

Chapter: Safeguarding Children

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**Executive summary**

This JSNA chapter on safeguarding children in North Somerset draws on local performance data, research, government guidance, legislation and user feedback to provide an overview of safeguarding practice and child protection arrangements in North Somerset.

The chapter outlines the importance of this area of work in respect of the outcomes for vulnerable children and details the national and the local drivers that impact on this area of the local authority's responsibility.

Safeguarding in North Somerset is detailed in respect of the performance data used by all local authorities to measure how safe children are in respect of wider safeguarding performance (road safety, accidental injury, missing children) and child protection system performance (child protection referrals, investigations and conferencing).

Services to meet the safeguarding needs of local children focuses on the range of services in North Somerset that provide:

- Early help to families to improve outcomes for vulnerable children.
- Services to protect children who are subject to or at risk of significant harm.
- Services to intervene with complex families in an effective and efficient manner (High Impact Programme).

Together with some local data a number of research documents are used to provide a wider context of what people think and of what works.

It clear from research that good multi agency practice is vital at all stages of safeguarding and child protection practice and that early intervention (Early Help), for families is critical to improving outcomes for vulnerable children.

It is important that these key issues are priorities for local authorities and that that resources are focused on these in order to better protect children from harm and to close the gap between children in need and their peers.

The chapter concludes with a number of challenges for consideration as outlined below:

- Providing effective Early Help arrangements for vulnerable children.

- Effective multi agency practice in early help, safeguarding and child protection.
- Adequate, efficient resourcing and services to close the gap between health and safeguarding outcomes for children.
- Strategic arrangements between adult and children's services in respect of parental mental health, substance misuse and domestic violence.
- Making our communities safer.
- Improve user involvement/engagement in safeguarding service design.

### **Section 1 Needs assessment:**

North Somerset children's services serve a population of 45,582 children aged 0-19yrs.

Within that population there are groups of children who are more vulnerable than their peers these include:

- Children for whom there are concerns about their development and wellbeing.
- Children who are at risk of being subject to abuse.
- Children who have been subject to abuse including sexual exploitation.
- Children who go missing from their home or from a care placement.
- Unaccompanied asylum seeking children.
- Privately fostered children.

There were just over 1,409 Children in Need (CiN) in North Somerset on 31st March 2014, an increase of 10% from 1,283 a year before (this includes CLA and children with a CP plan).

The rate of CiN at 31st March 2014 (334 per 10,000 children), was similar to the England average of 346 per 10,000 children.

During 2013/14 the average rate of referrals per month in North Somerset was 43.8 per 10,000 local children. This was close to the 2014 statistical neighbours average of 44 per 10,000 and lower than the England average of 48 per 10,000.

The rate of referral in North Somerset, at 516 per 10,000 children, was below the national average of 573 per 10,000, as might be expected, but the rate of re-referral within 12 months of a previous referral was 29% in North Somerset, compared to 23% in England (less referrals in North Somerset result in no further action and more of the remainder are considered CiN).

The sources of referrals were broadly similar between North Somerset and England in percentage terms.

There had been an increase in the number of safeguarding referrals and the rate is 177 per 10,000 (England average is 124 per 10,000) in the first part of 2013-14 in comparison with 2012-13. Over 330 in the period April to November 13 compared with just under 500 for the whole of 2012-13.

This puts additional pressure on the assessment teams and on the child protection conferencing system.

### Safeguarding performance:

There are a range of indicators and related measure that give us an overall measure of how well we safeguard children in North Somerset and some key indicators that give us a measure of our performance in the child protection system.

- Referrals to children's social care:

The management of referrals includes a number of performance indicators and North Somerset performance in respect of timely assessments is broadly in line with the England and Statistical neighbour averages.

The 2013 current performance for Initial Assessments in time in North Somerset is 74% compared to 77.4% and 70.8% respectively and for Core Assessment it is 64% in North Somerset compared with 75.5% and 73.9% respectively.

