

## **Children looked after, care leavers and adoption**

This chapter looks at the level of need and key issues faced by children looked after. It also outlines the current provision of services for children looked after in North Somerset and the challenges that need to be addressed to improve service provision. We believe that we must ensure each child has the right home base where they can feel loved and supported. We know that coming into care itself and often the previous experiences in a child's life will have an ongoing and profound impact on their ability to settle into placement and do well in education. We will prioritise the physical health and emotional health and well being of our children looked after to ensure they are able to develop and grow into healthy confident young people.

We recognise the fundamental importance of receiving a good education and the lifelong impact this has on all of us – ensuring our children looked after attend school and receive additional support where needed is a priority across the Council and all partner agencies. Within our care population there are groups of children with particular needs which must be recognised and responded to by everyone working with them to ensure they too can achieve the best possible outcomes. We recognise the importance of listening to children and young people individually so that their views are reflected in plans made for them and also in the wider planning for services within the Resource Service and across the Council. We believe we must do more to strengthen the contribution that young people are encouraged to make to the development of services.

In order to provide our children with a strong and supportive base we need to recruit more foster carers, particularly those able to offer placements to teenagers, some of whom may be on remand, sibling groups, children from black and minority ethnic groups and children with a challenging history. The matching of each child to the most suitable placement is the key to good outcomes. All children benefit from a close supportive relationship with a carer who can believe in their potential and encourage each of them to raise their aspirations. Wherever possible we will seek permanent placements for our children, if this is not possible within their own families this will be in adoptive families, or Special Guardianship arrangements.

Finally we know that leaving care can be a lonely experience. We will support our young people and ensure that they are living in suitable accommodation with the help and support they need to find work with training, work experience or apprenticeships or to go into further and higher education. We want to see more of our young people choosing the option of university and we must ensure that we provide the support for them to do so. We know that many care leavers will find adulthood a challenge and we will give them the chances they need to try and try again until they find the path that suits them.

This chapter highlights the key challenges to be addressed to improve our services and give children looked after a real option of becoming successful adults able to make their own contribution to society.

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## **1. Introduction - Children in the Care of the Local Authority (Looked After): Why this subject is important.**

North Somerset Council has high aspirations for its children looked after and is committed to providing the highest standard of care. This can only be achieved by all parts of the council taking their responsibilities as corporate parents very seriously and alongside partner agencies, putting children looked after and care leavers at the top of their agendas.

Children and young people come into the care of the local authority, either on a voluntary basis with the agreement of their parents, or through a decision in the Family Courts. This may be necessary to protect the child from harm, or because the family needs support due to a crisis or particular circumstance.

Many children looked after will have been affected by distressing and damaging experiences, such as physical or sexual abuse and neglect. Some may be in care due to the illness or death of a parent. Others may have disabilities or complex needs. A minority are in care because of offences they have committed.

Unaccompanied children seeking asylum in the UK may also become looked after.

The health and wellbeing of children looked after and young people is significantly influenced by their life experiences prior to coming into care, by separation from family and by changes of placement once they are looked after. Experiences in their early lives may have long-term consequences for the health, social development, educational achievement and emotional well being of children looked after and care leavers.

There are just over 68,000 children looked after by local authorities in England. In North Somerset there were 210 children aged between 0 -17 looked after at the end of January 2013, compared to an overall population of children in North Somerset of 41,400 at the time of the 2011 national census. Around 79% of North Somerset's children looked after are placed in foster care. The remaining children who have become looked after are placed for adoption, live in residential homes or are living independently.

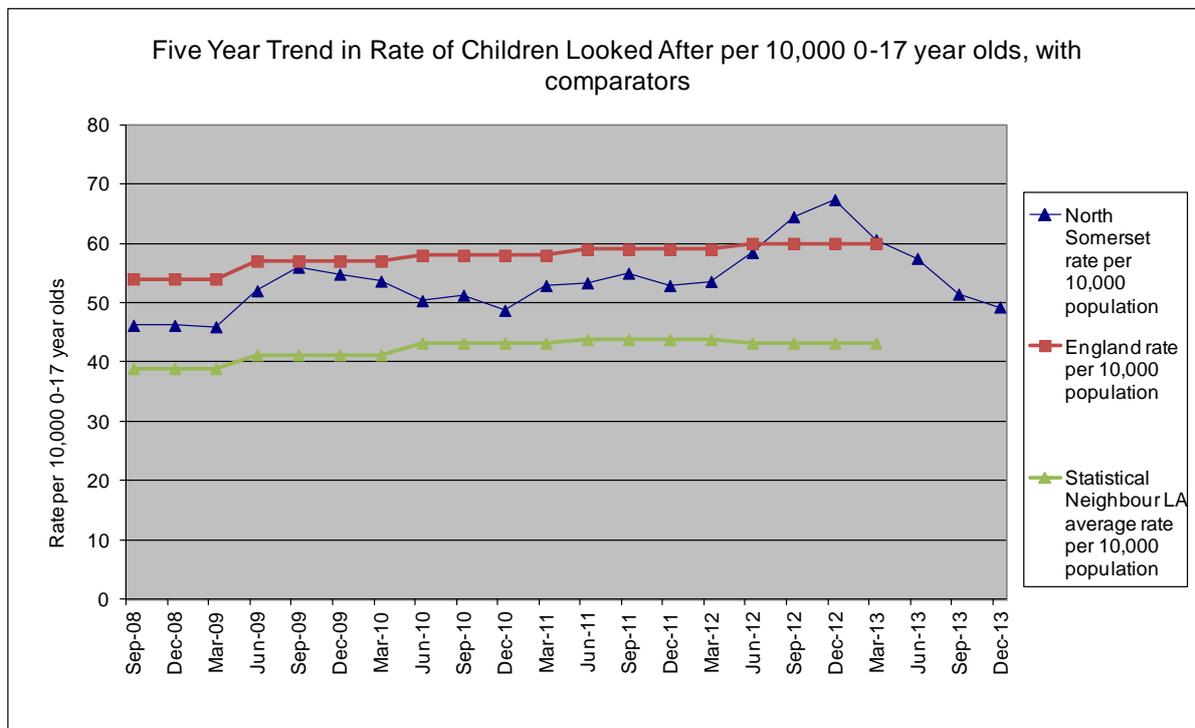
Children looked after are significantly more likely than their peers to leave school with few or no qualifications. These young people are at higher risk of becoming involved in offending, becoming a teenage parent and of not being in education, employment or training once they have left school.

Certain children looked after are entitled to support as Care Leavers, broadly these are children who have been looked after beyond the age of 16. Councils have ongoing responsibilities for Care Leavers, helping to promote their independence and stability and keeping in contact with them until they are 25.

We know that many young people leaving care will face more challenges and barriers than their peers particularly through the first decade of adulthood. Care Leavers are more likely than their peers to become NEET (not in employment, education and training) and the likelihood of this increases the earlier they leave care.

## 2. The needs of children looked after in North Somerset:

### Numbers of Children Looked After:



The number of children looked after in England has increased each year since 2008. In March 2013 there were 68,110 children looked after, an increase of 1.5% from March 2012, and an increase of 12% from March 2009. The number of children looked after in England is now at its highest for over 25 years.

In North Somerset there was a general increase in the numbers of children looked after between March 2007 (158) and December 2012 (279). Greater awareness of child protection and safeguarding amongst all agencies has been a major contributing factor with numbers rising significantly following the death of Peter Connolly in 2008.

However, over recent months there has been a fall in the number of children looked after in North Somerset to 204 on 31<sup>st</sup> December 2013 and since then the number of looked after children has remained around this level.

