Dreams.

We will make sure you get a good education

We will have achieved this when:

- You are achieving the best you can.
- You have a stable school where you feel safe.
- You feel part of your school community and are able to take part in clubs and activities.
- You have adults who understand your needs and put the right things in place to support them.

Nationally, children in care have poorer educational outcomes than their peers although research shows that coming into care generally has a positive impact on their attainment. Regardless, corporate parents are obliged to do all they can to narrow the attainment gap between children in care and the general population. As well as their usual education setting, all children in care are enrolled in a Virtual School. This is a local authority team with a remit to promote the education of children in care and care leavers. In practice this means ensuring best use is made of government funding allocated to the education of children in care, promoting high quality Personal Education Plans (PEPs) and providing training to education settings, carers and others. The Virtual School Advisory Panel meets termly and includes members of the Corporate Parenting Board and professionals from Northamptonshire education settings and services. This offers high level scrutiny and support as a 'critical friend' to the Virtual School.

The timeliness and quality of PEPs remains a central focus of the Virtual School. These important documents set out how the educational needs of children in care will be met, and provide a way for progress to be tracked. The PEP is a statutory element of the child's overall care plan and is created collaboratively by the Designated Teacher, social services and the child. As of the 2021 spring term:

- 96 per cent of children in care of statutory school age had a PEP, down slightly from 98 per cent the previous term.
- 67 per cent of these PEPs were rated as good by the Virtual School, up from 58 per cent, with
- 31 per cent requiring improvement and
- 2 per cent rated inadequate.

New tools are now in place which allow the Virtual School to monitor and respond to issues experienced by children and young people, such as low attendance and potential

exclusions. The Virtual School responds robustly to such issues, challenging school settings where necessary and helping to implement alternative measures. There were 69.5 days of education lost to fixed term exclusions for children in care during the 2021 spring term, compared to 436.5 for the whole of the 2019-20 academic year. Given the importance of stability for children coming into care, the Virtual School takes an active role in minimising changes of school when decisions around children's living arrangements are being made. The Virtual School also oversees the Bridging Programme which helps children from overseas who are separated from their families to learn English and integrate into education.

The Virtual School continues to offer a substantial training programme to carers and educational professionals, including courses around the effect of attachment issues on educational attainment. 58 people including 28 Designated Teachers attended courses in the 2021 spring term. Other courses include Promoting the Education of Previously Looked After Children for parents and guardians, and courses around effective Personal Education Plans. The Virtual School now also has a dedicated Inclusion Officer for Mental Health, who works with schools to help them support

mental health issues including for children who display challenging behaviour.

The 2021 Easter break saw the reintroduction of face to face participation events, including a multi-sport programme. A range of online events also continued. These participation events are highly popular, with over 100 young people participating during the spring term and many providing positive feedback. "I really enjoyed the activity and the staff were amazing thank you." (young person).

Among the primary school-aged cohort, where data was available:

- 72 per cent were at or above the expected level for maths compared to 68 per cent the previous term,
- 69 per cent for reading, up from 68 per cent, and
- 66 per cent for writing, up from 62 per cent

For secondary school-aged children:

- 71 per cent were at or above the expected level for English compared to 72 per cent the previous term, and
- 63 per cent for maths down from 65 per cent.

We will help you prepare for the future

We will have achieved this when:

- As you become independent, you have a suitable place to live which feels like a proper home.
- You are in education, employment or training, helping you reach your potential.
- You are helped to manage your money effectively and get the right benefits.
- You have access to leisure services and can get around easily.
-

For all young people, making the transition to independent adulthood represents a significant change. In light of their lived experience, evidence suggests that care leavers may have extra needs during this time. Nationally, leavers are more likely than the general population to turn to drug use or criminality, suffer mental health issues and experience homelessness. Our dedicated leaving care service is staffed with a retinue of personal advisors, who focus on working with young people to create pathway plans that meet their immediate needs as well as setting out their longer term goals and how to achieve them. Two Independent Reviewing Officers now have a lead responsibility towards young people approaching adulthood.

Particular areas of focus for care leavers include giving them the skills they need to prepare for adulthood and live independently, ensuring adequate housing options are available, promoting education, employment and training opportunities and achieving financial stability. Services available to care

leavers are set out in the Local Offer to Care Leavers, which is regularly updated as new services go live and is available through the Young Northants website.

At the end of March 2021, 93.8% of our care leavers aged 17 to 21 were living in accommodation deemed suitable, compared to 89% the previous year. While this is positive, it is important that beyond a base level of suitability, young people live in a place which feels like a home, within a community they feel part of. Any young people at risk of homelessness and rough sleeping are monitored closely through regular management oversight meetings and daily tracking, and these have thankfully been few in number. The move to two unitary councils has created an opportunity for closer working with housing services. At the time of writing a new joint social care housing protocol for the prevention of homelessness for care leavers is being developed. A new service framework for Independent Support Accommodation was launched early in 2021, and this will be

summarised in a short guide for young people so they know what support they can expect.

Lockdown accelerated our move towards communicating more effectively with our care leavers and communication channels through Facebook and WhatsApp groups are now in place. Many young people wish to access their social services records and we have a dedicated Subject Access Records Service (SARS) which, along with their personal adviser, helps them do so with tact and in line with data protection regulations.

Lockdown has impacted care leavers in terms of education, employment and training (EET) opportunities, however at the end of March 2020 59% of care leavers aged 17 to 21 were in EET, continuing an overall improvement over the last two years and slightly above the latest England average of 55%. Prospects remain our contracted service to promote EET for care leavers and they collaborate with our dedicated working group, as does the Virtual School. The Board regularly enjoys hearing about the achievements of individual young people who have left care, from securing high-flying university places to charity work and promising new careers.

A suite of support is available to care leavers to help them access EET opportunities, such as help preparing for interviews, links to

mentors who have studied similar university degrees and financial support for transport, clothes and equipment. Northampton University also now offers our young people free accommodation in their halls of residence. The Trust employs two care-experienced young people as Apprentice Champions, one focussing on housing, the other on emotional wellbeing and mental health. For care leavers with disabilities or other specific needs, closer working relationships are being developed with adult services, and other stakeholders such as the police and housing services.

Our ASDAN-accredited Independent Living Programme continues to help young people to gain the skills they need to live independently, such as cooking and budgeting, and is now accompanied by a guide available through the Young Northants website. Individual pathway plans set out the specific needs of young people and how these are to be addressed. Our working protocol with Jobcentre Plus aims to ensure that access to benefits is as seamless as possible, while encouraging young people to seek fulfilling, stable work and training. More widely, a range of financial support is available to young people, including statutory grants and allowances, as well as help with things like driving lessons, leisure activities and birthdays gifts. We also support all care leavers to open a bank account, acquire a national insurance

number, enrol to vote and we are delighted that a policy of council tax exemption for care leavers has been agreed and is currently being embedded via a pilot in the north of the county.

We are aspirational for our young people and want them to achieve great things. In late 2020 we held a competition on the theme of aspiration, challenging young people to impress us in whatever way they chose. The response was fantastic, with musical performances, cooking demonstrations and all sorts of artwork. The competition concluded with an online showcase event led by the Trust Chief Executive. In November 2020, a young person spoke movingly to the Board about how the service had helped her and her aspirations:

“At 14 I went into care and I thought it was the end of any aspiration I had. I thought it meant I couldn't do things other people could do and accepted that my fate was going to be very dull. I was a troubled child and always rebelled but had a heart of gold and still had some hope I could one day overcome being in care. After being in care for some time I realised I was heavily supported and I still had the opportunities I was convinced I wouldn't have. I am 19 now and I've come a long way. I've achieved things I would only dream of.”

We will involve you in developing our services and holding us to account

We will have achieved this when:

- We celebrate your successes.
- We actively seek and take account of your views, wishes and feelings to improve our services to you.
- You can access useful and accurate information about services available and the people who can support you.
- You feel able to share complaints compliments and comments about our services.
- There is a range of opportunities for you to get involved to with helping to improve all services to children and young people.

Good social work means listening to children and young people and involving them in decisions, both individually and in terms of identifying trends and setting strategic direction. We are making great strides to achieve this and as Ofsted noted after their monitoring visit in February 2021:

“The inspirational Children in Care Council works relentlessly to participate in designing service improvements, with support from senior leaders. Children were very proud to show inspectors their work and gave many powerful examples of the positive impact that they are having on developing and improving services.”

As discussed earlier, continuing to embed Signs of Safety helps ensure that children’s voices are heard and acted upon through positive working relationships. This methodology brings with it a suite of useful tools through which children can express their feelings in a way that is comfortable to them. In collaboration with the Children in Care and Care Leaver Councils, further tools have also been developed to help young people communicate with us, such as posters about the complaint process and new one-page profiles to facilitate children being matched with a placement that is right for them. The

Young Northants website remains a valuable source of information for all children in the county, with dedicated sections for children in care and care leavers and ways of getting in touch. The Board continues to celebrate the successes of our young people through a regular report, and by rewarding young people with shopping vouchers and certificates signed by the chairs and the Trust CEO.

As well as their primary worker, children are encouraged to share their views through other points of contact with the Trust. Independent Reviewing Officers now include a letter directly addressed to the child as part of their review report for example, and fostering panels actively seek feedback from children for foster carer household reviews. Research demonstrates that children, particularly teenagers, often prefer to communicate through electronic means, and we are excited to be rolling out the Mind of My Own mobile phone app. This allows children and young people to record at any time their feelings in a friendly age-appropriate interface and share them with the adults of their choice. As well as valuable on a case by case basis, this will increase our ability to identify wider trends. More widely, children and young people are helping us shape our services through a range of participation activity. During Practice Week in July 2020 our Young Inspectors worked

with the Assistant Director for Corporate Parenting to explore a number of issues including how we deal with conflict and how we get to know our children. This meant interviewing social workers and team managers over two days and the results were fed back to the service. The process found positives such as the impression that social workers know their children very well, as well as areas of challenge such as the need for more consistent management oversight and further embedding of Signs of Safety. Young people also made a presentation for the Families Justice Service for a conference in January. They used art and writing to powerfully set out what is important to them and how to help them through the court process.

Other ways children and young people shape our services include taking part in interview panels for recruiting new members of staff, and working with our commissioning team to evaluate accommodation providers and draw up commissioning frameworks. Through extensive consultation, young people in the Children in Care Council were also closely involved with the genesis of the Trust's very first business plan, including designing the overall vision and the logo. Young people asked the Trust to make the following commitment:

"What we do today affects your tomorrow, we promise to walk side by side with you."