More recent data in respect of assessments is in development alongside a new type of assessment (single assessment).

- Child protection:

Children who are suspected of being subject of abuse are referred to children's social care services and may become subject to a child protection conference and an individual safeguarding plan.

The rate of children who are subject to a protection plan in North Somerset grew steadily from 2005 to 2009. Whilst there are fluctuations from 2009 to 2014 the rate has generally remains lower than the England (Eng) and Statistical neighbour group (SN), average. North Somerset currently has a rate of 34/35 per 10,000 children.

This compares to Eng and SN rates of 37/38 per 10,000 (2013). Analysis of casework and conferencing activity takes place where exceptions are noted in our Child Protection data.

Whilst the number of children may vary significantly at times (due to numbers of children in a small cohort of families), the number of families varies much less and is at an average of 57 families (taken over the period 2010-14).

North Somerset performs well in the performance indicator for reviewing child protection plans on time as we have a 100% rate that has been maintained since 2004 (Eng and SN rates are 94.6 and 95.4 respectively).

North Somerset's performance in relation to Protection Plans lasting more that 2 years is good at 2.7% and represent a strong commitment to making changes to protect children in a timely way.

Our 'statistical neighbour' performance is 4.9 % and the national figure is 4.5%.

Areas of concerns relate to parental mental health, substance misuse and domestic violence in child protection cases.

In the 2012 the percentages of initial conferences where these issues individually featured ranged from 20% up to 30% for each issue. There were periods in 2012 where some issues e.g. domestic violence feature in 60% of cases.

In many cases the issues are combined e.g. alcohol abuse and domestic violence, raising the percentage significantly.

The North Somerset 'Think Family' guidance responds to issues of joint work across adult and children's services.

- Allegations against people who work with children:  
As required by statutory regulation North Somerset has a procedure to manage such allegations and there is an officer responsible for the management of the process, the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO).

The headline issues for North Somerset is that the rate of referrals has increased by a three fold in the period Oct 2012-Oct13 (and again in the 2013-14 period), following a number of high profile media cases of professionals accused and/or prosecuted for the abuse of children.

The bulk of referrals come from local schools (65% in the reporting period) and support and training for schools is in place.

Referrals to the LADO are now occurring at an earlier stage of agency concerns and most issues of staff behaviour are being dealt with prior to any incidents against children occurring.

This is in line with our regional neighbouring authorities who report similar increases and referral sources.

Further information (including priorities), is noted within the NSSCB annual report for the period Oct 2012-13 and for October 2013-14.

<http://www.northsomersetlscb.org.uk/annual-report.htm>

- Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE):  
The NSSCB commissioned a report from Barnardos in respect of the extent to which CSE was a potential risk in North Somerset. The report was presented to the Board in June 2013 and the Board establish a sub committee that met for the first time in September 2013 to focus on the issue.  
The group published a CSE Strategy and progressed the development of CSE multi agency risk assessment conferences (MARAC) in 2014. CSE training for practitioners provides attendees with information to raise awareness and information in respect of referral to CSE MARAC.

North Somerset CSE strategy:

<http://www.northsomersetlscb.org.uk/uploads/files/464.pdf>

The NSSCB annual report 2013-14 provides further detail:

<http://www.northsomersetlscb.org.uk/annual-report.htm>

- Female Genital mutilation (FGM):  
Practitioners in North Somerset have access to guidance through the electronic child protection procedures (SWCPP) that contain detailed information on FGM including: signs and indicators, practice guidance, national support, case examples and a practice flowchart.  
Links exist with specialist services in Bristol and FGM (and forced marriage), training has been part of our multi agency training programme since September 2013.  
Newly developed CSE training also included FGM and forced marriage.  
As part of the work in respect of CSE a check across health agencies in North Somerset was undertaken in respect of FGM, no cases had been reported across health service providers at that point (August/September 2014).