There are a number of factors which may be contributing to this reduction that include;

- Thresholds for intervention are appropriate and consistently applied
- Care is used only when it is in the child's best interests
- Courts are seeking to minimise delay e.g. by minimising the appointment of experts
- The focus on speeding up the adoption process

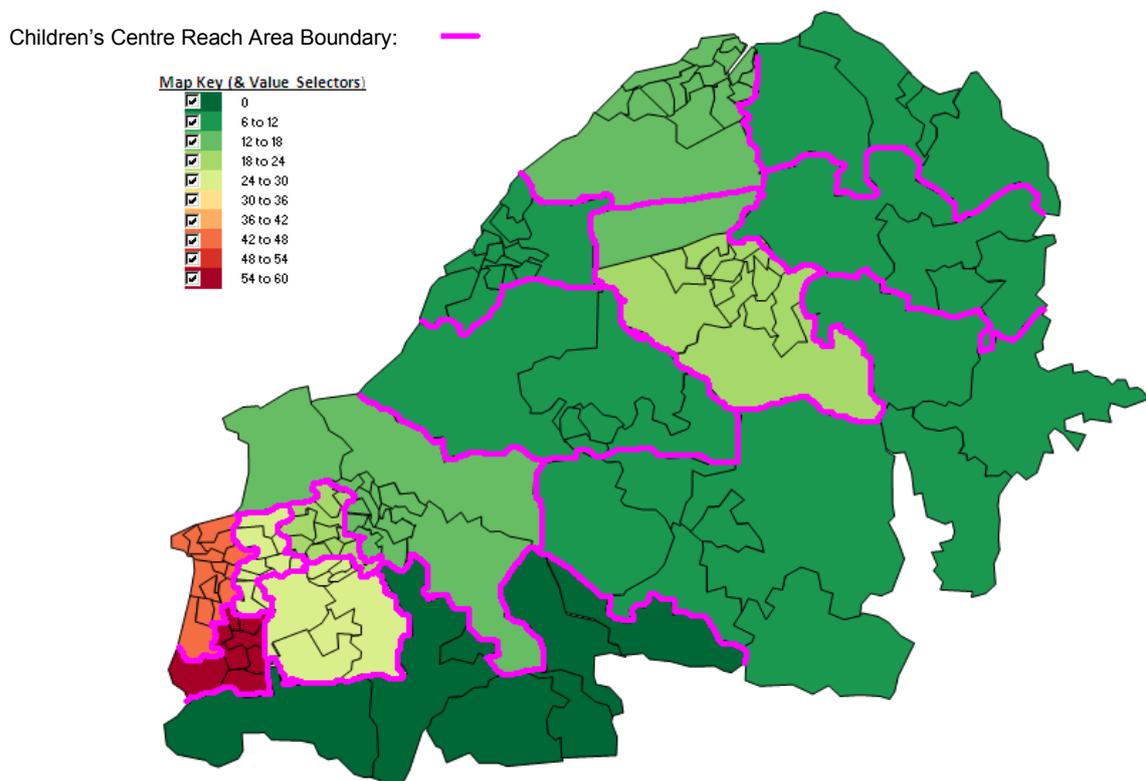
Effective and robust safeguarding, early prevention and support activities are critical to minimising the need for children to be brought into local authority care.

### 3. Where Children Looked After come from

Children looked after tend to come from the southern part of North Somerset, particularly Weston Super Mare which has the greatest density of population and includes areas of high deprivation.

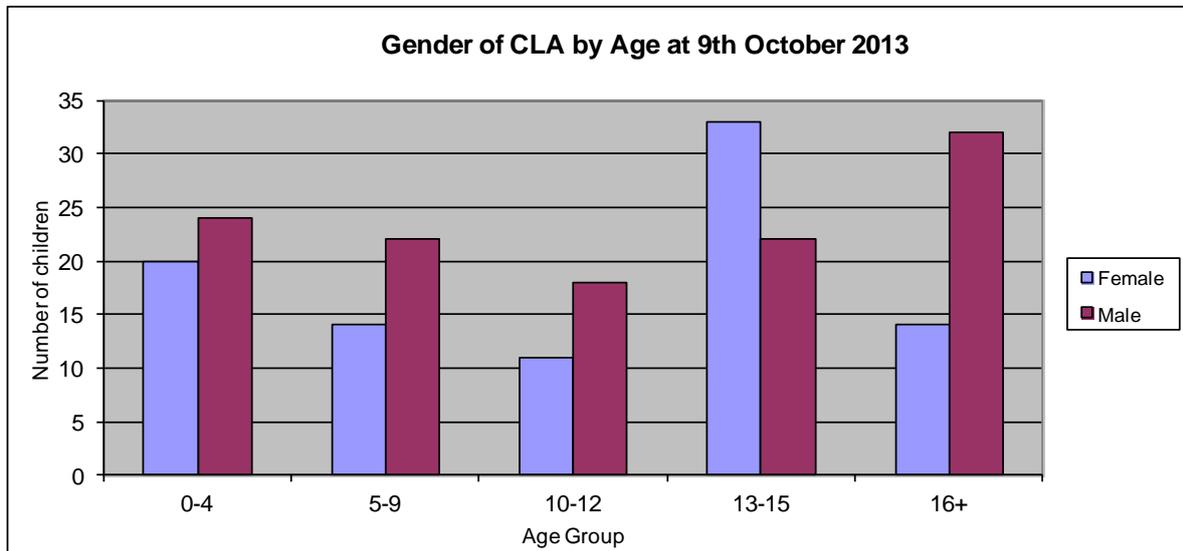
The chart below colours the 14 Children’s Centre Reach Areas according to the number of children looked after who come from each area, with black lines showing the Lower Super Output Areas within each Reach Area.

#### Home Address of Children Looked After at November 2013 by Children’s Centre Reach Area

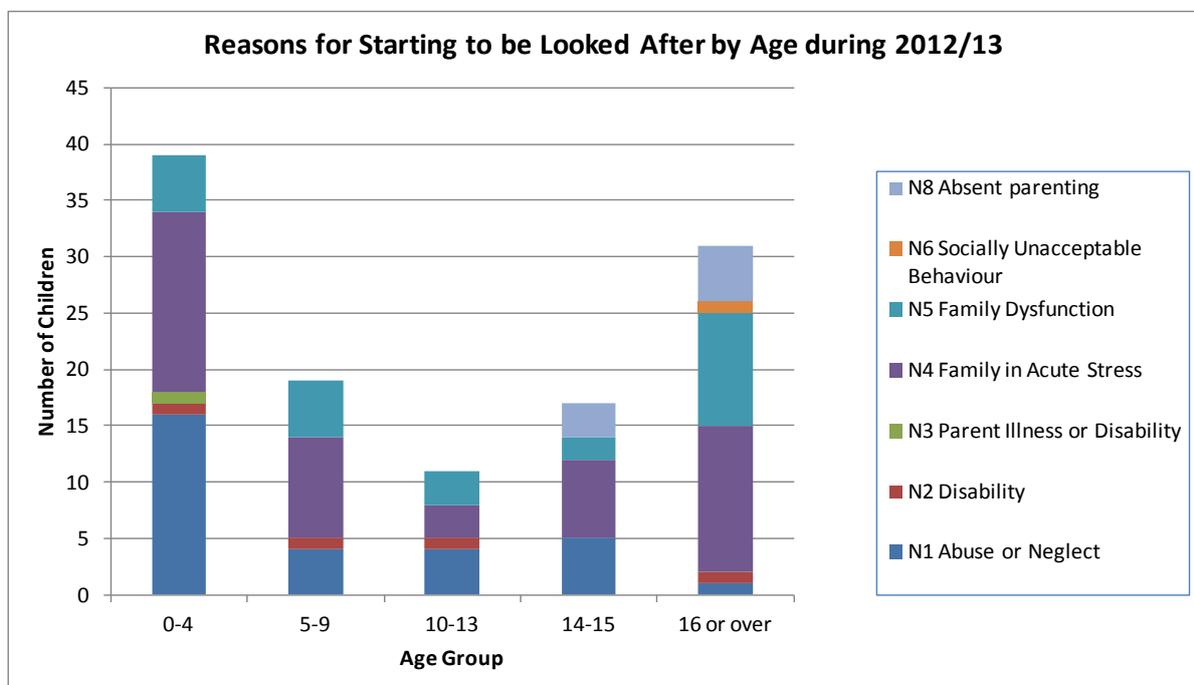


#### 4. Age and Gender profile of Children Looked After

In October 2013 boys made up a higher proportion of young children looked after than girls, and also a higher proportion of 16+ year olds.



#### 5. Reasons for being Looked After - Category of Need



In 2012/13 most North Somerset children started to be looked after when aged 0-4 or 16+. The reasons children started to be looked after were mainly because

families were in temporary acute stress or more chronic family dysfunction. Abuse or neglect was a major reason for young children starting to be looked after.

This is in line with national trends, with younger children entering care following abuse or neglect and more teenagers needing to be looked after following family breakdown. Experiences of abuse and neglect have far reaching effects which are likely to lead to long term consequences for the health and social development of these children.

## 6. Health

Children who become looked after share the same health risks and problems as all young people, but children often enter the care system with a poorer level of health than their peers. The government has produced statutory guidance<sup>1</sup> to promote the health of children looked after which underlines that joint working between local authorities and the NHS is vital. It sets out the role of the Local Authority as the corporate parent to work in partnership with health agencies to ensure the child looked after has their health needs assessed and a health plan drawn up.