The Fostering Service

The Trust's fostering service is made up of two Post-Approval Fostering Teams, the Connected Persons Team, the Recruitment and Training Team and two fostering panels. The Post-Approval Teams manage and support our mainstream fostering placements as well as post-approval connected persons carers, with every carer allocated a supervising social worker. Foster carers undertake a diverse range of roles, from providing long and short term care, emergency accommodation, short breaks for those with special educational needs or disabilities and resilience foster carers for hard to place young people who would otherwise be placed in out of county expensive residential placements. The Connected Persons Team's primary role is to assess the suitability of children to be cared for by people they already know. This type of arrangement is particularly beneficial to children in providing continuity in terms of their identity and culture and these carers are provided the same level of support and remuneration as mainstream carers. 20 per cent of our children in care were in such placements at the end of the March 2021, compared to 18 per cent the previous year. The Recruitment Team is responsible for recruiting and training carers as well as retaining existing carers.

Children and young people with complex needs have often had to be placed out of the county, due to a lack of specialist support available in Northamptonshire to meet their needs. However, our new Resilience Foster Carer programme has helped carers develop specialist skills to care for these children and young people, who are therefore more likely to be able to maintain their existing relationships and school setting. All carers receive a substantial package of training and support, including work around child development, managing behaviour and first aid. Covid-19 has of course meant that many training sessions are now online which has proved successful, with many non-mandatory sessions, such as Internet Safety, seeing improved attendance.

Recruitment and retention of foster carers is a national issue so our dedicated recruitment team works hard to ensure we have the carers we need. Social media is a fruitful forum for recruitment and every single enquiry we receive is followed up. Our Digital Marketing Specialist sits within the Recruitment Team and has developed specific strategies tailored to different social media. For example, our Facebook page features an appointment booking system for call backs for members of the public interested in fostering, whereas LinkedIn is used more to target professional groups.

During 2020 we reinstated our retention surgeries to proactively address issues that carers may be experiencing, and have taken on board feedback from the Northamptonshire Foster Carers Association (NFCA) for this purpose. This has helped to prevent placement breakdown and maintain permanence for our children and young people. At the end of March 2021, there were 228 approved mainstream fostering households compared to 219 at the same time in 2020. In addition to this as of March 2021 there were 144 approved Connected Persons/Kinship fostering households. 35 per cent of our carers were 'in-house' at the end of March 2021, compared to 30 per cent the previous year.

As well as maintaining our high level of recruitment activity, priorities for the fostering service include expanding our retinue of Resilience Foster Carers, developing our training offer and expanding our use of the Fostering Support Fund to access therapeutic interventions for children. The service works very closely with the NFCA, who provide invaluable informal support to our foster carers and help us develop our services. With the move from the old county council to a Trust, the fostering service has been an Independent Fostering Agency since November 2020. Our Fostering Panel continues to approve new carers, review approvals for existing carers and provide important feedback to the service.

The Adoption Service

One of our main goals as a Trust is for children to have a permanent home at the earliest opportunity, and wherever possible this should be with members of their family. When this is not possible, Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs) and Adoption represent two of the most stable routes to permanence. Adoption orders are only issued by the courts using a very high threshold, given that it severs the legal connection between child and birth parents. Our Adoption Service is made up of two Adoption Teams, and a Special Guardianship Order / Post-Adoption Support Team.

The Adoption Teams oversee the recruitment, assessment and training of adopters and manage the adoption process including matching and placement. The teams work particularly closely with our specialist permanence social workers and family finders, who work across the Trust to identify a stable home for children at the earliest stage of our involvement. During the reporting period there were 37 adopters approved, with 74 adoption orders being made. While this is a reduction from 44 approvals the previous year, this is in the context of the pandemic and a general shift away from adoption towards other permanence arrangements such as SGOs. Recruitment continues to be promoted through our campaigning, such as a radio promotion to coincide with Mothering Sunday.

The service continues to embed the Signs of Safety methodology, and a number of the team are trained in play therapy. We also outsource services to undertake therapeutic work with children around making the transition from fostering to adoption, and we work closely with the Coram charity, who host an adoption helpline and regional events to share good practice. As with many services within the Trust, much of the adoption service's training and support offer has moved online. Our regular support sessions for adopters now take place on Zoom and their frequency has been increased to include evenings and weekends.

All adopted children are entitled to a post-adoption assessment of their needs and this is undertaken by our SGO / Post Adoption Support Team. Self-referrals or from schools are most common, and the team also helps adults who were previously adopted. Support focusses on repairing the effects of past trauma, using a therapeutic approach. The Adoption Support Fund continues to be available in order to commission specialised therapeutic work. The team mediates contact with birth families for children subject to an SGO, and will supervise contact for adoption; such contact usually takes place

once a year. A dedicated member of staff manages 'letterbox contact' between adopted children and birth parents.

We continue to compare well with our statistical neighbours in terms of adoption timeliness, which is important in order for children to have a stable, permanent home as soon as possible. At the end of March 2021, there was an average of 106 days between an adoption order being made and the child being matched with an adoption placement. This compares to 152 for our statistical neighbours.

With the move to a Trust, the adoption service is currently a Voluntary Adoption Agency but plans are afoot to join a Regional Adoption Agency in the near future which will allow greater sharing of positive practice. A peer-review exercise in March 2021 with Essex local authority proved successful, with positive feedback in terms of adopters' views on the support they receive, management oversight and timely work for children.

NCC Children's Homes

Arnold House

Located in Northampton, Arnold House is a specialist provision for children aged 8 to 17 on the autistic spectrum, who often are referred to the home during a time of crisis. Through a package of tailored support and individual risk assessment, children are helped to transition to a more permanent home, such as foster care or a return to their birth family. Staff are trained in a range of specialist tools, such as Treatment and Education of Autistic and related Communication handicapped Children (TEACCH) and the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS). Working closely with special schools, social workers and previous care settings helps to ensure a coordinated and holistic approach to the child's wellbeing.

Phoenix House

Opening in February 2020, Phoenix House is one of our newer residential homes and provides care to up to four 12 to 17 year olds. The home specialises in meeting emotional and behavioural issues, and staff have benefitted from a behaviour management training from the Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) and online sessions around the impact of trauma. All children at the home are subject to an impact risk assessment before they arrive, which considers how to meet their needs and how

to mitigate any impact they could have on other young people. This forms part of a transition plan which is created with the child's social worker and the child themselves. A token-based economy and a robust behavioural policy help to provide boundaries for the children and young people in the home.

Individualised support plans are geared around the needs of the child which in some cases means moving on to independence, in others, a return to foster care or their birth family. Developing close links with the police, youth offending and CAMHS among others has helped in many cases to break down barriers between young people and professionals, enabling them to get the most out of the support that these agencies offer. In the relatively short time the home has been operating, a number of young have shown enormous progress. One young person came to the home in the summer of 2020 on an emergency basis after several placements were unsuccessful. Utilising specialist behaviour management techniques, staff helped him back into education and to relate more positively with his family who he had only been seeing occasionally. Overnight contacts gradually progressed to him returning full time to the family home. This process involved not only working with the

young person himself but also his parents, giving them skills to meet their son's needs. He is now doing very well.

Raven House

Raven House is a well-established five bed home for young people aged 11 to 17 with emotional and behaviour issues, specialising in those who have suffered early childhood trauma. Staff utilise a range of techniques to help children depending on their individual care plan, including skill sessions on topics such as emotional regulation, sexual health and independent living. Covid-19 has proved a challenge to the home, with various young people testing positive at different times and staff members having to isolate. However, the commitment of the stable staff group and leadership have helped to maintain a safe, nurturing environment. In October 2020, the county council, High Sherriff's Office and the Lord Lieutenancy awarded the home a Rose of the Shires award for its response to the pandemic.

By the time they enter care our children may not have had the opportunity to experience some of the positive childhood experiences that many of us remember fondly. Our homes make sure young people do not have to miss out. Young people at Raven House recently enjoyed a trip to Weston Super Mare and a future trip to Skegness is planned. Staff also

promote community and leisure activities; one young person is excelling with the army cadets; another is enjoying horse riding. One young person who came to the home in December 2019 had exhibited considerable emotional dysregulation, suffered issues with her mental health and had missed a lot of education. Through a tailored package of support in conjunction with other professionals, she has now progressed to maintaining good attendance and completing her GCSEs in a mainstream school and has completed National Citizenship Service. She is doing well, working on the Seeds of Change scheme at an equine therapy centre where she received an award in recognition of her teamwork.

Thornton House

Another of our newer homes, Thornton House is an emergency provision for up to two young people at a time. Young people may come to the home at a time of considerable risk, and might arrive from a secure provision, hospital or an unregulated placement at a time of crisis. They can stay at the home for a maximum of 16 weeks, during which time they receive intensive support. Staff work very closely with the police, youth offending services, CAMHS and others, helping the young person back into education and regular routines and giving them the tools they need to regulate their emotions and behaviour. The

overall aim is to help young people step down into a permanent home, such as foster care or with their birth family, and to help them achieve more positive outcomes. All of the young people who have resided at the home have gone on to stable, permanent homes which have been successfully maintained.

Welford House

Another well-established home, Welford House provides a nurturing environment for up to 5 children and young people aged 12 to 18, with a full, stable staff and highly experienced manager. Young people at the home receive bespoke packages of support which meet their needs and goals. Linking with a local PCSO who visits the home regularly has helped to break down barriers between young people and the police. Nationally, children in care who go missing from their placement are very often those who live in residential homes. This has been an issue for Welford House historically however only one such episode took place during the reporting period and was resolved positively. There were no incidents requiring physical intervention from members of staff.

Thankfully the home experienced no positive Covid-19 tests, however two young children were required to self-isolate. As well as delays to medical and dental appointments, the pandemic meant that much of staff training had to move online, which includes courses around protective behaviours, gangs, substance misuse and child development, and continuing to embed Signs of Safety. Despite the pandemic, children were able to go on a short break during 2020, and are looking forward to another holiday in summer 2021.

Children living at the home are settled and making good progress, some having arrived from their parents' care, others from out of county. One young person at the home had struggled in education, but having engaged with support is now doing well in a painting and decorating apprenticeship, another is soon to commence a level 3 course in health and social care. Others are showing significant progress by simply maintaining their attendance in education. Because living at the home can be such a positive experience, many young people maintain contact with the home after they have left. For example, staff recently wrote a reference for a former resident and did grocery shopping for another who was in self-isolation.

Commissioning Services

Our commissioning service oversees a wide range of functions, based around the changing needs of children and the Trust's overall strategic direction. The needs of children and young people are at the heart of the service's strategy, and they play an active role in carrying out its functions through a programme of consultation and participation. The service can be categorised into a cycle of four broad areas, with specialist leads carrying out key functions within. Firstly, the service seeks to understand what is needed to carry out the Trust's ambitions. This involves activities such as identifying gaps in support for young people and assessing available assets. Secondly the service plans how to achieve the Trust's ambitions by, for example, considering how external partners can meet the needs of children and young people, and planning the implementation of commissioned services. Delivery is the third area of activity, which may involve working with our partners, children and young people and the workforce to embed new services into the Trust. Finally, a review process involves regularly monitoring performance, evaluating value for money and taking corrective action where required.