See also: *Joint Safeguarding Adults multi agency policy and North Somerset Domestic Abuse handbook* – links in bibliography.

- Missing children:  
A joint Police and Social Care Protocol has been in place since 2006. The most recent update was May 2014 and this version is available at <http://www.northsomersetlscb.org.uk/uploads/files/325.pdf>

The update included the new police definitions of missing and absent, updates in respect of independent interviews and CSE.

The headline message from the group is that North Somerset has a low incidence of children going missing in comparison with other Avon and Somerset policing areas and that there are no significant concerns from a policing perspective.

Arrangements are in place to share information on specific children across: CSE Marac, missing children monitoring and children missing education data.

Unaccompanied asylum seeking children who go missing are managed in the same way as other missing children.

Wider Safeguarding in North Somerset:

The Performance Management Framework for the NSSCB annual report provides a range of measures and judgements on the safety of children in North Somerset. Specific safeguarding measures include:

- Accidental injury: The 'childhood injury reduction group' reports to the NSSCB and the headlines from the group are:  
Rates of unintended injury in under 18's in North Somerset are relatively small compared to the national and regional average, however:
  - Childhood injuries are high in the more deprived areas and admissions rates are almost four times higher in Weston than in Clevedon North.
  - There has been a rising trend in the rates of burns and scalds, falls, accidental poisoning and strikes, crushes and jams among under 5 year olds in North Somerset since 2004.
  - There has been a rising trend in the rates of accidental poisonings and strikes, crushes and jams among 5-17 year olds in North Somerset since 2004.
  - Rates of incidents among 17 year old drivers, suggests this should be a priority in terms of road safety.
  
- Road accident:  
North Somerset is currently in the lowest 10 local authorities for child road casualties per 1000 population (Reported road casualties in Great Britain, 2012)  
The Joint Local Transport Plan set a reduction target of 30% by 2020 from a baseline figure across the child/adult age range. Baseline data was 6.6 and the target reduction for 2020 is 4.6.  
North Somerset is currently on target for the reduction and this year's figure represents an annual fluctuation in a small number of casualties
  
- Child deaths:  
A case review panel that spans four local authorities including North Somerset (West of England group), reports annually to the NSSCB and the detail is held with that report.  
The group review all deaths of children across the four areas and reports on any specific issues arising from the learning on those cases. In respect of North Somerset there are no specific trends reported for the area compared with our local authority peers and the rate of child death in the West of England group of local authorities remains lower than the England and Wales average.  
The annual report is published on the NSSCB website.  
<http://www.northsomersetlscb.org.uk/annual-report.htm>
  
- Privately fostered children:  
The NSSCB reports annually on private fostering and headlines include:
  - North Somerset numbers of private fostering notifications are normally low with the majority of assessments not concluding due to children returning to live with their family during the assessment period.
  - 5 notifications for Private Fostering assessments have been received since April 2013. Of these 3 assessments have been

completed, 1 discontinued and one is currently being undertaken. If this trend continues, figures may exceed those of 2012 when 5 assessments were completed in total.

- North Somerset provides a number of awareness raising campaigns targeted at professionals (e.g. teachers, health visitors) and the general public (public website and North Somerset Life).
- Looked after Children.  
Where it is known that children are suffering abuse and their family is not able to protect them, these children are looked after by the local authority.

The arrangements to provide accommodation for such vulnerable children range from placement with other family members, close family friends, foster care or adoption. The detail is covered in the JSNA chapter that relates to services for looked after children.

The most recent government statistics show that 142,500 children were subject to a child protection investigations in 2013-14 (an increase from 127,000 in 2012-13 and 88,700 in 2010).

Of these, 48,300 (increased from 44,300 in 2010), became subject to a child protection plan. The number of children who require a plan (considered to be suffering or be at risk of significant harm), has been rising steadily since 1995.