The NHS contributes to meeting the health needs of children looked after by commissioning effective services, delivering through provider organisations and individual practitioners providing coordinated care for each child, young person and carer.

The Clinical Commissioning Groups have responsibility for the health of the children looked after from their area, even when that child is placed in another area. In North Somerset during 2012/13, 97% of children who had been looked after for at least a year and were living within North Somerset received all their annual health assessments. However, ensuring these happen for children placed outside the area is often more problematic and 70% of these children looked after received all their health assessments during 2012/13.

At least 84% of North Somerset's children looked after for over a year received at least one dental check during 2012/13 and 88% were up to date with their immunisations at the end of the year.

**Challenge:**

To ensure that 90% children looked after by North Somerset are receiving regular health checks and dental checks, whether they live within the authority or another area.

To ensure that all physical and mental health needs for children looked after are addressed by a health plan which is owned by the council and all health partners.

To ensure that health services provide a range of services to meet all levels of health needs within the looked after population.

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[http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH\\_108501](http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_108501)

## **7. Mental Health and Emotional Well Being (See JSNA Chapter: Mental Health and Well Being of Children in North Somerset)**

Improving the mental health of children has a positive impact on their ability to form positive relationships with peers and adults, helping them succeed at school and make a success of their lives as adults.

We know that the neglectful and abusive experiences which children are subjected to before they come into care have been found to have a significant impact on their placement stability, which in turn will affect children in all other areas of their lives. Therefore the assessment of mental health needs and the response of health and other agencies to meeting those needs is critical to positive outcomes for all children looked after.

In North Somerset we use the Strength and Difficulty Questionnaire (SDQ), which is a standardised approach to assessing the emotional and behavioural health of children and has been shown to be a useful indicator of potential mental health need (Goodman & Goodman, 2012). The questionnaire scores children on a range between 0 and 40 with scores of 17 and above being a cause for concern. The information collected is used to identify children who are in need of additional support and placements that may potentially become unstable. A response is provided through Consult, the long term children looked after team and the CAMHS service.

In North Somerset, 41% of children looked after who were assessed using the SDQ completed by their carers scored within the range for concern during 2012/13. The norm for British children as scored by parents is around 9.8%. This suggests North Somerset's children looked after are over 4 times more likely to have emotional and behavioural problems than would be typically expected across all children in Britain. Additionally the average (mean) score for North Somerset's children looked after was 15.2, much higher than the expected 'norm' of 8.4 for British children.

### **Challenges:**

- To assess the emotional health of each child looked after to identify need
- To address each child's needs through an 'Emotional Wellbeing Plan'
- To work with colleagues to review services available to support and action children's emotional health and wellbeing plans
- To provide a package of services that supports each child's or young person's emotional health and wellbeing. This will range from life story work to therapeutic support and access to tier three CAMHS support
- To train foster carers to understand and positively respond to the emotional health and well being of children looked after

## **8. Educational Attainment**

Local Authorities have a duty to promote the educational achievement of children looked after: 'a lack of educational achievement is one of the biggest barriers to children looked after realising their potential'<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> Education Matters in Care – the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Children looked after and Care Leavers July 2012.

It is widely recognised that good educational attainment is associated with increased health and wellbeing later in life. Despite a far greater emphasis on improving educational outcomes for children looked after over the past decade, low levels of expectation for children looked after in education still persist across the country.

The same is true for children who are not looked after, but who do receive services from councils as Children in Need.

Children looked after are much more likely to have a Statement of Special Educational Needs than other pupils and in North Somerset almost three-quarters have some level of special educational needs, compared to 1 in 5 of all pupils.

**Children aged 5 to 15 who have been CLA continuously for at least a year by Special Educational Needs (SEN) status**

	No SEN	SEN without statement	SEN with a statement	Total children with SEN
North Somerset all pupils	80.1%	18.3%	1.6%	19.9%
North Somerset CLA	25.4%	51.8%	22.8%	74.6%
England CLA	28.5%	42.1%	29.4%	71.5%

Note: Data is for 2012. The number of school age children at 31/03/2012 continuously CLA for 12 months was 115.  
Source: 'Children with special educational needs: an analysis - 2013' DfE; October 2013

Attainment at Key Stage 2 by children looked after is lower than for all pupils and the extent of this gap fluctuate from year to year due to the relatively small cohorts. Figures across a number of years suggest that the gap widens by Key Stage 4. The percentage of children looked after achieving 5+ GCSEs A\*-C (including English and Maths GCSEs) in 2013 was 23.5%, compared to 58.6% of all pupils.

Children Looked After	Result			Gap between CLA achieving & all pupils		2013 Results average:	
	2011	2012	2013	2012	2013	Statistical Neighbours	England
<b>Key Stage 2 Level 4+ : % of pupils achieving</b>							
English (or Reading test only for 2013)	33%	67%	30%	19%	59%	57%	63%
Maths	56%	78%	20%	7%	66%	55%	59%
<b>GCSE or equivalent : % of pupils achieving</b>							
5+ A*-C inc Eng & Maths	17%	10%	24%	48%	34%	15%	15%

Note: KS2 English test results are not comparable between years and KS4 GCSE English thresholds were also different. The percentages shown in the 'gap' columns are percentage points, i.e. 10% of CLA pupils achieving compared to 58% in the wider population would be a 48 percentage point gap, shown as 48%.

'A better education for children in care' (Social Exclusion Unit 2003) identified five reasons why children looked after may underachieve in education

- Their lives are characterised by instability
- They spend too much time out of school
- They do not have sufficient help with their education if they fall behind
- Primary carers are not equipped to provide sufficient support and encouragement for learning and development
- They have unmet emotional, mental and physical health needs which impact on their learning

In North Somerset the educational achievement for each child looked after is at the top of our agenda and we have identified 5 challenges that will focus the thinking and actions of all agencies to improve educational outcomes.

**Challenges:**

To ensure every child attends and achieves in school

To prioritise the training of foster carers to enable them to support the education of children looked after

To address the needs of children looked after that impact on their ability to concentrate and learn

To monitor and ensure that the pupil premium plus is being utilised for each child

To ensure that every educational opportunity is provided.

To make better use of mentoring and coaching programmes to support educational attainment and encourage the aspirations of our children

### **9. Placements – Overview**

Since 2010 the council has been actively seeking to increase the number of in-house foster carers offering placements to children looked after. We must ensure that the fostering service and Placement Service is able to provide sufficient placements to meet the identified needs of children looked after while offering 'value for money'.

In North Somerset there has been an increase overall in the number of fostering households from 75 in March 2009 to 91 in March 2013. However this increase has not been able to address the rising need due to the increasing numbers of children looked after between 2009 and 2013.

It is anticipated that in 2014/15, North Somerset Council should anticipate numbers of looked after children ranging from 190 to 220. To provide placements that can meet that number of children, and offer sufficient choice and flexibility, there will need to be 100 to 120 foster carers registered with North Somerset Council. (We currently have 94 mainstream carers and 23 Kinship carers providing care for 30 children (November 2013).

There are on average 15 fostering households de-registered on an annual basis due to retirement etc.

In North Somerset we need to increase the range of suitable placements to meet the diverse needs of children looked after and young people. In particular we require suitable placements for specific groups (teenagers, sibling groups, black and minority ethnic children, challenging children and children with disabilities) and must be more targeted in our recruitment to meet individual needs. Numbers in some of these groups is small and demand can rise and fall – therefore the recruitment of foster carers and placements which can offer different types of placements and can be flexible in their arrangements is particularly critical.

In addition there will need to be an increase in placements in order to meet the new requirement to enable more young people to remain with their foster carers to 21 years.