Specialist functions within the service include a procurement specialist who advises on the best approach to adopting new assets, and a quality assurance team which works with accommodation providers to ensure that young people's living arrangements are of the best possible quality. Under lockdown, these visits were of necessity largely made in response to raised concerns. A planned programme of monitoring visits is now being reinstated. All unregulated accommodation (i.e., not subject to Ofsted inspection) are visited at least annually. For regulated provisions, such as children's homes, visits are made to any provision rated less than 'good' by Ofsted.

Through an extensive process of market shaping, new commissioning frameworks were introduced in February 2020. Frameworks not only ensure a standardised and fair commissioning process, but help us promote measurable and high expectations upon the services we commission, ultimately meaning that children and young people have improved outcomes and experiences at every stage of care. Our team of Young Inspectors remain instrumental in developing service specifications and evaluating tender applications. We plan to introduce a more formalised young commissioner role in the near future and to develop a service framework specifically written to be accessible to young people. From September 2021, new legislation will tighten the regulations around unregulated

provision and we plan to carry out further market shaping to explore for example whether some ISAs could become regulated children's homes.

Current projects include a two-year programme working with public health services to improve health outcomes for care leavers and children in care. For care leavers this includes looking at housing provision and increasing independence skills. Whereas for children in care there is a need to increase access to therapeutic interventions. The projects have provided funding for our two care-experienced Apprentice Champions, one of whom is focussed on housing issues, the other on mental and emotional wellbeing. We are working with Northampton University to assess the success of these projects and develop further avenues to explore.

Successful outcomes for children and young people depend on working in partnership with commissioned services. Homes 2 Inspire remain a valued partner, allowing us to block purchase a number of training flats for our care leavers, where they can learn independence skills for adult life in a supportive environment. We continue to hold workshops and training sessions with our providers, such as an event with the police around knife crime and exploitation. These sessions are well attended and moving them largely online has enabled more senior representatives of providers to attend. Sharing data with providers allows a faster response to issues for individual young people, and the ability to act proactively to mitigate wider risk factors.

Workforce development

Meeting our Pledge to Children in Care and Care Leavers depends on having a highly skilled, motivated and stable workforce. A detailed workforce development programme is helping us achieve this through a wide range of initiatives, such as:

- driving recruitment,
- making sure the physical working environment is accessible and welcoming,
- fostering a culture of openness and respect, and
- ensuring policies are clear and up to date.

One of our strategic priorities as set out in the Trust Business Plan for 2021-22 is to “Recruit, retain and develop an awesome workforce.” We measure this in a number of ways such as looking at the proportion of staff who are permanent employees as opposed to agency workers, the size of primary worker caseloads, assessing the quality of practice and management oversight and using the feedback from staff surveys. Regular “58 minutes” webinar sessions led by Chief Executive Colin Foster are providing a forum for communication between senior leadership and staff and for all our team to make their voice heard. Staff are also able to participate in the improvement journey through the Practitioners’ Improvement Board and Microsoft Teams virtual groups such as the Disability, BAME and LGBTQ networks. Updates from our quality assurance activity, feedback from children and young people and new opportunities to share good practice are disseminated through regular staff updates from the CEO, senior leadership team and Principal Social Worker.

Across the Trust, turnover of permanent staff has steadily decreased from 14.08 per cent in December 2019 to 11.25 per cent in October 2020, with 17 per cent of social care posts filled by agency staff in January 2021. Vacancies within children in care specialist teams have decreased in the same timeframe. In January 2021, only a single social worker had a caseload over the maximum target of 22, compared with 26 such workers at the end of March 2019.

A number of new social care posts were created in response to the pandemic and a recruitment campaign was launched by the Chief Executive in December 2020. Qualified social workers joining the Trust are eligible for a £4,000 bonus and help with relocation costs. Salaries are more competitive and now align with that of other local authorities, which historically, has not been the case in the county. Our highly regarded Social Work Academy not only provides newly qualified workers a structured and supportive learning framework in which to develop their practice, but also

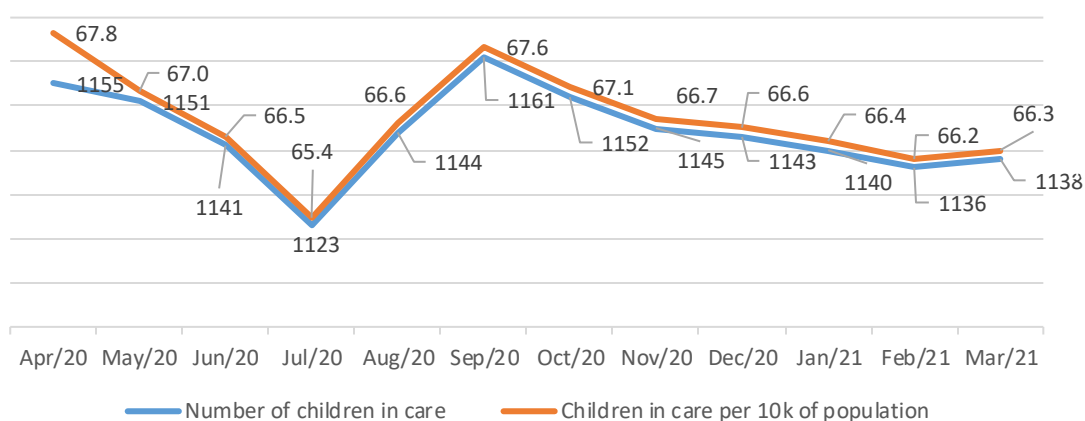
shapes support and training for existing staff in conjunction with our Learning and Development Team. Learning takes place through face to face sessions and quick and accessible online resources. Topics include Voice of the Child, Applying Professional Judgement and Effective Multiagency Working. All staff are trained in the methodology of Signs of Safety. We also have access to training offered by the Northamptonshire Safeguarding Partnership and Research in Practice. While presenting some challenges, increased flexible and homeworking due the pandemic has led to a number of benefits, such as decreased sickness levels and the adoption of new technology.

Appendix 1: Demographics

Population

The population of children in care fell slightly between April 2020 and March 2021, although the population varied during that time and at the time of writing stands at over 1160. The March figure of 66.3 children in care per 10,000 is lower than the latest England average of 67, but slightly higher than the statistical neighbour average of 61.2. "Statistical Neighbour" refers to the group of local authorities with similar characteristics for the purposes of data collection. This is determined by central government.

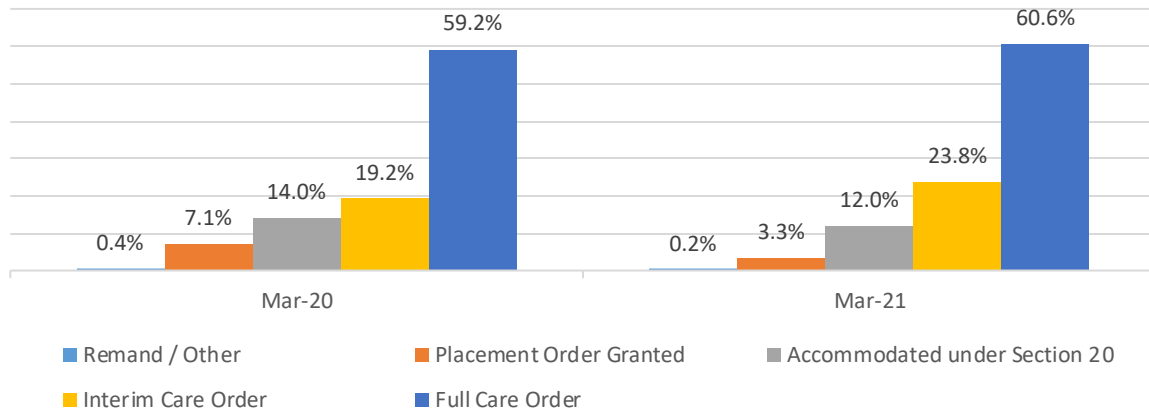
Northamptonshire looked after children population, April 2020 to March 2021



Legal status

The proportion of children voluntarily accommodated under Section 20 of the Children's Act (as opposed to being subject to a court order) has continued to reduce year on year. Section 20 arrangements are intended as temporary measures, so this is a positive development, indicating that more children are in permanent homes. Children arriving from overseas who are separated from their families are made subject to Section 20 arrangements.

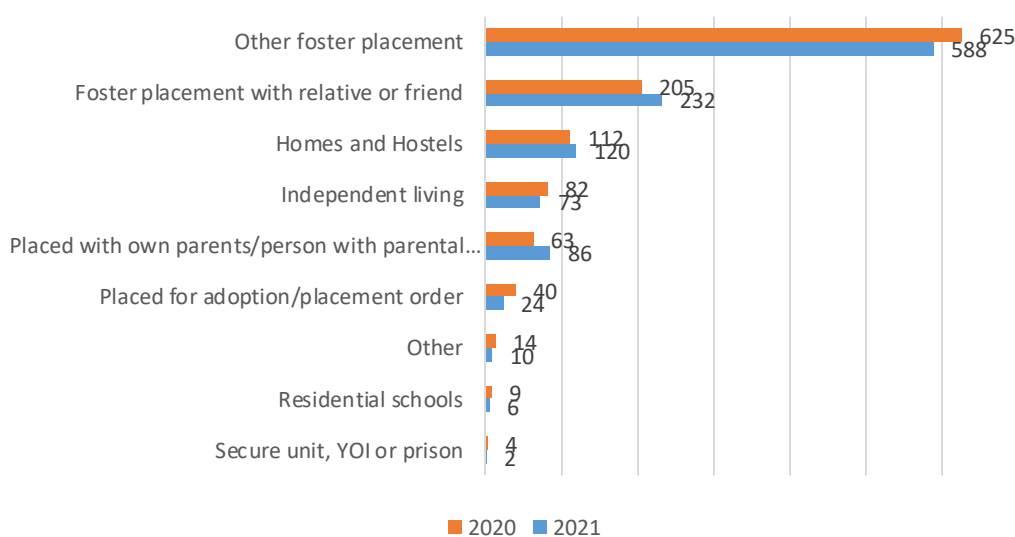
Legal status, percentage at end of March 2020, 2021



Placement type

The proportion of our children living in foster care fell only very slightly during the reporting period from 71.9 per cent to 71.8 per cent, whereas the proportion placed with relatives or friends (including parents) rose from 23 per cent to 28 per cent. This needs to be understood in the context of a fluctuating population of children entering and leaving care, rather than a static population. Over the year, on average 32 children entered care each month and the same number left. Reflecting the actions of our commissioning team, the proportion of children living in in-house placements as opposed to those supplied by an agency, rose from 30 per cent to 35 per cent.