It has long been known that there is a gap between substantiated cases of maltreatment of children that are known to children's services and the actual level of child maltreatment. A review of the research for the medical journal *The Lancet* found that substantiated cases of maltreatment of children referred to children's services related to 1% of the child population each year. However research indicates that between 4 and 16% of children suffer physical abuse, 10-15% emotional/psychological abuse, between 1 and 15% are neglected and 10-25% are exposed to domestic abuse directed toward a parent (Gilbert et al, 2008).

Local authorities and their partners (who work with children), are required through legislation and statutory guidance to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children in their area. The requirement on local authorities and their partners together with public concerns in respect of protecting children from abuse make safeguarding of children a priority area of responsibility.

Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children is defined within statutory guidance (*Working Together to Safeguarding Children 2013*), as:

- protecting children from maltreatment;
- preventing impairment of children's health or development;

- ensuring that children grow up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care; and
- taking action to enable all children to have the best outcomes.

Whilst the local authority has the lead role to co-ordinate services, safeguarding children is everyone's responsibility and everyone who comes into contact with children and families has a role to play.

Everyone who works with children - including teachers, GPs, nurses, midwives, health visitors, early years professionals, youth workers, police, Accident and Emergency staff, paediatricians, voluntary and community workers and social workers - has a responsibility for keeping them safe.

A number of high profile cases have been highlighted in the media during recent years, this has increased the workload of local authority children's services and placed increasing pressure on children's services to respond to high levels of public concern and high public expectations to identify and protect vulnerable children.

## **Section 2 Current Strategies, Services and Community Voice: Key National Drivers**

The United Nations Convention on the rights of the Child is an international agreement that protects the rights of children under the age of 18 years.

The convention gives children and young people over 40 substantive rights that include:

- special protection measures and assistance
- access to services such as education and healthcare
- develop their personalities, abilities and talents to the fullest potential
- be informed about and participate in achieving their rights in an accessible and active manner

Children's legislation and local authority services must take account of these rights in relation to how services are developed and how they are applied.

The inquiry into the death of Victoria Climbié 2003 resulted in a number of important system and policy changes for safeguarding children that were underpinned by the Children Act 2004. Since then the recommendations from a number of high profile cases have focused on many of the same issues and the current Coalition Government continues a commitment to early intervention, reform of social work and integrated service delivery.

Government have made a commitment to support intensive work with families who have long standing problems that include children out of school, crime and antisocial behaviour. Up to a third of such families are involved in the child protection system.

Other problems include domestic violence, mental or physical problems and social isolation making it hard for these families to solve their problems.

The local 'Troubled Families Programme' uses funding provided through the government framework to improve the delivery and quality of services on the principle of a 'whole family' approach, joining up a range of interventions across agencies to provide effective outcomes for these families.

The statutory guidance Working Together to Safeguard Children 2013 brings together the responsibilities of the local authority and the key partner agencies in respect of their duties to safeguard and to promote the welfare of children in their area.

The guidance details each organisations responsibility to safeguard children under Section 11 of the Children Act 2004 and the duty on the local authority to establish a Local Safeguarding Children Board under Section 13 of the Children Act 2004 to scrutinise and challenge the local arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in the area.

In addition the guidance outlines how local authorities must assess the needs of children in their area and provide 'Early Help' for children to promote their welfare (section 10 Children Act 2004). Where children are subject to abuse or at risk of abuse, the guidance provides details on how cases of child abuse are investigated and how child protection conferences are managed.

Other national safeguarding priorities include the need to have organisational arrangements to safeguard particularly vulnerable children who are:

- Missing from home or care.
- Privately fostered.
- Unaccompanied asylum seeking children.
- Trafficked children.
- Sexually exploited children.
- Children who are at risk of forced marriage.
- Children at risk of female genital mutilation.

**Key local drivers:**

The current North Somerset Corporate Plan includes two safeguarding priorities for Children

- Strengthen safeguarding for children and vulnerable adults.
- Making our streets and communities safer.