### Challenge:

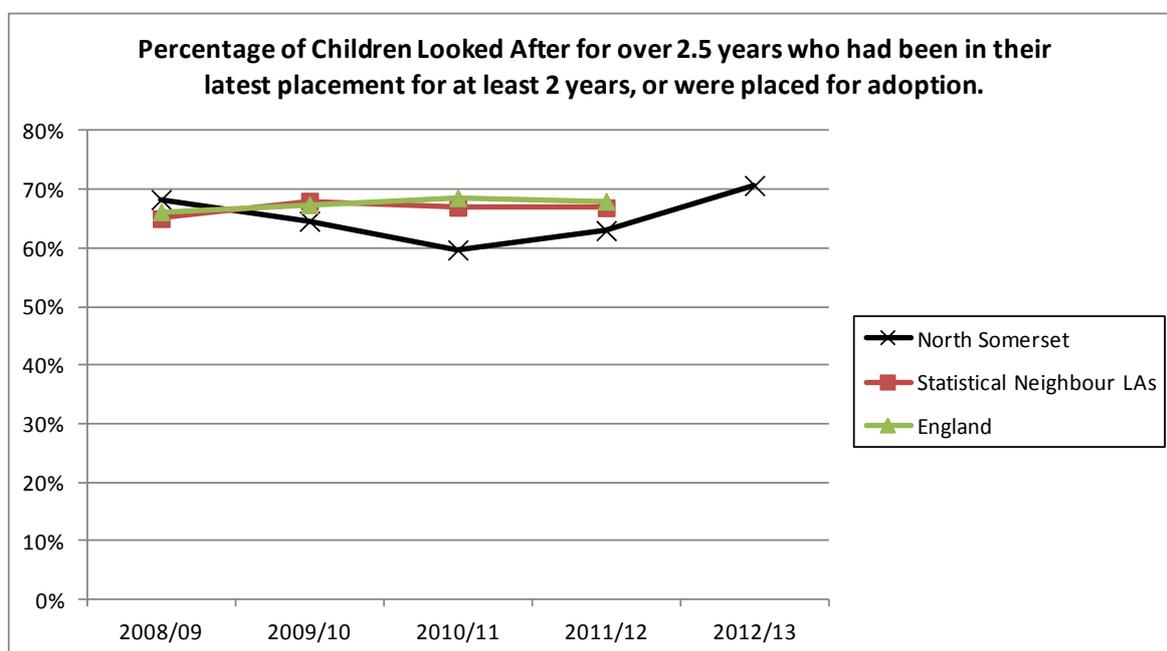
- To increase the pool of available placements for teenagers, sibling groups, black and minority ethnic children, challenging children and children with disabilities.
- To develop a small number of placements to be used for young people on remand or emergency 'out of hours' placements.

## 10. Placement Stability

Achieving stability for children looked after and reducing the number of moves they experience in their lives is critical to improving outcomes for young people who have been in care. We know that the quality of a child's day-to-day care and the chance to build a trusting long-term relationship with their carer will have an impact on all other areas of their lives.

*Reducing the number of unnecessary moves is a priority as stable and nurturing placements are thought to directly influence the child's ability to recover from the abusive and neglectful experiences, which they have previously had. (Harden, 2004, in Price et al, 2008)*

Instability for a child within a placement may be due to increasingly challenging behaviour, changes in birth family circumstances, contact with birth family members, transition points in the child's life such as primary to secondary school, changes within the foster family, the combination of the children placed within the foster family, or impact on the birth children within the foster family.



In North Somerset our placement stability needs improvement. Placement stability is a priority, as we believe strongly in the importance of a stable placement as the basis for meeting the needs of children looked after and ensuring it is possible to achieve good educational outcomes. Placement stability is the result of a number of factors which include: listening to the wishes and feelings of the child, choice and matching of each placement, good initial information and assessment on the needs of the

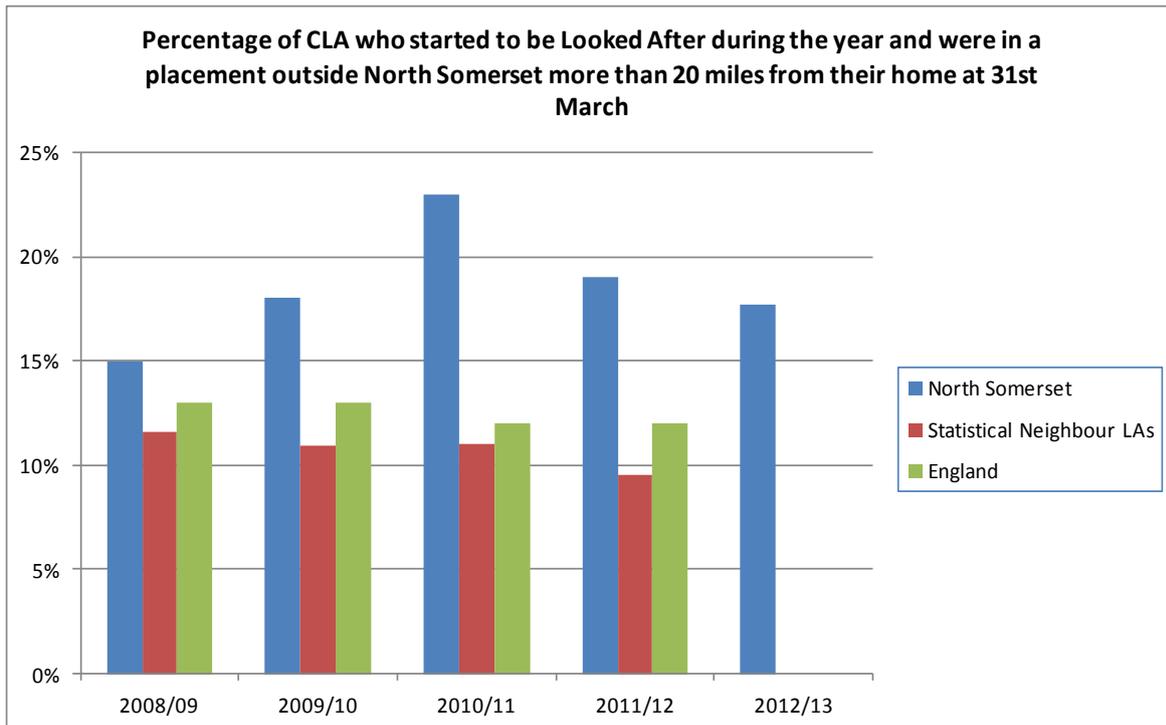
child, strong foster carers who lead the drive to provide good parenting to children, training and support to foster carers, multi-agency commitment to meet the educational and health needs of each child, and careful monitoring and rapid response when difficulties are identified within a placement.

#### Challenges

- To improve matching, and planning for permanence, so that children are placed with foster carers who can meet their needs and provide a safe long term relationship for as long as necessary
- To provide therapeutic support at an early stage for all children looked after
- To increase the support and training to foster carers to develop resilience and expertise which can sustain placements through periods of challenge and difficulty
- To monitor placement stability and provide a rapid response when crises are imminent
- To provide a multi-agency response to placement instability to ensure a comprehensive response which addresses all areas of need

### **11. Out of County Placements**

Due to rising numbers of children looked after over the past five years and increased pressure on available placements, North Somerset placed 14 (18%) of children starting to be looked after into 'out of county' placements over 20 miles from their homes in 2012/13. Some of these young people were placed appropriately in order to be nearer family members, or further away from potential risk of harm, or within communities that more appropriately matched their cultural, racial or religious identity. However many of these children were too far from North Somerset to be well supported and to make good use of resources available to them within the local authority.



### Challenges:

- To reduce the numbers of children and young people placed outside North Somerset by increasing the number of in-house foster carers, thereby offering more placement choice and availability to a wider range of children and young people looked after within the authority.
- To strengthen the Supported Lodgings service to provide placements for older young people wishing to return to the area from 'out of county' placements.
- To increase the range of supported housing options for young people returning to North Somerset
- To keep and monitor a single data set of all children and young people living 'out of county', to ensure they receive the services identified within their plan.

## 12. Placements with Family and Friends, Special Guardianship and Residence Orders

*'Family and friends carer' means a relative, friend or other person with a prior connection with somebody else's child who is caring for that child full time. An individual who is a "connected person" to a looked after child may also be a family and friends carer. A child who is cared for by a family and friends carer may or may not be looked after by the local authority<sup>3</sup>*

<sup>3</sup> Family and Friends Care: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities. Reference:DFE-00025-2011  
Published:March 2011

Many children unable to live with their parents are living with family and friends (also known as Kinship) carers. Over 7,000 of these children are children looked after who are placed with family members and friends who have been approved as their foster carers. North Somerset Council has published its policy in relation to Family and Friends Care which is available on its website.

There were 33 Family and Friends carers in North Somerset at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2013 who cared for 46 children looked after. These carers receive support from the Adoption and Permanence Team as their needs and expectations are often different to those of mainstream foster carers. These carers may need family specific support that addresses family relationships, complex dynamics and conflict over contact etc. Where appropriate, family and friends carers are supported to apply for Special Guardianship Orders or Residence Orders as this provides permanence and longer term stability for children.

Special Guardianship Orders were made for 10 children looked after in 2012-13 and 12 children looked after in 2013-14 in North Somerset.