Placement type at end of March 2020, 2021



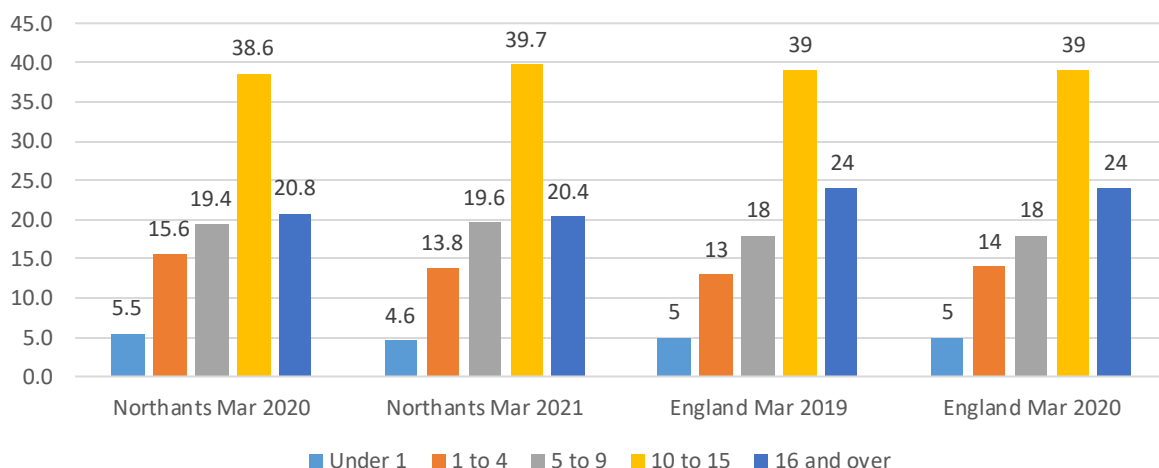
Geography

The proportion of our children living out of the county has remained stable at around 25 per cent, which compares well with the latest statistical neighbour average of 32 per cent and reflects efforts to increase sufficiency in our area, particularly for children with complex needs. However, for those children living out of their local authority, Northamptonshire children are slightly more likely to be living over 20 miles from their original home than those from our statistical neighbours (18.6 per cent compared to 16 per cent). So, Northamptonshire children are less likely than average to be placed out of their local authority area, but if they are, they are more likely to be over 20 miles from home. This is likely a consequence of Northamptonshire being one of the larger local authority areas. Comparisons with England as a whole are not particularly useful due to the great variation in local authority size and population density. Our children who live out of county are more likely to be subject to a full care order, and more likely to be in residential children’s homes than the looked after population as a whole. After Northamptonshire, our children are most likely to be living in Leicestershire, followed by Milton Keynes and Warwickshire.

Age

As an end of March snapshot, the age ranges of our children in care have remained fairly stable and largely in-line with national averages, although our proportion of those aged 16+ is slightly lower and reflects our average age of children on admission to care (next item).

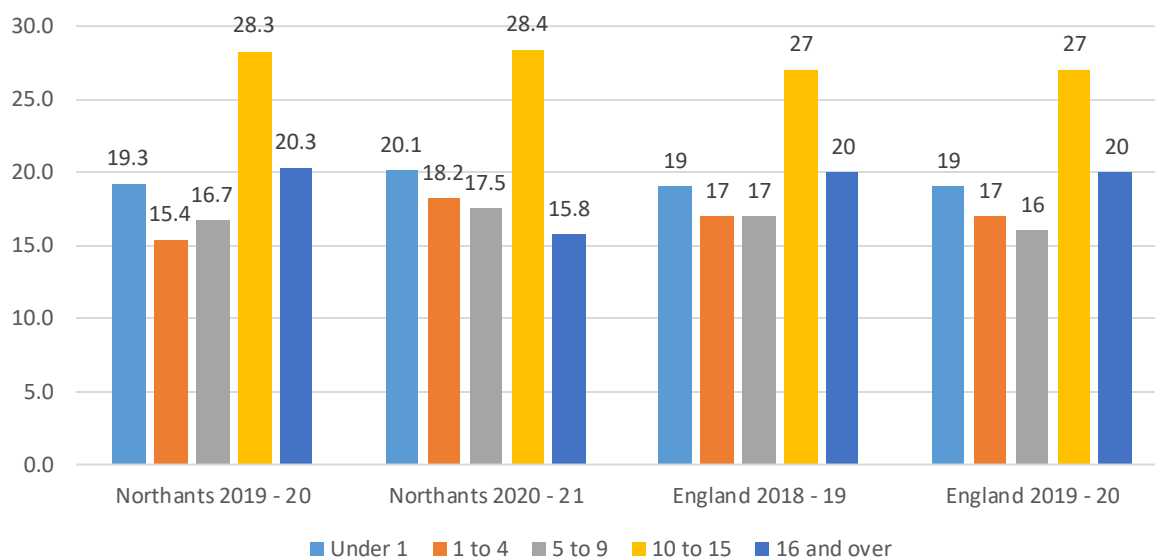
Children in care age, percentage per age group at end of March 2020, 2021



Age on admission

Historically, Northamptonshire had a high proportion of older children entering care, but this has steadily fallen into line with national averages. The proportion of children aged 16 and over fell substantially from 20.3 per cent to 15.8 per cent, with increases in those in the lower age ranges. Research from the Children’s Commissioner demonstrates that older children are more likely than younger children to enter care due to external risks, such as gang involvement, than family issues. The Trust now has a specialist Adolescent Team to provide tailored support to this group of young people.

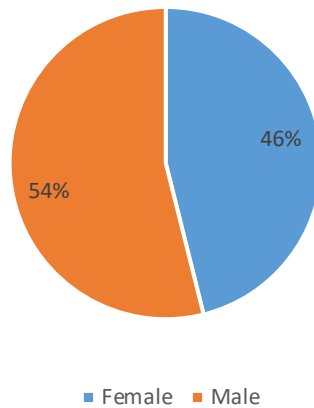
Admission to care by age group, percentage April 2020 to March 2021



Sex

As in previous years, males are in the majority for Northamptonshire’s children in care population. This is largely explained by the county’s population of children from overseas who are separated from their families, over three quarters of whom are male.

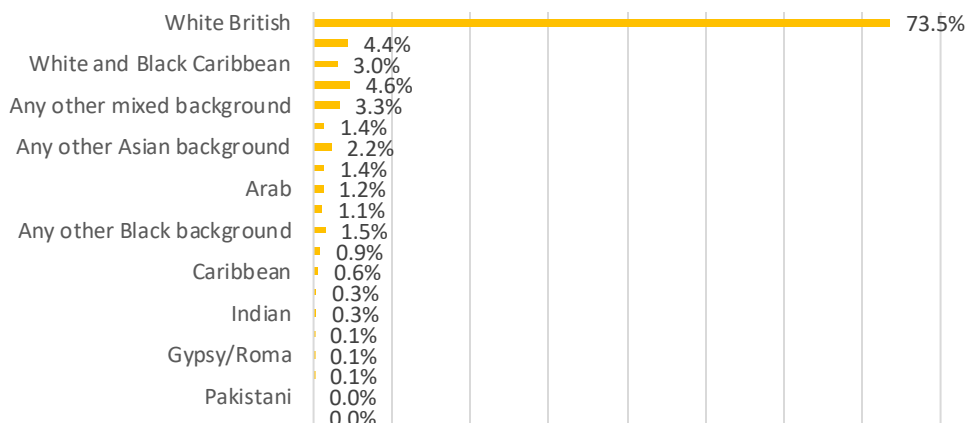
Children in care sex, percentage at end of March 2021



Ethnicity

Reflecting the wider populous of Northamptonshire, almost three quarters of our children and young people are white British, though with significant numbers with African and Caribbean backgrounds. Nationally, 79 per cent of children in care were white British at the end of March 2019. Nationally, black children are more likely to be in care (8 per cent) and less likely to be adopted (2 per cent) compared with their share of the child population (5 per cent). Asian children were less likely to be in care (4 per cent) and less likely to be adopted (1 per cent) compared with their share of the child population (10 per cent).

Children in care ethnicity end of March 2021



Separated children

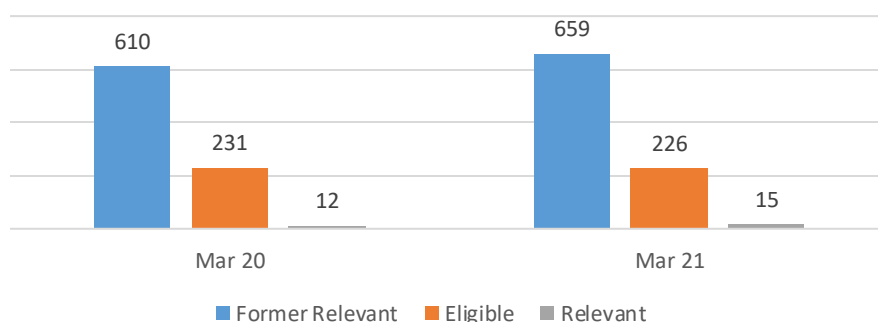
As of March 2019, Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) made up 6 per cent of the national looked after child population, with great variance between local authorities. For example, Kent and Croydon have much larger numbers of UASC than other local authorities. The National Transfer Scheme Protocol for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children is a voluntary protocol which aims to ensure a more even distribution of UASC across the country so that local authorities are not disproportionately burdened and that these often very vulnerable young people get the support they need. In Northamptonshire during the reporting period there were 246 such young people including those over 18 receiving leaving care support. Over the course of 2020-21 our separated children were most likely to come from Afghanistan, followed by Eritrea, Sudan, Iran and Iraq.

Care leavers

The qualifying characteristics of care leavers are set out in the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 and can be defined as follows:

- a) **Eligible children** are those in care aged 16 and 17 who have been in care for at 13 weeks since the age of 14 and are still in care.
- b) **Relevant children** are those aged 16 and 17 who meet the criteria for eligible children but who leave care. This also includes young people who were detained (e.g. in a youth offending institution or hospital) when they turned 16, but who were looked after immediately before being detained.
- c) **Former relevant children** are those who before reaching the age of 18 were either eligible or relevant children and are now aged 18 to 25.

Northamptonshire care leaver population, end of
March 2020, 2021



Appendix 2: Northamptonshire Children’s Trust Improvement Plan

Updated April 2021

RAG Delivery Criteria: **Red:** Not on track to meet delivery date, mitigation or escalation required. **Amber:** Work in progress, some risk to delivery and/ or delivery date and mitigation applied. **Green:** On track to meet delivery date or completed

RAG Outcome Criteria: **Red:** Outcomes at risk/ not achieved, mitigation or escalation required. **Amber:** Progress towards the agreed outcomes being made. **Green:** Satisfactory outcomes achieved (in line or above comparators)

1. Excellent Leadership

Our improvement will be driven by a stable senior leadership team that provides strategic leadership and direction, clarity of the vision for the service and sets clear priorities and expectations. The senior leadership team will be visible to and engage with all staff.