The North Somerset Partnership People and Communities Strategy 2013 outlines a number of important safeguarding and health issues for North Somerset and have a set of key priorities that include:

- Improve health outcomes and reduce inequalities.
- Improve outcomes for children by enabling early intervention and prevention.
- Strengthen safeguarding for children and vulnerable adults.
- Make our streets and communities safer.

The North Somerset Safeguarding Children Board (NSSCB) has a range of responsibilities and the key priorities for all Safeguarding Boards include:

- The provision of child protection training and guidance to practitioners.
- Ensuring that there is good management of private fostering, management of allegations against people who work with children and services to help children who go missing from their home or from care placements.
- The provision of good Early Help services for children in North Somerset,
- Scrutiny of the arrangements to protect children from abuse, and specifically from child sexual exploitation (CSE).

The NSSCB annual report is published on the NSSCB website. The Oct. 2013 - Oct. 2014 version will be finalised and published on the site at the end November 2013.

<http://www.northsomersetscb.org.uk/annual-report.htm>

### **Service provision**

The development of a range of 'Early Help' services is a key priority in safeguarding vulnerable children.

North Somerset has a range of early help provision that includes Children's Centres, nursery provision, pre-school and school support services.

In addition North Somerset has an integrated approach to the assessment of children who require additional support through the Early Help Assessment (CAF).

The Early Help Assessment is one of a number of tools and processes which help practitioners to assess and address the needs of a child or young person. Education, health and other partner agencies have good quality tools that assess children's needs in their areas of expertise.

The aim of the Early Help Assessment (CAF) is to help identify, at the earliest opportunity, a child or young persons additional multiple needs which are not able to be met by a single agency and to provide timely and co-ordinated multi-agency support to meet those needs.

The range of services available in North Somerset to meet the needs of children is outlined in the following levels of support:

- Universal settings provide services for all children and young people in their day-to-day work. In the majority of cases, a child or young person's needs are addressed at this early stage.
- Children who do have an additional need. These needs can be met by a single agency. If the child's needs become more complex or are multiple then move to stage 3.

- Children who have multiple needs, which require a co-ordinated response from two or more agencies.  
Where a child has multiple needs the Early Help Assessment (CAF) should be offered to the family.
- Cases where a multi-agency response is required and a 'Team around the Child' (TAC) is formed. This brings together practitioners from a range of services to co-ordinate and deliver an integrated package of solution-focused support to meet the needs identified during the Early Help Assessment (CAF) process.

#### Child Protection Procedures and Early Help:

Where there are signs that a child or an unborn baby:

- is experiencing or may already have experienced abuse or chronic neglect or,
- is likely to suffer significant harm in the future

A referral to Children's Social Care Referral and Assessment Team is made.

North Somerset has a range of services to deal with the protection of children from abuse that include:

- A Referral and Assessment team of social workers who assess concerns from the public or agency partners.
- Regional Child Protection Procedures.
- Community based social work teams to progress casework of children who are at risk of harm.
- A child protection system to support the management of case where it is suspected that children are at risk of harm.
- A process to manage the investigation of allegations of abuse against people who work with children.
- A process to manage the initiation of care proceedings in Court in respect of children where there is evidence of harm.

#### High Impact Families Programme

- Provides integrated services to a number of families who meet the government criteria (Troubled Families Framework 2012).
- Provides a framework that supports ongoing work to re-design services families across North Somerset.
- Provides potential opportunities to identify efficiencies and deliver good outcomes to families.

#### **What do the public think?**

Public expectations in respect of safeguarding children are understandably high and a number of high profile cases have resulted in increased pressure to improve safeguarding services and to demand accountability for mistakes.

Children reported to the Children's Rights Director in 2010 that early help was an important issue for them and that they felt that social work was doing a good job in keeping children safe.