#### Challenges

- To support more children looked after into permanent family arrangements
- To encourage and enable more Kinship families to become Special Guardians

### **13. Adoption and Permanence**

The aim for most children when they become looked after is for them to be returned back to their family in due course, or for them to be placed permanently with another family via Adoption or another legal order such as a Special Guardianship Order or a Residence Order, if it would not be appropriate for them to return to their original family.

The number of children needing to be placed for permanence through adoption has increased significantly and is predicted to continue to remain high for the foreseeable future.

The Adoption Reform requirements place an expectation on Local Authorities to increase the number of approved adopters and approve them within shorter timescales. Local Authority adoption agencies are expected to join together to create more efficient systems of recruiting adopters and provide a wider choice of family to meet a child's needs. North Somerset is working alongside neighbouring authorities to set up a more effective system for recruiting adopters and making adoptive placements across the area. This is known as 'Adoption West'. This plan is still in the early stages of development, but it is hoped that this will provide an opportunity to make better use of skills and resources available across each authority.

The adoption scorecard for North Somerset confirms that we have a challenge to improve timely adoption for children. Currently statistics show that North Somerset is taking longer between a child starting to be looked after and placing them with a prospective adoptive family than our statistical neighbours or the England average

However, 16 children in North Somerset have been adopted during the period April to November 2013 and 14 children have been matched to possible families. Work is underway to move these 14 children into their adoptive families.

Twelve adopters have been approved at the Adoption Panel since April 2013. There are 19 adopters currently undergoing assessments and it is expected that all of these will be presented to panel before March 2014. The numbers of new adopters approved in 2013/14 is expected to be 25.

#### Challenges

- To reduce delay for 'children waiting' to come in line with government timescales.
- To reduce the time taken to match a child after a placement order has been made.
- To respond to the national shortage of adopters by recruiting more adopters than are needed in North Somerset.
- To recruit, assess and train adopters within shorter timescales.
- To ensure that adoption support is provided and improved to adopters as required by Adoption Reform and to ensure that North Somerset adopters receive a high standard of service. .

#### **14. Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children - UASC**

In North Somerset there is a small number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children coming from Eastern Europe, Afghanistan, North Africa and South East Asia by road or to Bristol International Airport, which is located within North Somerset. Unaccompanied asylum seeking children are unified by their separation not only from their family, but from their community and country of origin and are seeking refuge from political, cultural, religious or other forms of persecution including armed conflict and war.

UAS children will experience culture shock where language, food, routine, religious observance, attitudes to animals, education, sexuality, gender, dress, alcohol and those in authority including parental figures may be very different. Previous expectations and experiences of custom and culture may be very different to those they encounter in the UK.

As children looked after they should benefit from all the services, support and care that any looked after child can expect. UAS Children will have additional needs as the result of the experiences they have had prior to arriving in the UK and as a result of the differences in culture. They may have additional health needs, and they will need extra support to settle into school and manage relationships whilst probably needing to learn and communicate in a new language.

In North Somerset these young people are mostly placed 'out of the county' so that they can be placed with foster carers and in communities that can meet their particular racial, cultural and religious needs, with the majority living in the Bristol area and one in Birmingham.

It is difficult to anticipate the future number of UASC due to the range of external factors that impact on this, but it is not anticipated that the number will rise significantly.

#### Challenges

- To ensure suitable placements are available to meet the needs of UASC
- To ensure that UASC are enabled to settle into a new culture and develop positive relationships to support them
- To ensure that their educational and health needs are addressed

## 15. Ethnicity of Children Looked After

The large majority of North Somerset's children looked after have a White British ethnic origin, just under 90% on 31 March 2013. This is higher than the England average of 78%. A higher proportion of North Somerset's children looked after come from minority ethnic groups than would be expected given the proportions in the wider population of children in North Somerset. Numbers are relatively small and so fluctuate, but children of mixed heritage are generally over-represented, whereas children with a white ethnic origin other than White British are currently under-represented amongst looked after children

Achieving and maintaining a sense of security may be more difficult for children and young people from black, minority ethnic and multiple heritage backgrounds, and for unaccompanied asylum seekers. These groups may face racism and isolation which can additionally challenge their ability to develop resilience and high self-esteem. Fostered children from black and minority ethnic backgrounds, wherever they are placed, need support to appreciate their cultural heritage and to face possible racism and discrimination

In North Somerset we have not yet been successful in recruiting foster carers from minority groups within the community and it is therefore not always possible currently to match children according to race or ethnicity with North Somerset foster carers. Placements are usually sought through Independent Fostering Agencies locally.

#### Challenges:

- To actively and successfully recruit foster carers who are able to meet the needs of children from black and minority groups to offer local placements to children that match their needs.
- To ensure that children from BME groups have contact with communities that reflect their racial, cultural or religious background
- To ensure that BME children have positive relationships and role models from cultures that reflect their own

## 16. Children Looked After and Offending

(See Youth Justice Partnership Plan 2013 – 16)

Children looked after are more likely to come into contact with the youth justice system than the general population: in England 6.2% of young people aged 10 or more looked after for at least a year, compared to 1.5% of all young people<sup>4</sup>.

Prior to care most looked after children have experienced many of the risk factors, such as adverse parenting and abuse, that also lead to offending. Therefore those young people who are looked after and those who are offending to a large extent have similar risk factors.

The offending rates of looked after children vary in accordance with the length of time spent in care and by the type of placement. Those who have been looked after for 12-18 months are more likely to offend than those who spend longer in care<sup>5</sup>.

Two of the most crucial periods (for risk of offending) are entry into care during adolescence and transitions from care to independence.

In North Somerset during the three years to 2012/13, children looked after for over a year aged 10-17 were four times more likely to be convicted, or be subject to a final warning or reprimand than young people in the wider population. A diversionary multi-agency panel for young people at risk of entering the criminal justice system (Better Futures) is now in place to identify those young people who are potentially at risk of offending. The panel will ensure effective case co-ordination and establish/review agreed plans of intervention. This panel is chaired by the YOS manager and attended by social care staff working with young people at risk as well as multi-agency partners.

The LASPO (Legal Aid Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act) 2012 places responsibilities on the Local Authority in respect of young people between the ages of 12 -18 who are remanded to Youth Detention Accommodation.

The act places a responsibility on Local Authorities to accommodate in a suitable placement any young person under the age of 18 who may otherwise be held overnight in a police station. Therefore any young person remanded in custody will become a child looked after and potentially a care leaver.

Historically there has been a low/unpredictable demand for remand foster placements for children who are held in police cells or remanded to Youth Detention Accommodation. These beds are often required without notice and the nature of the remand restricts the use of mainstream foster carers who may not be able to meet the needs of the young person and satisfy requirements of the courts. Currently placements are spot purchased through independent providers but North Somerset is seeking to recruit to a small pool of foster carers able to provide remand placements.

Substance misuse is a matter of concern for all young people, and especially vulnerable are children who are looked after (particularly if they are excluded from

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<sup>4</sup> Department for Education (2013) *Outcomes for Looked After Children as at March 2013* London: Department for Education

<sup>5</sup> Blade R, Hart D, Lea J and Willmott N (2011) *Care – A Stepping Stone to Custody? The views of children in care on the links between care, offending and custody* London: Prison Reform Trust

school). Many of these children come from homes where families have misused drugs and alcohol.

In North Somerset during 2011-12 there were 158 children who had been looked after for a year or more, of whom less than 5 were identified as having substance misuse issues and they all received an intervention for their substance misuse problem. The Substance Advice Service (SAS) received a total of 14 new referrals that were looked after children in 2011-12, of which 13 were assigned to the Tier 2 service; in 2012-13 there was an increase to a total of 26 referrals that were looked after children or young people.

The Mental Health and Substance related needs of young people who are known to the Youth Offending and/ or Substance Advice Service are met through robust assessment with subsequent Care Planning of identified need. Onward referral is made to specialist services as required (e.g. No Worries), with practical support to attend these appointments facilitated.

The link between increasing substance misuse and risk of offending behaviour requires further work and collaboration between those working with looked after children, health services and the youth offending service.

**Challenges:**

- To recruit foster carers able to offer emergency placements to young people held on remand or involved in criminal activity.
- To develop foster placements that can offer stability, reduce risk and promote resilience, thereby reducing risk of offending
- To develop initiatives and potential for diverting looked after young people from involvement in crime and/or antisocial behaviour
- To increase health education and support to young people who are at risk from substance misuse
- To anticipate and plan for the 'high risk' period when a young person leaves care which may lead to offending behaviour

## **17. Child Sexual Exploitation**

Child Sexual Exploitation is a form of child abuse which involves children and young people receiving something (e.g. money, drugs, and affection) in return for sexual activity. This often but not always follows a period of grooming where the offender pretends affection to create trust in the young victim. Child Sexual Exploitation is a national priority area and is recognised by North Somerset as an area that needs careful monitoring to ensure that none of our young people is abused in this way (See JSNA Chapter: Safeguarding).