Ofsted 2019 2a: The quality of management decision-making, oversight and challenge.

Ref	Actions	Lead and Support	Additional funding to support delivery	Timescale	Measure of Progress	Direction of Travel since last update	RAG delivery	RAG outcome	Progress Update
1.1	<p>1.1a Deliver our Vision and Values</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Review progress of 21/22 Business Plan - Complete 3 year Business Plan for 2022/23 	SLT		Mar-22	<p>Staff at all levels know the Vision and Values for the Children's Trust and we see them being lived out-</p> <p>Feedback from staff surveys</p> <p>Feedback from parents, carers, children and young people</p> <p>Themes from QA activity</p>	↑	Green	Amber	<p>21/22 Business Plan launched with contributions from staff, children and young people.</p> <p>Strategies that sit below the business plan are in progress for publication in by Summer</p> <p>Planning for formal Trust launch 26 May</p> <p>Trust Board governance and formal contract monitoring governance in place</p> <p>Ofsted Feb 21 MV found: <i>Senior leadership team is stable and committed, ambitious, child focused and committed to improving the lives of children</i> <i>Senior leaders and managers have a thorough understanding of the strengths of the service and what needs to improve</i> <i>Continuing to build on positive changes already in place</i></p>

Ref	Actions	Lead and Support	Additional funding to support delivery	Timescale	Measure of Progress	Direction of Travel since last update	RAG delivery	RAG outcome	Progress Update
	<p>1.1b Visible, Effective, Stable & Engaged Leadership</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Staff encouraged to contact Chief Exec directly - Regular Internal comms (all staff and managers) - Regular 58 min Chief Exec briefings - Regular Practice Weeks throughout year - Consistent and regular management meetings structure in place - You Said, We Did included in comms 	SLT		Completed	<p>Feedback from staff surveys regarding quality of leadership and communication</p> <p>No. and per cent Managers who are permanent by service</p>	Completed	Green	Green	<p>Leadership Development Programme to commence in June</p> <p>Trust Comms plan in place and delivering regular comms</p> <p>58 min briefing sessions held with over 600 of the workforce attending each round</p> <p>Practice weeks being held regularly with SLT on practice week teams</p> <p>All SLT and Strategic Managers are permanent as are vast majority of Service Managers</p> <p>LGA Social Work Health Check survey completed Dec, with positive response about access and support from senior managers</p> <p>Ofsted Feb 21 MV found: <i>Leaders have a clear line of sight to frontline practice and knows what needs to change to improve outcomes for children</i> <i>Senior leadership team is ambitious, child focused and committed to improving the lives of children</i></p>
1.2	1.2 Development of the Corporate Parenting Board responsibilities in order for them to champion	Chief Exec, AD Corporate Parenting, DCS		Sep-21	Clear understanding from all Corporate Parenting Board members of their responsibilities as evidenced through Corporate Parenting Board meetings	↔	Green	Amber	<p>Council tax exemption for care leavers in place from April 21</p> <p>Developmental and training activity to re-start following Unitary elections in May 21</p> <p>Corporate Parenting training for all Members of NNC and WNC to be completed by June</p>

Ref	Actions	Lead and Support	Additional funding to support delivery	Timescale	Measure of Progress	Direction of Travel since last update	RAG delivery	RAG outcome	Progress Update
	improvements				Positive impact on experiences of children in care, including children with disabilities, evidenced by Corporate Parenting Board and Member activity - as evidenced through you said we did				Refresh and rejuvenation of Corporate Parenting Board planned once new Councillors are embedded. Care leavers Apprenticeship Programme agreed with NCT/NCC/WNC. Interview carousel scheduled for September 21
1.3	1.3a Clarity of standards and expectations for all managers	SLT		Apr-21	Peer thematic audit findings – management oversight Supervision audit findings Feedback from staff survey regarding supervision Quality assurance shows increase in quality of practice and outcomes for children Improved quality management oversight and supervision evident on cases Improved per cent	↑	Green	Amber	Leadership Development Programme to commence in June Trust business plan live - golden thread to service plans and appraisals in development Practice Standards and Supervision guidance being reviewed for re-launch by July Revised scheme of delegation for 21/22 Thematic 'Brilliant Basics' CPD sessions with Operational Managers follow up, Brilliant Basics & Awesome Practice intranet page to go live Apr/May (dependent on Microsoft 365 go live) PIP improvement support for services in place and mentoring for managers, SWA managers and L&D providing coaching for managers Research in Practice Practice supervisors programme: 2 team managers Research in Practice Practice Leaders Development Programme: 3 service / strategic managers SW health check survey (Dec 20) provided some positive feedback re supervision and areas for

Ref	Actions	Lead and Support	Additional funding to support delivery	Timescale	Measure of Progress	Direction of Travel since last update	RAG delivery	RAG outcome	Progress Update
					supervision Staff survey feedback - quality of supervision				improvements Ofsted Feb 21 MV findings: <i>Overall quality of service remains inconsistent and management oversight is not sufficiently robust Frontline management oversight, challenge and formal supervision inconsistent</i>
	1.3b Develop the skills and confidence of Managers and support for them to lead good practice and effective services - Leadership development programme for all managers in the Trust -Co-ordinated CPD programme for managers	Assistant Directors Partners in Practice Lincs		Mar-22	Feedback from quality assurance activity showing staff receiving positive support and challenge from their managers Feedback on CPD from managers	↑	Green	Amber	Leadership Development Programme to commence in June. PIP are providing mentoring offer for social care managers, SWA managers and L&D providing coaching for managers Team and Service Manager development programme phase 2 offered mentoring / coaching 2 managers in Social Work Academy offering coaching - MASH TM receiving Research in Practice Practice Supervisors: 2 Team Managers Research in Practice: Supervising the Supervisor: 3 Service/ Strategic Managers Thematic 'Brilliant Basics' CPD sessions with Operational Managers completed- positive feedback Brilliant Basics and Awesome Practice internet page to go live in June (dependent on Microsoft 365 go live date) Ofsted Feb 21 MV <i>Workforce reported that they felt supported. However consistency in practice and robust management oversight remains and issue</i>

2. Recruit, Retain and Develop an Awesome Workforce

Improvement for children and families will be delivered by our workforce, who are therefore our most valuable resource.

Ofsted 2019 3b: Social worker caseloads that enable all children to have an allocated social worker and workers to have manageable workloads.

Ofsted 2019 3d: Stability and sustainability of the social care workforce.

Ref	Actions	Lead	Additional funding to support delivery	Timescale	Measure of Progress	Direction of Travel since last update	RAG delivery	RAG outcome	Progress Update
2.1	<p>2.1ab Refreshed Continuous Professional Development Offer</p> <p>-Signs of Safety CPD plan in place and implemented</p> <p>-Refresh routes in practice offer</p> <p>-Develop Social Work Academy to support Practitioners at different levels of the organisation</p> <p>-Develop CPD offer for the Trust</p>	<p>AD Quality Assurance & Commissioning</p> <p>Head of HR & OD</p> <p>Partners in Practice</p>	DfE Signs of Safety	Sep-21	<p>per cent Practitioners SoS trained – by service</p> <p>Social Worker Apprenticeship and Step Up places offered and completion rates</p> <p>ASYE retention measure (Year 2 and beyond)</p> <p>Decreased workforce turnover</p>	↑	Amber	Amber	<p>Workforce Strategy refreshed. SLA in place for L&D support service.</p> <p>Developing plan to co-ordinate CPD for managers and all workforce</p> <p>Induction under review</p> <p>Signs of Safety trajectory plan in place, delivery supported by SofS project manager. Additional Practice Champions trained and Signs of Safety training available for all workforce</p> <p>PSW attending team meetings and providing drop in sessions</p> <p>Social worker pipeline plan in place. Apprenticeships training provider to be re-commissioned by L&D. Recruiting for next Step Cohort. 8 Step up Graduates starting as NQSWs in May. 10 additional Practice Educators to be trained to support social work students</p> <p>Turnover has been declining since Dec 2019 however increased to 15.6per cent in March 21 due to externally funded posts and organisational changes in NCT Central and increase in turnover in Safeguarding</p>

Ref	Actions	Lead	Additional funding to support delivery	Timescale	Measure of Progress	Direction of Travel since last update	RAG delivery	RAG outcome	Progress Update
	<p>2.1b Improved Working Conditions</p> <p>-Review HR Policies and Procedures</p> <p>-Deliver conditions for success - including improved finance and business processes</p> <p>-Deliver Equalities Strategy</p>	Director of Finance & Resources		Mar-22	<p>Decreased workforce turnover</p> <p>Reduced vacancies and agency rate</p>	↑	Green	Amber	<p>Conditions for success launched in business plan</p> <p>Some positive impact of flexible and home working arrangements during COVID: reduced sickness rates, positive feedback from workforce - lessons learnt to inform future policy. workforce survey to go out May</p> <p>Transport challenge unit pilot live to improve co-ordination and challenge of use of travel policy and procedure</p> <p>Equalities steering group and Forum in place. Equalities Survey completed. Equalities Strategy & Anti-Racism Statement finalised, to be published in June</p> <p>Financial approval processes to be reviewed. Changes requested to ERP to reduce burden on managers</p> <p>Recruitment processes being reviewed to further improve (agency, perm and international) - dedicated fixed term recruitment lead in place</p> <p>Vacancies have reduced since Dec 19 but have been increasing in last few months due to increased turnover in some teams</p>

Ref	Actions	Lead	Additional funding to support delivery	Timescale	Measure of Progress	Direction of Travel since last update	RAG delivery	RAG outcome	Progress Update
2.2	<p>2.2a Recruitment</p> <p>- Directorate and service level recruitment planning in place and implemented</p>	Head of HR & OD		Sep-21	Reduced proportion of Social Work vacancies by service.	↔	Green	Amber	<p>Recruitment campaign launched in Community Care following Ofsted letter publication. Weekly recruitment panels in place</p> <p>17per cent of the social worker workforce is filled by agency workforce this includes temp Covid response posts and is a reducing from 22per cent in December.</p> <p>NQSWs recruitment: 9 started Jan and 12 due to start in May - including 8 Step Up graduates</p> <p>Recruitment process being reviewed. Focus on improving agency, permanent, international recruitment</p> <p>Dedicated fixed term Recruitment lead now in place</p>