In the 2011 Children's Rights Director reported on the child protection system, children stated that the highest scoring children's right was the right to be protected from abuse.

As shown in the NSSCB annual report, North Somerset performs well in relation to a range of safeguarding measures and this includes the response to the prior 'Tell us Survey' that looked at how children felt in relation to bullying, play areas, travel etc. A similar survey is currently in development to capture current feedback on this critical issue.

Families who attend child protection conferences have been asked for their views during the period 2011-2012 and as a result work has been undertaken to improve information on conference system and how attendees contribute to the discussion, to reduce the volume of information presented at the meeting and to improve the documentation for families.

Practitioner feedback regarding local multi agency safeguarding training is good and the training is valued by practitioners. The provision of good quality multi agency safeguarding training is a key message from research on 'what works' in safeguarding practice.

**What works** (evidence/resources used re: Safeguarding children):

- Messages from Research – e.g. Safeguarding Children across Services 2010, outlines the need to focus on Early Help, multi agency safeguarding training and arrangements to support multi agency safeguarding and child protection practice and service delivery.
- The Munro Review into Child Protection – includes: valuing professional expertise, early help, reducing bureaucracy, case reviewing, developing improved performance measures and the role of Safeguarding Boards.
- C4EO – key questions for audit of child protection 2009 highlight the need to audit and learn about the quality of the CP process.
- Child maltreatment studies – including World Health Organisation 2010 on effective approaches to reducing child maltreatment stress the need for multi agency practice, early help for children and families and promotion of the needs of children.
- Working Together 2013 – Statutory guidance to detail how early help, child assessments, child protection investigations and allegation investigations are conducted. The guidance has gone through a number of revisions and supports multi agency work and practice to safeguard children.
- Government guidance in respect of very vulnerable children e.g. missing children, homeless and sexually exploited children – gives impetus to determine the local context for the issue and provide a framework on which to create or modify a local response.

- South West Child Protection Procedures – provide a set of shared procedures across the south west that practitioners can follow, including recent research findings. A cost effective solution.
- NSSCB – Brings partners together to establish and evaluated operational arrangements to safeguard and protect children including high quality multi agency training and support to schools.
- Research in respect of learning from serious childcare incidents (SCIE, DFE) – prides a clear framework by which to review serious cases and establish learning for partners.

### **Section 3 Key Issues:**

#### **Short term 3-5yrs**

- Maintain priority of Early Help arrangements for vulnerable children including:
  - Improvement in agencies undertaking CAF assessments and TAC arrangements.
  - Progress 'high impact families' work.
- Ensure effective multi agency practice in Early Help, Safeguarding and Child Protection work.
- Develop adequate, efficient resourcing and services to close the gap between health and safeguarding outcomes for children.
- Review strategic arrangements between adult and children's services in respect of parental mental health, substance misuse and domestic violence.
- Making our communities safer including: support for young victims, support and education re: abuse in relationships.
- Improve user involvement/engagement in safeguarding service design including: collecting and collating the safeguarding concerns of parents and children in North Somerset.

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<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs150/en/>

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[http://www.c4eo.org.uk/themes/safeguarding/files/safeguarding\\_briefing\\_2.pdf](http://www.c4eo.org.uk/themes/safeguarding/files/safeguarding_briefing_2.pdf)

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<http://www.northsomersetpartnership.co.uk/whoweare/people+and+communities+board/pcstrategy2013finalaug13.pdf>

North Somerset Safeguarding Children Board Annual report 2012-13

<http://www.northsomersetlscb.org.uk/annual-report.htm>

South West Child Protection Procedures

<http://www.online-procedures.co.uk/swcpp/>

National guidance documents (e.g. missing children etc.)

<http://www.northsomersetlscb.org.uk/national-guidance.htm>

Serious Case Review research

<http://www.education.gov.uk/search/results?q=serious+case+review+research>

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Joint Safeguarding Adults multi agency policy.

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