The profile of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) was raised nationally in November 2011 with the publication of the governments 'Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation Action Plan' (Department of Education, 2011).

“From our emerging findings we have ascertained that children are being victimised through gang and group associated sexual exploitation from the age of 10 upwards, and are both female and male (although predominantly female). They come from a full range of ethnic backgrounds represented in England, and some are disabled. The abuse is taking place across England in urban, rural and metropolitan areas”<sup>6</sup>.

Multi agency working and information sharing are particularly key issues in tackling CSE. In 2013 the North Somerset Safeguarding Children Board (NSSCB) commissioned an independent report in respect of CSE in North Somerset and a multi agency sub group was formed in the autumn of 2013. The group has developed an action plan and draft CSE strategy to be agreed at the NSSCB in March 2014. The action plan includes work to develop CSE Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs), in North Somerset with direct links to the local Missing Children Protocol.

### **Challenges**

- To raise awareness about child sexual exploitation, what to look for and the needs of victims
- To consider the possibility of child sexual exploitation whenever a child goes missing or other possible risk indicators are present
- To increase communication and collate information on children at risk or are victims of child sexual exploitation
- To develop CSE MARACs

## **18. Leaving Care**

‘Care leavers should expect the same level of care and support that others would expect from a reasonable parent. The local authority responsible for their care should make sure that they are provided with the opportunities they need, which will include offering them more than one chance as they grapple with taking on the responsibilities of adulthood’<sup>7</sup>.

The duties and responsibilities that Local Authorities have towards care leavers are set out in The Children Act 1989 which was updated in 2010 to include [Planning Transition to Adulthood for Care Leavers](#). It includes The Care Leavers (England) Regulations 2010.

As a corporate parent North Somerset has a responsibility to ensure that all young people leaving our care receive the support and encouragement they need to move confidently into adulthood. This means providing emotional support, financial advice and guidance about making plans for their future as well as practical support with accommodation and personal needs. It also means giving chances, offering a safety net where needed, and tailoring services to meet the needs of individuals.

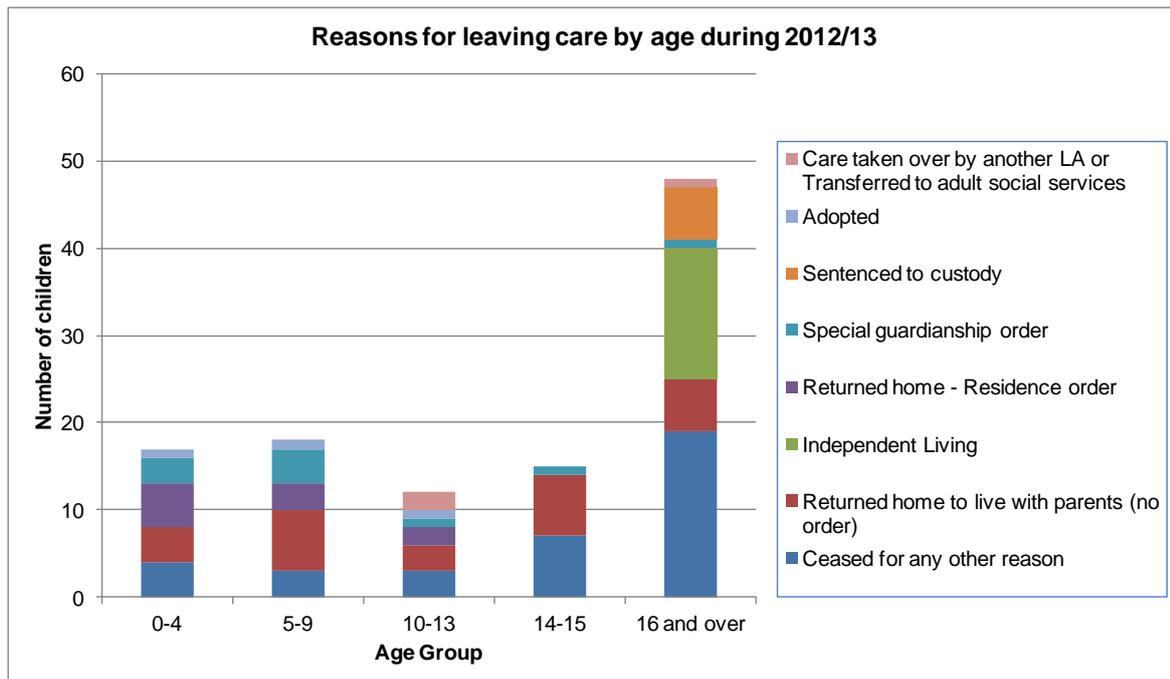
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<sup>6</sup> Briefing for the Rt Hon Michael Gove MP, Secretary of State for Education, on the emerging findings of the OCC’s Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Gangs and Groups, with a special focus on children in care. July 2012

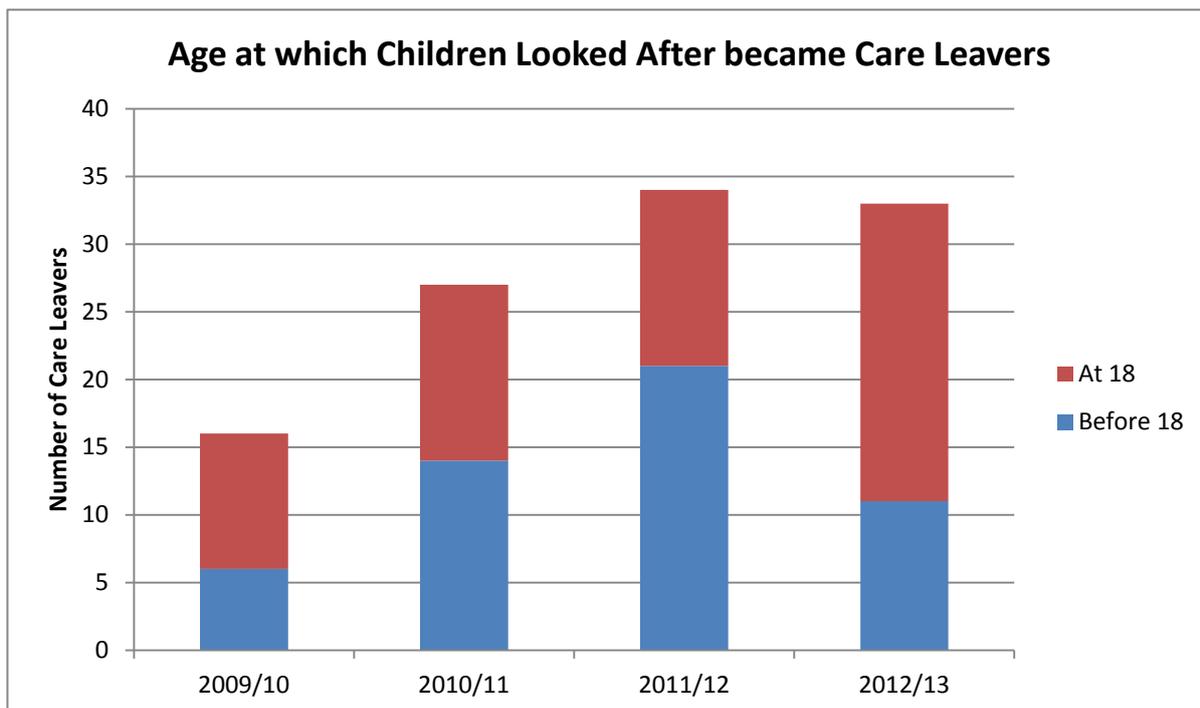
<sup>7</sup> Volume 3: Planning Transition to Adulthood for Care Leavers. Publication date: October 2010  
Implementation date: 1 April 2011

Preparation for adulthood and leaving care is not a one off event, but a process that supports young people to make a successful transition to independence. This begins when children looked after are still a long way from independence and must be carefully planned as part of the young person's journey through care.

We must ensure that we have high aspirations for our young people. Providing ongoing support to help young people think about and plan for their future educational and employment careers is key to ensuring that they are able to achieve their potential. This will be part of the young person's Pathway Plan which should be in place from age 16 years and 3 months.