Ref	Actions	Lead	Additional funding to support delivery	Timescale	Measure of Progress	Direction of Travel since last update	RAG delivery	RAG outcome	Progress Update
	<p>2.2b Retention</p> <p>-Deliver workforce strategy</p>	Head of HR & OD	BRR Workforce	Mar-22	<p>Increased proportion of Social Work permanent workforce - by service</p> <p>Reduced Social Work turnover rate</p>	↔	Green	Amber	<p>Permanent workforce turnover had been steadily, slowly decreasing from 15per cent Dec 19 to 11per cent Dec 20. Has been a recent increase and changes in NCT Central has meant Mar turnover rate is now at 15.6per cent</p> <p>Recent increase in workforce leaving (Nov/Dec) following improvement in workforce turnover and vacancy rate. High proportions of agency remain in DAAT & some Safeguarding teams and recent addition of Covid posts in teams has increased vacancy rate</p> <p>Low sickness level during COVID response; some positive and some negative impacts of working from home</p> <p>Positive feedback in Social Work Health check - green RAG for SWs not intending to leave the organisation in next 12 months</p> <p>Re-introduction of increments from Apr 21 has been very positively received</p> <p>Equality steering group and Forum established following feedback from workforce, equality strategy and Anti-Racism statement completed</p> <p>Ofsted Feb 21 MV recognised: <i>Workforce stability is improving and caseloads are steadily reducing</i> <i>Improved working conditions and active senior management engagement has reduced workforce turnover and vacant posts</i></p>

Ref	Actions	Lead	Additional funding to support delivery	Timescale	Measure of Progress	Direction of Travel since last update	RAG delivery	RAG outcome	Progress Update
	<p>2.2c Improved Capacity</p> <p>-Improve efficiency of practice workflows and processes -Demand management activities (as in Leadership section above)</p>	<p>AD Safeguarding & AD Corporate Parenting</p> <p>Partners in Practice</p>		Sep-21	<p>Average caseloads in line with agreed level for service</p> <p>Reduction in number of cases in highest caseloads in services</p> <p>KPI timescale targets met</p>	↔	Green	Amber	<p>Additional capacity agreed for DAAT, MASH and EDT Adolescent service social work re-organisation increased capacity in Safeguarding North.</p> <p>Additional short term social work and support capacity agreed to manage expected surge in demand following impact of Covid</p> <p>Processes reviewed to improve sufficiency e.g. EH part of pods and support decision making about contacts to referrals.</p> <p>Ofsted focused visit highlighted high caseloads in DAAT - have been improvements since but remain challenge in Safeguarding, workforce from other services supporting</p> <p>Revised duty system has led to improved timeliness of single assessments at 98per cent (Mar); which is above comparators</p> <p>Timeliness relating to children in need and child protection above comparators.</p> <p>Additional Family Support Worker capacity recruited to support life story work</p> <p>16per cent SWs have caseloads above target - pressure is currently in Safeguarding (impacted by Covid)</p>

3. Strong Relationship Based Practice

We are focused upon evidence based practice that works with children, young people and families to help them achieve positive changes. Our practice model is child centred at its heart and evidenced through all we do.

Ofsted 2019 1a: The identification of and response to risk when contacts relating to safeguarding concerns for children are received into the MASH.

Ofsted 2019 1b: Timely and purposeful visits to children to ensure that their needs are understood.

Ofsted 2019 1c: The quality of social work assessments and plans so that they are consistently timely and are effective in improving children’s experiences.

Ofsted 2019 1d: The identification of and response to risk in relation to long-standing concerns of chronic neglect.

Ofsted 2019 1e: The response to children at risk of exploitation to ensure that their vulnerabilities are fully recognised and lead to intervention to keep them safe.

Ofsted 2019 1f: Clear reunification plans and support services for children returning home.

Ofsted 2019 1g: Timely transition planning for disabled children in care to reduce uncertainties and anxieties for them and their families .

Ofsted 2019 1h: Pathway plans that include clearly defined objectives for young people.

Ofsted 2019 1i: Proactive intervention and focus for older teenagers disengaged from support services.

Ref	Actions	Lead	Additional funding to support delivery	Timescale	Measure of Progress	Direction of Travel since last update	RAG delivery	RAG outcome	Progress Update
3.1	3.1a Implement a Practice Model - Develop and agree Practice Model with workforce that clarifies our principles, ways of working with and purpose of intervention and involvement with families - Equip and support workforce through CPD offer to implement the Practice Model	Director of Social Care	DfE Signs of Safety	Mar-22	Practice Model agreed and known by workforce Positive feedback from L&D participants regarding impact on practice Audit evidences compliance with practice standards and increased consistency in good practice Quality assurance activity shows improvement in consistency of use and quality of Signs	↑	Green	Amber	Practice Model relaunched Nov 20 and being promoted by PSW CIC Practice Week held end July 2020, Safeguarding Practice Week held in Dec 2020. Fostering Practice Week held in April 2021 Some improvement in collaborative reflective practice discussions (CRPD) identified - further improvement required Good practice shared with workforce. Service plans including the Learning from Audit and Learning from Practice week Signs of Safety trajectory plan in place Additional DfE funding secured Signs of Safety Project Manager new in post and additional Advanced Practitioners being recruited Key deliverables are in place and programme plan in development Signs of Safety bite size sessions have been delivered since Oct Further 5 day intensive training is in place for 2021 to develop additional Practice Champions

Ref	Actions	Lead	Additional funding to support delivery	Timescale	Measure of Progress	Direction of Travel since last update	RAG delivery	RAG outcome	Progress Update
	- Deliver Signs of Safety Trajectory Plan and Key deliverables				of Safety SoS used across interventions with positive impact on practice and culture				PIP supporting MASH/DAAT/Safeguarding and CIC to embed Signs of Safety Ofsted focused visits found better quality child in need and child protection assessments, using Signs of Safety, capturing lived experience of children and most visits demonstrating a child focus. Ofsted Feb 21 MV found: <i>Embedding the Trust's strengths based model of social work practice is showing signs of progress e.g. recording of reviews</i>
3.2	3.2a Evidence of Voice of the Child and of engaging parents in meaningful relationships with practitioners - Consistent and appropriate use of Three Houses and other direct work tools to inform assessments and plans - Evidence of relationship based practice with families -Safety Planning	AD Early Help AD Safeguarding AD Corporate Parenting AD Quality Assurance & Commissioning	DfE Digital	Sep-21	Quality assurance activity shows improvement in voice of child and relationship based engagement of parents in informing assessments and plans . Evidence of children and young people's involvement in planning Purpose of visit to be recorded in visit case note Children and young people participating in reviews	↔	Green	Amber	Clear expectation that voice of the child is considered/recorded by all Social Workers. Voice of the child more evidenced through work completed - recognised by Ofsted Focused Visit Child's voice is integrated into the QA audit tool. Young Inspectors participation in Practice Weeks, with focus on voice of child The quality of assessment and plans depend largely on caseloads and do vary. Practice Model includes emphasis on whole family and relationship based practice. Launched November Ofsted Focused Visit found better quality child in need and child protection assessments, using Signs of Safety, capturing lived experience of children and most visits demonstrating a child focus Ofsted focused visit found increasing examples of direct child centred work that informs plans and planning Ofsted Feb 21 MV found: <i>Children in Care Council and Young Inspectors have a</i>

Ref	Actions	Lead	Additional funding to support delivery	Timescale	Measure of Progress	Direction of Travel since last update	RAG delivery	RAG outcome	Progress Update
	and Family Network meetings to be undertaken with all families - All direct work to be evidenced on child file - IROs consistently seek views of children and promote attendance at reviews								<i>strong voice and has had a significant impact in shaping services. They were described as inspirational by the Inspectors</i> QA Board in place from Mar 21 includes Voice of Child standing agenda item.
3.3	3.3a Improvement in the consistency of quality in: - Assessments - Plans - Pathway Plans - Reviews - Management Oversight - including rationale for recommendations and appropriate challenge	AD Safeguarding AD Corporate Parenting		Sep-21	Improvement in performance of KPIs – Assessments, Plans and Reviews, Supervision Quality assurance activity shows improvement in consistency of quality per cent Re-referrals	↑	Green	Amber	Quality Assurance activity and Ofsted identifying improvements although inconsistency remains IRO / CP Chair oversight & escalation processes in place to capture early identification of concerns for management review & actions to address. Practice in safeguarding is improving evidenced by performance; feedback from service users/judiciary/gateway panels. PIP are implementing support plan from March 21. Brilliant Basics CPD being delivered to managers and intranet page developed (go live Apr/ May dependent on Microsoft 365) Action plans from QA activity and Practice Weeks are being implemented Ofsted focused visit found Quality and impact of decision making for disabled children are satisfactory Ofsted focused visit found tangible improvements in quality of social work practice . Impact not yet seen on per cent of re-referrals (34per cent above comparators)

Ref	Actions	Lead	Additional funding to support delivery	Timescale	Measure of Progress	Direction of Travel since last update	RAG delivery	RAG outcome	Progress Update
									<p>Ofsted Feb 21 MV found:</p> <p>Most social workers know their children well and have a clear understanding of their needs</p> <p>Majority of children are visited within statutory timescales</p> <p>The vast majority of children have an up to date assessments that identifies their needs</p> <p>Further improvement needed on:</p> <p>Some assessments are not comprehensive and are limited in analysis and do not consider the children's wider needs</p> <p>Some care plans are not actioned in a timely way leading to delays in meeting needs and achieving permanence</p> <p>Quality of recording care plans inconsistent with some not indicating what success looks like for a child</p> <p>Risk assessment and safety plans for children at risk of exploitation are inconsistent and safety plans are not always updated</p> <p>Supervision records do not reflect on children's circumstances and miss opportunities to drive forward plans with actions not being specific or given a timescale</p>
	<p>3.3b</p> <p>Improvement in the consistency of quality in</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - SoS supporting tools and approaches - Chronologies - Genograms - Consideration of fathers / male carers - purpose of visits to children - Assessments: lived life of child - views of all involved to 	<p>AD Early Help</p> <p>AD Safeguarding</p> <p>AD Corporate Parenting</p>	DfE Early Help	Sep-21	<p>Quality assurance activity shows improvement in consistency of use and quality of Signs of Safety tools, genograms, chronologies -</p> <p>Performance meeting address deficits in areas of compliance</p>	↑	Green	Amber	<p>Quality Assurance activity and Ofsted focused visit identified inconsistency. QA development in EH in progress</p> <p>PIP supporting quality of contacts in mash and assessments DAAT. PIP implementing support plan in safeguarding to improve quality of work including supervision.</p> <p>Brilliant Basics and Signs of Safety bite size sessions to operational managers on L&D programme</p> <p>Use of family network meetings increasing</p> <p>QA activity finding improvements in use of genograms and chronologies</p>

Ref	Actions	Lead	Additional funding to support delivery	Timescale	Measure of Progress	Direction of Travel since last update	RAG delivery	RAG outcome	Progress Update
	be explicitly recoded -plans to be focused and measure & progressed all above need to be child not adult focused								
3.4	3.4a Strengthened offer for adolescents Service restructure to enable increase in capacity to help young people at risk of all forms of exploitation and strengthening approaches to respond to extra-familial risk	AD Early Help		Sep-21	Reduced rate of adolescents entering care Contextual safeguarding approach In Northamptonshire reflected in strategy and practice	Completed	Completed	Amber	<p>Targeted Support Adolescent Service has been implemented 1st Sept which incorporates Adolescent Service.</p> <p>Adolescent social work team re-organisation implemented 1st October, creating additional team in Safeguarding ensuring social work oversight and decision making for social workers previously in Targeted Support - Completed</p> <p>Adolescent Strategy agreed (December 2020)</p> <p>Vulnerable Adolescents Panel implemented (December 2020)</p> <p>NSCP Practice Guidance for Missing agreed (November 2020)</p> <p>Contextual Safeguarding Toolkit developed through NSCP sub-group</p> <p>Contextual Safeguarding training now live Contextual Safeguarding Strategy drafted and funding bid for support in implementation to be submitted March</p> <p>Perm AD Early Help and YOS now in post and undertaking review of offer</p>

Ref	Actions	Lead	Additional funding to support delivery	Timescale	Measure of Progress	Direction of Travel since last update	RAG delivery	RAG outcome	Progress Update
3.5	3.5a Child Protection Demand - Improved confidence in managing risk - Strengthened CIN practice	AD Early Help & AD Safeguarding		Mar-22	Maintain rate of assessments in line with comparators Reduce rate of assessments ending with No Further Action Increased rate of CIN in line with comparators Reduced rate of CP in line with comparators	↔	Amber	Amber	<p>Potential risk of surge mitigated with preventative approach of utilising Early Help Coordinators to be more visible in schools and support the management risk. This was in place from September 2020 and again from 8 March 21. Early Help co-coordinators have implemented schools locality based plan</p> <p>Early Help based in DAAT and Safeguarding facilitating step downs. This is having an impact in the smooth transition from Social Care to Early Help Process reviewed and implemented in November 2020.</p> <p>Single assessments closing with NFA reducing in Feb at lowest since July 20 i.e. 34.8 per cent. Slight increase to 37 per cent in Mar. Remains below target and comparators</p> <p>Rate of CIN below comparator authorities Rate of assessments below comparator authorities - may be Covid related although referrals have been decreasing in lockdown. Rate of CP Plans in line with comparator authorities</p> <p>Signs of Safety bite size sessions for Team Managers, Advanced Practitioners and Senior Social Workers for all relevant services being delivered</p> <p>Covid has seen an increase in complexity of cases associated with CP conferences and Emergency intake.</p> <p>Robust application of thresholds and risk management continue to be priority areas.</p> <p>CP Chairs providing consultation regarding ICPCs with positive response from teams</p>
3.6	3.6a Deliver FGCPilot	AD Safeguarding		Mar-22	KPIs identified and monitored for pilot -	↑	Green	Amber	FGC pilot is underway and progressing well.

Ref	Actions	Lead	Additional funding to support delivery	Timescale	Measure of Progress	Direction of Travel since last update	RAG delivery	RAG outcome	Progress Update
	- deliver pilot and contribute to evaluation				including children able to remain cared for within their family network				
3.7	<p>3.7a Children in Care Demand</p> <p>- Development of Edge of Care Offer</p> <p>- Improved approach to reunification at edge of care and for children in care</p> <p>- Refresh and deliver Sufficiency Strategy - children in the right placement to meet their needs</p>	AD Corporate Parenting & AD for Early Help	DfE Edge of Care	Sep-21	<p>Edge of care service delivery is established</p> <p>Step down programme evidences activity and savings</p> <p>Reduced rate of children in care in line with comparators</p> <p>Increased per cent of children in care placed with in-house foster carers</p> <p>Reduced per cent of children in care placed in residential care</p> <p>Reduction in kinship carers and increase in SGOs</p> <p>Reduction in rate of children on interim care order or care order placed at home</p> <p>Quality assurance</p>	↑	Green	Amber	<p>Sufficiency Assessment and Strategy plan being implemented - positive feedback from Ofsted inspector regarding the quality of the strategy. Dedicated fixed term Service Manager in post to move this forward</p> <p>Development of Edge of Care Service - New permanent AD Early Help and YOS leading on development of offer</p> <p>Dedicated social workers within Court Teams to focus on revocation of care orders for children living with parents under placement with parent regulations</p> <p>Safeguarding Practice Week focused on effectiveness of keeping children within families - service delivering action plan</p> <p>Rate of children in care has reduced and is below England average, although above stat neighbours</p> <p>Above statistical neighbour average for per cent children in care leaving for permanence (35 per cent Mar)</p> <p>70+ of our children have been placed for adoption or have had an adoption order granted in 2020/21</p> <p>Ofsted Feb 21 MV found: <i>Tangible improvements in placements sufficiency</i> <i>Majority of children live in well-matched placements that meet their needs</i> <i>Adoption is appropriately considered and promoted when appropriate to do so. CAFCASS and the Judiciary reported that achieving permanence through adoption was a particular strength</i></p>

Ref	Actions	Lead	Additional funding to support delivery	Timescale	Measure of Progress	Direction of Travel since last update	RAG delivery	RAG outcome	Progress Update
					shows the right children are in care and in the right placements to meet their needs				
3.8	<p>3.8a Continue to achieve effective planning and increase engagement with care leavers</p> <p>-improve quality and effectiveness of early pathway planning</p> <p>-Up to date risk assessments and pathway plans</p>	AD Corporate Parenting		Sep-21	<p>Achieve target of 95per cent of Care Leavers with an up to date Pathway Plan</p> <p>Increase per cent of Care Leavers with a PA</p> <p>Maintain per cent of Care Leavers in EET and Suitable accommodation in line with or above comparators</p> <p>Quality assurance activity show consistent good quality and timely pathway planning</p>	↔	Green	Amber	<p>Ofsted focused visit identified some concerns re two homeless young people who had not accepted support.</p> <p>Recent reduction in up to date Pathway Plans from 92 per cent to 88per cent (Mar 21) 92 per cent in suitable accommodation (Mar 21) above England average</p> <p>Pathway plan for young people aged 18+ developed with young people and completed by them has facilitated greater focus on goals and aspirations</p> <p>Regional Improvement alliance peer review completed for Leaving Care - provided confirmation of service strengths and areas for improvement</p>

4. Insightful Quality Assurance and Learning.

We know ourselves and our practice well through rigorous quality assurance.

Ofsted 2019 2b: The use of quality assurance activity such as case auditing and escalations to inform and improve practice.

Ofsted 2019 2c: Action planning in response to the findings of serious case reviews.

Ref	Actions	Lead	Additional funding to support delivery	Timescale	Measure of Progress	Direction of Travel since last update	RAG delivery	RAG outcome	Progress Update
4.1	<p>4.1 Delivery of QA Framework</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Auditing -Practice weeks -Performance clinics -Training and coaching for audit consistency -Escalations -Quarterly QA reports shared with workforce -Review of QAF in light of new Trust Strategy -Regular Quality Board, chaired by Chief Exec to be established 	AD Quality Assurance & Commissioning	BRR Practice Improvement	Sep-21	<p>Increase in amount and range of QA activity across services that provides understanding of quality of practice</p> <p>Improvement in consistency of quality of QA activity (as confirmed by moderation)</p> <p>per cent Escalations resolved in timescale</p>	↑	Green	Amber	<p>CIC Practice week July and Safeguarding Practice Week completed. Fostering PW taking place Apr</p> <p>Increasing quality of audits and side by side audits</p> <p>QA training in place and management development session Jan - positive feedback- 1-2-1 support ongoing and training to be rolled out across service</p> <p>Performance clinics in place across social care services with standard terms of reference</p> <p>Ofsted focused visit identified that our QA activity identified same themes as inspection, and confirmed variability in quality of QA</p> <p>Ofsted focused visit identified QAF and findings from audit activity are underpinning improvements to practice</p> <p>QA Board, chaired by Chief Exec in place</p> <p>QA Strategy and Framework refreshed in line with new business plan, new audit tool (Collaborative Reflective Practice Discussions CRPDs) and cycle in place from April 21</p>

Ref	Actions	Lead	Additional funding to support delivery	Timescale	Measure of Progress	Direction of Travel since last update	RAG delivery	RAG outcome	Progress Update
4.2	<p>4.2 Learning Loops are in place and influence practice</p> <p>Learning and practice development opportunities are available to workforce in a range of mediums and through communication structures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Management oversight and audit - Peer Thematic Audit - Practice week - SCR/Practice Review - PIP 	AD Quality Assurance & Commissioning	BRR Practice Improvement	Sep-21	<p>Evidence of casework actions to complete audit recommendations</p> <p>Evidence of actions to implement thematic/SCR recommendations</p> <p>Evidence of learning through practitioner forums</p>	↔	Green	Amber	<p>Learning from QA activity being shared in workforce and leaders' newsletters, service management team meetings. Action plans developed by services in response to QA activity and Practice Week</p> <p>Audit team completing learning reviews and appreciative inquiry sessions. QA, SoS and Social Work Academy delivering training sessions with managers in response to QA findings.</p> <p>6 step briefings to be produced to disseminate audit findings</p> <p>Principal Social Worker role merged into Social Work Academy Service Manager role to improve learning loop</p> <p>Ofsted focused visit identified QAF and findings from audit activity are underpinning improvements to practice</p> <p>Ofsted focused visit found increasing examples of direct child centred work that informs plans and planning</p> <p>QA Board, chaired by Chief Exec in place from Mar</p> <p>Ofsted Feb MV said: More for IROs to do in consistently seeking the view of children and promoting attendance at reviews</p>

5. Healthy Partnerships.

Effective partnership working is essential to good practice.

Ofsted 2019 3a: Strategic development of early help services to ensure that children's needs are identified and responded to at the earliest opportunity.