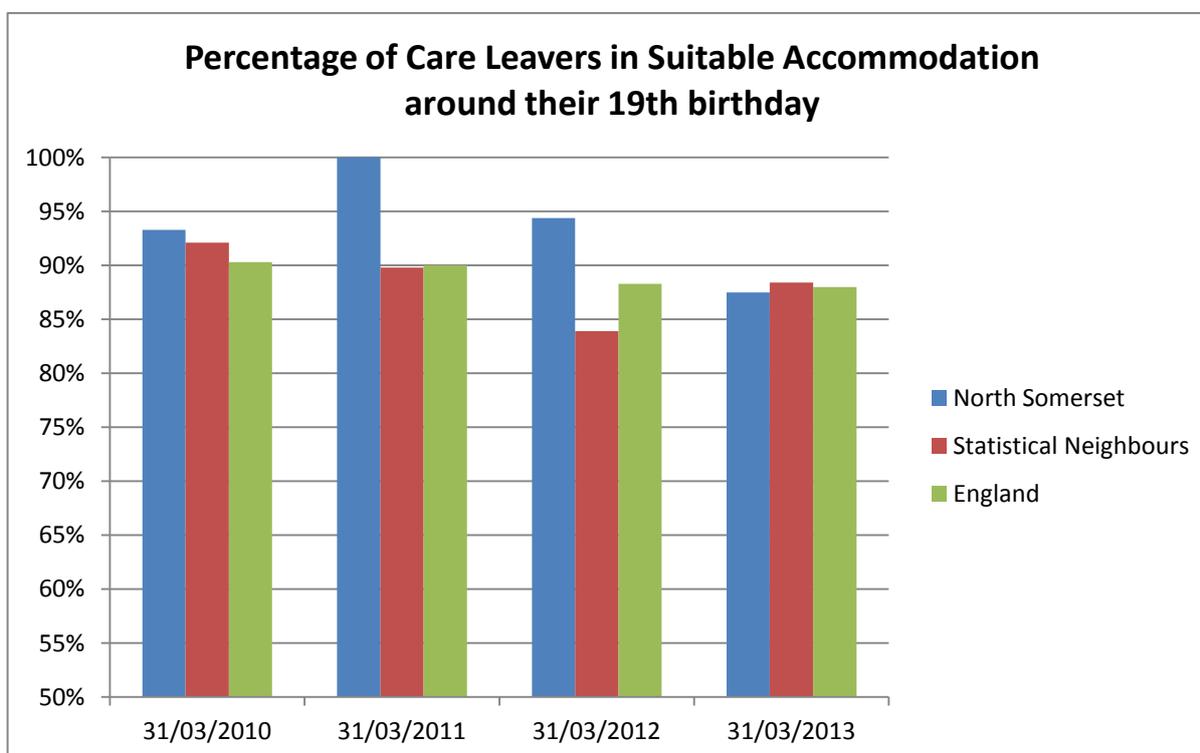


In North Somerset we need to increase the numbers of young people who continue to be looked after until they are 18, by raising their aspirations and opportunities and by encouraging them to remain in their foster placements to 21.



Note: Only young people who meet the criteria for receiving support as a Care Leaver are included in the chart.

For those over 18, or keen to leave care sooner, there are a range of housing options available, ranging from supported housing projects such as foyers, to trainer flats, supported lodgings to independent housing tenancies.



There are currently 7 care leavers in Higher Education (HE) in North Somerset, 4 of whom started in 2013/14. Although support has been provided to these young people, they have largely achieved their success through self motivation, support

from foster carers and the commitment of individual staff. This reflects the research undertaken by the Buttle Trust which shows that the number of students coming into Higher Education from a care background remains extremely low across the UK: 6% of care leavers in England in 2011 were in HE compared to 23% of their peers.

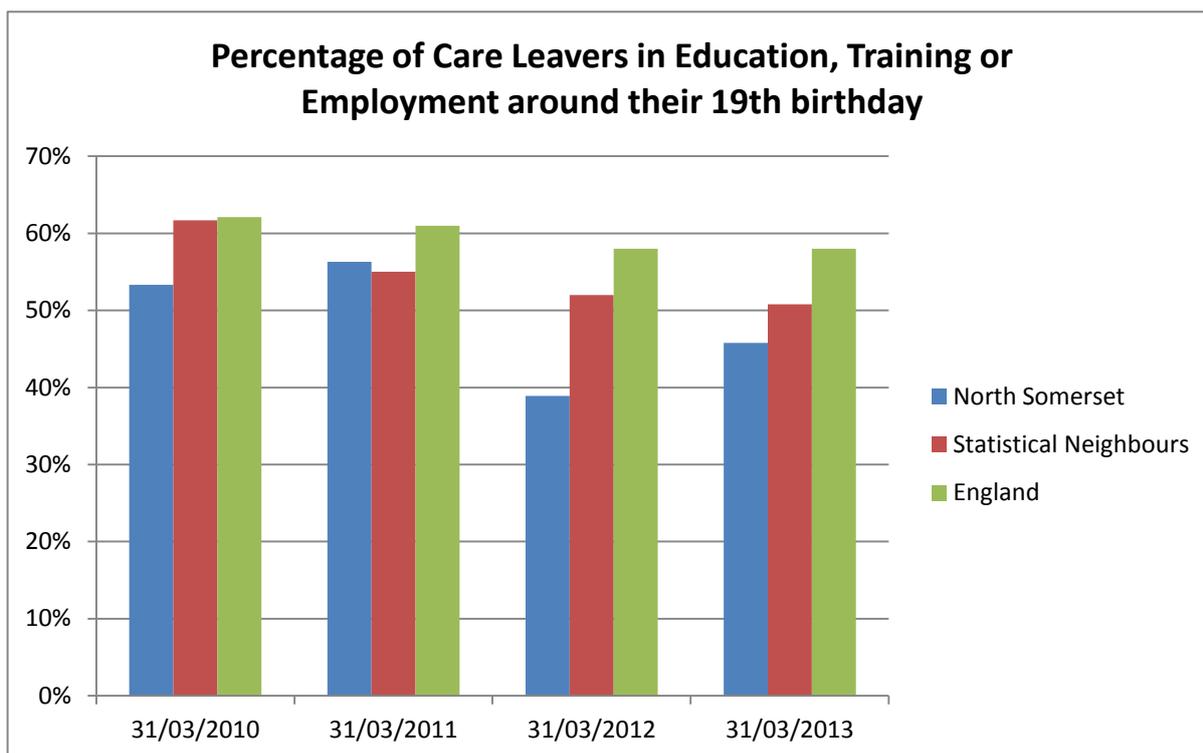
The Buttle Trust reported in July 2013 on the disadvantages faced by looked after children and young people leaving care which include a lack of:

- Educational attainment which begins at an early stage in the education cycle
- Information regarding financial support
- Encouragement from professionals and carers in their aspirations
- Knowledge about choices and the support available for care leavers
- Knowledge/information amongst professionals and carers
- Confidence amongst young people themselves

In North Somerset we need to tackle the disadvantages highlighted by the Buttle Trust and in particular develop a culture of high aspirations on the part of all involved with each young person, with a belief that they are capable of success, and ensure we provide flexible accommodation available when needed, especially during the holidays.

### **Raising Participation in Education, Employment or Training (EET)**

Care Leavers are more likely to become NEET (not in education, employment or training) than their peers and the likelihood of this increases the earlier they leave care. For example, 29% of Care Leavers in England were known not to be in education, employment or training (NEET) at age 19 in 2013<sup>3</sup>, plus councils were not in touch with a further 8%. This compares to 15.5% of 18 year olds being NEET in the general population at the end of 2012<sup>4</sup>.



The government priority laid out in the Care Leaver Strategy October 2013 is “to ensure that children in care and care leavers get the support they need from schools, colleges, universities and local authorities to maximise their educational attainment and employment opportunities”.

The government’s raising of participation age is now in effect. Those care leavers who were born after 1st September 1996 will be required to stay on in education or training beyond 16. (This means if they are due to complete year 11 in 2013 they must continue in learning until July 2014. If they complete year 11 in 2014 or after, they will need to stay on in learning until their 18th birthday).

In North Somerset work is underway to develop a pathway to employment which will provide young people with a supportive programme to increase their skills and readiness for work. This programme will enable a more bespoke approach to meeting individual needs but will also ensure that young people can have second chances and opportunities in a supportive environment. This programme is being developed in conjunction with key partners including education providers, employers, voluntary groups, Learning and Achievement and the Local Enterprise Partnership to provide opportunities for care leavers. Work experience opportunities, mentoring and Apprenticeships are a critical part of this programme that needs the support of local providers and employers.