Ref	Actions	Lead	Additional funding to support delivery	Timescale	Measure of Progress	Direction of Travel since last update	RAG delivery	RAG outcome	Progress Update
5.1	5.1a Early Help is strengthened across the partnership and front door demand is reduced with right children being referred at right time - EH Strategy - EH Action Plan - EH Pathways - Partner training re thresholds and SoS - PAUSE - DFE funded support	NSCP Early Help sub group and AD Early Help	DfE Early Help	Sep-21	Increased Early Help Assessments and interventions Reduced per cent of contacts that lead to no further action Increased per cent of contacts that lead to referral Reduced per cent referrals with a previous referral in the last 12 months in line with comparators Reduced per cent of contacts that lead to no further action Increased per cent of contacts that lead to referral Reduced per cent referrals with a previous referral in the last 12 months in line with comparators	↑	Green	Amber	EH Strategy agreed by NSCP, action plan now being delivered. Refreshed in line with Trust Business Plan for launch in May/ June. This is expected to increase early support and reduce inappropriate contacts to social care Edge of Care service in implementation from January - Perm AD EH to lead development Pause went live in October - women being engaged Increasing number of initial contacts signposted to Early Help Early help workers facilitate the right support whether that is provided by our Targeted support or partners in the locality area EH inclusion in MASH Pods and matrix management implemented Feb 21 Contacts to referrals not yet seen impact Increase in referrals from MASH to EH from 20 per cent Oct to 29 per cent Mar 21 Impact of Covid has led to increased demand and complexity
5.2	5.2a Clear transition pathway	Adults Lead with AD Corporate Parenting		Sep-21	Timely CIN meetings for children in transition to adulthood	↔	Green	Amber	There are closer working relationships with Adult Social Care and processes and timescales for children referred to Adult Social care have been strengthened. The implementation of the Moving in to Adulthood Panel (MIAP) and referral process has led to improved

Ref	Actions	Lead	Additional funding to support delivery	Timescale	Measure of Progress	Direction of Travel since last update	RAG delivery	RAG outcome	Progress Update
									<p>outcomes.</p> <p>Further improvements so that the system of transition as a whole is enabling earlier allocation and assessment, in particular for children and young people with Mental Health difficulties</p>
5.3	<p>5.3a Robust and effective identification of and response to risk in the MASH</p> <p>-Consistent application of thresholds</p> <p>- Effective Domestic abuse triage</p>	<p>Rich Tompkins with</p> <p>AD Safeguarding</p>		Mar-21	<p>Quality assurance activity shows increase in consistency of quality in identification and response to risk in the MASH</p> <p>Timely submission and screening of DA notifications</p> <p>Reduced rate of s47 in line with comparators</p> <p>Actions from strategy meetings to be clearly identified and actioned and outcome reported in s47 and risks identified and recorded in s47</p> <p>Reduction in the use of PPO</p> <p>Reduced number of repeat CP plans in line with comparators</p>	↔	Green	Amber	<p>The process for Domestic Abuse notifications has been further refined in the MASH. All high and medium risk Domestic Abuse notifications where children are present or involved are progressed through the MADRA (Multi Agency Daily Risk Assessment) meeting, and in addition to this the standard risk Domestic Abuse notifications where there have been 3 incidents of Domestic Abuse within a 12-month period and those where professional judgement identifies risks to the child.</p> <p>Ofsted focused visit found this helps ensure risks are understood and sensitive child and victim centred safety plans are implemented quickly</p> <p>MASH service plan completed in partnership being delivered</p> <p>Perm Strategic Manager for MASH and DAAT now in post</p>

Ref	Actions	Lead	Additional funding to support delivery	Timescale	Measure of Progress	Direction of Travel since last update	RAG delivery	RAG outcome	Progress Update
	5.3b Effective identification of and response to children at risk of exploitation - Development of county wide approach to all forms of exploitation - Development of youth strategy and offer - Improve management oversight of children who are missing education	Rich Tompkins with AD Early Help & AD Safeguarding with AD Education		Sep-21	risk assessments that are kept updated No of young people supported and outcomes Understanding of top 10 high risk YP across the partnership Data set that enables identification of risks/ trends	↔	Green	Amber	Vulnerable Adolescents Strategy completed Dec 2020 New adolescent service configuration, including Missing Children response, implemented 1st September 2020, that will enable a more responsive and preventative service for exploited and vulnerable teenagers and their families. Completed September 2020 Vulnerable Adolescents Panel operational from the 3rd December - 6 month review to take place Ofsted focused visit found effective collaborative work with partners helping to prevent or reduce harm to missing and exploited children, however targeted services for adolescents are currently fragmented <i>Ofsted Feb MV said: Prompt multi- agency response when children go missing from care and independent return interview provided to children in care</i> <i>Previous actions had been completed by Apr 21. This remains an action on the plan to review and develop as unitary Education Service now in place and perm AD Early Help has started and will review progress and further improvements to be made</i>
	5.3c Improvement in Practice - Assessments informed by partners' information - Regular multi-agency meetings	AD Safeguarding		Sep-21	Improvement in identification and response to risk identified in multi-agency audits	↑	Green	Amber	Locality multi-disciplinary meetings in place for children in care and children with disabilities Operational meetings for case discussions monthly with health i.e. focus on pre-births Operational meetings with police 6 weekly i.e. focus on risk management and strengthening relationships Vulnerable Adolescents Panel in place from Dec - impact will be reviewed after 6 months

Ref	Actions	Lead	Additional funding to support delivery	Timescale	Measure of Progress	Direction of Travel since last update	RAG delivery	RAG outcome	Progress Update
5.4	5.4a Improved Health Outcomes - Mental Health pathways for children in care and care leavers - Care Leavers health passports -develop Mental Health support teams in schools - children have up to date health reviews and dental checks	CAMHS Lead with AD Corporate Parenting	Public Health funding	Mar-22	Clear MH pathways for children in care, care leavers and vulnerable children Timely mental health assessments Reduction in per cent CAMHS referrals not accepted Reduction in number of children and young people presenting at A&E for self-harm and/or suicide ideation	↑	Green	Amber	Public Health funded projects for children's mental health now progressing (following some delay due to Covid) - Commissioning Manager in place from Dec and projects on track Additional MH funding for Northants announced Apr 21 via CCG All Children in Care are now able to access mental health consultation where next steps are agreed <i>Ofsted MV said: Not all children have up-to-date initial and review health assessment and dental checks but the inspectors acknowledge that this has been hindered by Covid and that there is a plan in place to remedy</i> <i>CAMHS for children in care offer a comprehensive range of services for children and carers and have appropriate oversight for children out of county</i>
	5.4b Strengthened corporate parenting -Increased range of apprenticeships and EET options	AD Corporate Parenting DCS		Mar-22	Maintain per cent care leavers in EET in line or above comparators Increased No. of apprenticeships for care leavers in Children's Trust and unitary councils	↔	Amber	Green	North and West Northants have agreed council tax exemption for care leavers Care Leavers in Suitable accommodation 92per cent Care Leavers in EET 59per cent close to stat neighbour - Covid impact <i>Ofsted Feb MV said: Leadership has taken prompt action to develop the partners understanding of corporate parenting responsibilities</i>
	.5.4c Housing needs are met	Unitary ADs for Housing &		Mar-22	Reduction in number of 16-17 year-olds	↔	Amber	Amber	As part of the Early Help Partnership, Housing have allocated single points of contact across the county to

Ref	Actions	Lead	Additional funding to support delivery	Timescale	Measure of Progress	Direction of Travel since last update	RAG delivery	RAG outcome	Progress Update
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Access to emergency accommodation - Joint pathway for 16 and 17 year-olds 	<p>Communities</p> <p>With AD Corporate Parenting AD Safeguarding and AD Early Help</p>			coming into care as s.20				<p>support the Partnership approach. This has been shared with NCT workforce and Housing have been asked to join NSCP Early Help subgroup and Vulnerable Adolescent Panel</p> <p>Impact of Covid adding to numbers of family breakdowns particularly with 16/17 year-olds.</p> <p>Unitary ADs for Housing & Communities now in place</p>
	<p>5.4d Educational needs are met</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Children in care are in appropriate educational placements to meet their need -Reduce number of children in care who are excluded -Safeguarding performance clinics to monitor PEPs 	<p>Head of Virtual School</p> <p>with AD Corporate Parenting</p>		Sep-21	<p>Reduction in proportion of children in care on part time timetables, home tuition or in alternative education for too long</p> <p>Reduction in proportion of children in care who are excluded from school</p>	↔	Amber	Amber	<p>Children in care at risk of being excluded or already excluded are discussed at the Vulnerable Pupils Panel held on a 3-weekly basis. Remedial activity planned and delivered.</p> <p>Multi-agency weekly meeting review all children who are excluded or at risk to ensure that they have oversight and multi-agency input that plans interventions and promotes an outcome focus for education placements to be achieved.</p>

6. Robust and Effective Resource Management.

We understand the key drivers of the budget and budget managers understand the financial impact of their decisions. Budget managers will be equipped with support and systems to effectively monitor and forecast.

Ofsted 2019 3c: Sufficiency of placements that meet children's needs

Ref	Actions	Lead	Additional funding to support delivery	Timescale	Measure of Progress	Direction of Travel since last update	RAG delivery	RAG outcome	Progress Update
6.1	<p>6.1a Monthly robust oversight and monitoring in place</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Performance clinics -Budget monitoring and forecasting -Establishment monitoring 	All ADs		Jul-21	<p>Performance issues identified and addressed</p> <p>Savings are achieved and services are delivered within budget. - Deficits are understood and mitigations are in place</p>	↔	Green	Amber	<p>Performance clinics in place with consistent TOR, successes celebrated at clinics.</p> <p>SLT monitoring of Covid specific management information in addition to business as usual information</p> <p>Revised model for establishment and workforce budget monitoring implemented August</p> <p>Tighter grip on recruitment and workforce spend by SLT, improved ownership of budgets and savings by ADs – further progress needed with managers’ ownership</p> <p>Budget Management and forecasting to be focus of new Support Structure to be in place from Apr 21</p>
6.2	<p>6.2a Deliver the Sufficiency Strategy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Placement Panel is effective and evidences activity Fostering Improvement Plan and IFA set up -Increase in in-house specialist foster carers -QA of fostering and residential framework -Options appraisal for bridging foster 	<p>AD Corporate Parenting</p> <p>AD Quality & Resources</p>	BRR Specialist Fostering	Mar-22	<p>Increase in no of in-house specialist foster carer placements</p> <p>Increase in no. of in-house standard foster carers</p> <p>Increase in in-house foster carer placement utilisation rate</p> <p>per cent CIC</p>	↑	Green	Amber	<p>Action plan refreshed Feb 21 and fixed term service manager in place to drive forward as Covid has had impact on moving ahead with some initiatives</p> <p>Reduction in children in residential homes achieved over period of last strategy - currently below comparators</p> <p>Placement Review Project achieved £1m savings to date and positive impact for children</p> <p>In house specialist Foster Carer recruitment will potentially provide 6 placements</p> <p>Utilisation of mainstream foster care placements remains steady at 86per cent Feb 2021 - net gain of 5 carers</p> <p>IFA step down fostering placements in place</p> <p>Public Health project for in-house fostering supporting children's mental health progressing</p> <p>Permanency tracking arrangements introduced in June - showing improvements.</p> <p>Just under 10per cent increase in number of available foster placements (excluding friends and family) which has led to 40 more children placed in in-house foster placements than were placed at 31st March 2020.</p>

Ref	Actions	Lead	Additional funding to support delivery	Timescale	Measure of Progress	Direction of Travel since last update	RAG delivery	RAG outcome	Progress Update
	care placements to support step down -Options appraisal for additional HMO for UASC				with in-house carers per cent CIC in residential care Savings are achieved				<i>Ofsted Feb MV said: Tangible improvements in placements sufficiency</i>