#### Challenges:

- To increase support for Care Leavers until age 25
- To encourage young people to remain in care until 18 and in foster placements until 21
- To expect and support Care Leavers to continue with education or employment with training
- To give Care Leavers additional chances to achieve
- To adopt a system that ensures Care Leavers have a pathway to employment
- To work with key partners, including education providers, employers, voluntary groups, Learning and Achievement and the Local Enterprise Partnership to provide opportunities for care leavers
- To reduce the experience of loneliness and isolation for Care Leavers by anticipating need and preparing them to live confidently in the community
- To increase the numbers of Care Leavers accessing higher/further education

### **19. The Views of our Children and Young People**

Involving children and young people, families, carers and professionals in the design, delivery and monitoring of all services is vital so we know that we are getting it right and importantly the care experience of Children looked after is improved as a result.

Every effort is made to speak to young people individually about their personal experiences and jointly with other young people in groups and activities about the wider experience of young people in care in North Somerset. Young people's views are sought about a range of issues. For example, feedback is collected from young people regarding their workers, which is used in staff appraisals and children looked after are able to have their say about how their 6 month reviews are conducted and can chair the meetings if they want to. The recent review of the service for children looked after collated views from young people who were both positive and critical. These are being used to inform planning and development of the service.

North Somerset has a Children in Care Council called 'Unite' which meets regularly to address issues raised by young people and feed back to corporate parents on gaps in service provision and improvements to be made. This group has a standing feedback item on the North Somerset Children's Champions Group and regular meetings with the Director of People and Communities.

#### The Pledge:

The North Somerset Pledge to Children and Young People Looked After and Care Leavers was developed in 2010/11 and is organised around the following headings:

- Looking after your health
- Keeping you safe
- Getting involved and having your say
- Being happy and doing well

- Building your future

Work has recently been undertaken with a group of young people of mixed ages, different experiences and abilities to review and update the Pledge

The Resource Service achieved Young People Friendly Status in June 2013. In order to achieve this kite-mark the service had to evidence that practice within the service is young person friendly in the following areas:

- Access and Environment
- Staff Training, Attitudes, Confidentiality and consent
- Involvement of Young People
- Publicity and Joined Up Working
- Health Issues for Young People

Feedback received as part of the inspection for the Young People Friendly kite mark included;

“The Resource Centre clearly works hard to give children and young people a sense of belonging by creating a vibrant, happy and inclusive atmosphere”.

“In addition to support from a range of agencies, there were an impressive number of leaflets in the centre to inform children and young people about available support”.

**Challenges:**

- To continue to develop even stronger partnership working with young people
- To raise the profile and increase the impact of the Children in Care Council
- To ensure that the views and wishes of all young people are included as a matter of course in the development and delivery of services both in the People and Communities Directorate and more widely across the council.
- To ensure more effective feedback to young people when they have expressed their views so that they know what has been actioned and what difference their views have made.

**20. Current Service Provision:**

Children in need of care and protection are initially accommodated and provided with a service by the North Somerset Community Family Teams. The Community Family teams work to return children home wherever possible and to support families so that children can remain at home. If this is not possible a plan will be made for the child’s long term future. All children with a plan for long term care, other than adoption, are transferred to the ‘Resource Service’.

Within the Resource Service there is a child care team to support children looked after and work with them on the plans for their long term future. This team is also responsible for ensuring all options for permanence through Special Guardianship, or Residence Orders are fully explored and that the possibility of reunification to the child’s birth family is regularly reviewed and wherever possible it is instigated. Social workers are responsible for ensuring that each child’s health needs are fully met and

that they are enabled to take full advantage of educational and other opportunities available to them. This team also includes:

- The Children Looked After nurse who is seconded from health to provide direct support to young people through health assessments and other contact.
- The Communications Worker whose role is to lead on the engagement of children and young people in all our work, particularly through the Children in Care Council, and to ensure that children and young people receive appropriate feedback on their views.

When older young people are preparing to leave our care they will be transferred to the Care Leaving team who take the lead on working with young people on their pathway to successful independence. They will support each young person to take full advantage of all opportunities for further/higher education, work experience, apprenticeships, and job options. This team will ensure young people are living in suitable accommodation and have the support they need to maintain contact with friends and family and that they do not become isolated. This team also includes:

- The housing worker who leads on advice and guidance re suitable accommodation and acts as a link between young people and housing services
- Learning Partnership West seconded staff who provide information, advice and guidance to young people on work opportunities/careers/university etc. And support young people into work alongside other staff.
- A supported lodgings social worker who recruits, supports and trains host families who provide lodgings to young people in semi-independence.

The Resource Service includes family placement services for young people in North Somerset - the Fostering Team and the Adoption and Permanence Team. Both these teams provide placements with families for all children who are looked after, so they work across the Community Family Service and the Resource Service.

The Fostering Team recruits and supports all the mainstream foster carers in North Somerset. Placing children with foster carers and working with child care social workers, foster carers, and multi-agency partners to achieve the plan for the child. The team also recruits and supports carers to provide short breaks for disabled children, this team has close links with the Disabled Children's Service.

The fostering team includes the 'Consult Service' which consists of a social worker and part-time child psychologist (seconded from CAMHS) who work with social workers, foster carers and multi-agency partners to support the stability of placements. The Consult service advises social workers and relevant staff on plans to address the emotional health and well being needs of children looked after. The Consult Service works across children looked after services in North Somerset including the Community family teams and the Adoption and Permanence team

The Adoption and Permanence Team recruits and supports adopters and children whose plan is adoption. The staff work with adopters through the whole process from initial application to become adopters through to final adoption order when a children has been placed. They also work with child care social workers where the plan for a child is adoption, seeking suitable families, and supporting the matching and

placement process. The Adoption and Permanence Team provide ongoing support to adoptive families once an order has been made.

The Adoption and Permanence team also works with Kinship families (family members or close family friends) who are providing foster care to children looked after. This team supports those families and enables them to secure permanence for the children they care for through Special Guardianship Orders or Residence Orders wherever possible.

The Virtual School sits within the same building as the Resource Service and is fully integrated into the service provision for children looked after. The Virtual School champions the education outcomes for 4-19 year olds looked after, ensuring that all agencies are working together to close the gap in educational outcomes between children looked after and other children. This includes advice and guidance to social workers, leaving care personal advisers, teachers, and foster carers. The Virtual School has an important role in the support and challenge of schools to provide a good education to children looked after and to ensure that the pupil premium is used to best advantage for each child.

Working alongside the Children Looked after nurse, the Substance Advice Service regularly attends the Resource Service to provide substance related advice and to build trusted relationships with the young people in their environment.

The Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service in North Somerset works with children looked after according to their needs and through a referral/assessment process. CAMHS also makes a contribution to the care of children looked after through the Solutions Panel which considers the needs of children looked after in 'out of county', residential provision and independent fostering.

The Resource Service has strong links with the Youth Offending Service in North Somerset on the care and support provided to particular young people and on initiatives to identify and reduce the risk of offending.

Good outcomes for children and young people looked after are most likely to be achieved by working together across all partner agencies and departments within the council. Although this section describes the services provided within Support and Safeguarding for children looked after, and the partners who are directly seconded to work with us, there is a widespread and growing recognition that 'corporate parenting' is the responsibility of all agencies in North Somerset. There is already a commitment in place from many partners to support this work and we cannot reflect all of those agencies here but have not forgotten the contribution that they make.

## **21. The Challenges**

We believe we must set ourselves high targets and aspirations if we are determined to improve outcomes for children looked after and care leavers in North Somerset. In order to focus on the key issues and drive change we will expect all our staff to work towards three "obsessions":

*An 'obsession' is used in this context to describe the commitment and passion which we will give to achieving the three fundamental elements of providing high quality care for looked after children and achieving positive outcomes for care leavers. We will ensure these three strands run through all our work and contact with children and young people.*

- Securing the right home and family for every child
- Ensuring that the emotional health and well being needs of every young person are met
- Ensuring that every child attends and achieves in school to the best of their ability and as a care leaver is engaged in education, training or employment with training

We have listed the specific challenges for each area of work under the relevant section in this Needs Assessment.

It is critical that we work closely with our partners and across all agencies that touch the lives of children. We need to be imaginative and creative to widen the options for young people and we must ensure that the fundamental services are in place to prepare our children looked after for adulthood.

## **22. References**

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