

HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Report

Decision Maker:	Cabinet
Date:	13 December 2022
Title:	Annual Safeguarding Report - Children's Services 2021-22
Report From:	Director of Children's Services

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Purpose of this Report

1. The purpose of this report is to provide an annual update to Cabinet on safeguarding children activity within Children's Services during 2021/22.

Recommendation(s)

2. That Cabinet notes the positive progress and continued consistently high performance with regards to safeguarding children in Hampshire.
3. That Cabinet note the commitment of a wide range of Children's Services officers in achieving this level of performance.
4. That Cabinet receives further updates on safeguarding on an annual basis.

Executive Summary

5. This report seeks to identify key national developments, summarises performance and activity levels, and details a number of key local developments and future priorities. The report mainly uses data from the financial year 2021/22 but supplements this with more recent data where it is useful to do so.
6. The report provides assurance that whilst demand for children's social care services continues to increase year on year, the response to the safeguarding of vulnerable children is both robust and timely. New and emerging risks to children are identified and addressed collaboratively with partners and the

wider transformation of children's social care will deliver a modern social work service fit for the future challenges over the next decade.

Contextual information

7. Cabinet will recall the Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) that, local authorities are subject to standard and short inspections depending on their previous Ofsted judgement. Inspections since the introduction of the ILACS:
 - 7.1. **November 2018** - Hampshire was subject to a focused visit, inspecting children subject to a child protection plan, including the quality and impact of pre-proceedings intervention under the Public Law Outline (PLO). Hampshire had received a very positive letter from Ofsted following this visit.
 - 7.2. **April and May 2019** - Hampshire was subject to a full ILACS inspection. Report to Council dated 15 July refers to this inspection. This inspection judged Hampshire to be outstanding overall and across the other three areas of judgement.
 - 7.3. **November 2021** – Hampshire volunteered to pilot a new Joint Targeted Area Inspection (JTAI). The focus of this inspection was multi agency Safeguarding arrangements across all partners, working from initial contact through to a CIN/CP decision. The inspection involved inspectors from Ofsted, CQC (Care Quality Commission) and HMICFRS (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services). The partnership received a very positive outcome letter following this visit.
8. It is worth noting that each of these inspections were rooted in safeguarding and have fully tested Hampshire's safeguarding practice, alongside testing the front door process within the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH).

Finance

9. There are no financial recommendations in this report although the issue of the continued rise in cost (price) of placements for children in care in the independent sector, is a key pressure for the County Council.

National Developments

10. The Independent Review of Children's Social Care

- 10.1. This national review and its final recommendations are presented as a once in a generation opportunity for radical change. The Review calls on government to be ambitious for children and to play a more active role in creating the conditions for success, both in the design and delivery of services and for children's rights and outcomes.

- 10.2. The Review itself recognises the context within which children's services operate, the impact of poverty and wider policy decisions on families and consequently on social care e.g. welfare, immigration, drugs, CAMHS and domestic abuse, both on children's lives and the need for help and support in communities. The report reiterates the importance of strong universal services. The report follows a child's journey through the system and puts forward a series of recommendations for reform.
- 10.3. There is a greater emphasis on family help, which is a combination of early help and lower level children's social care cases. The review suggests that an expert child practitioner (qualified social worker) supervises the work of multi-disciplinary teams, allowing case holding by practitioners that are not qualified social workers.
- 10.4. The Care Review recommends that a National Reform Board and a national data and technology taskforce are required to oversee the overall reform programme plus the technical specifics of national data and case management reforms. The Director of Children's Services is a member of what is now termed the National Implementation Board in his role as President of the Association of Directors of Children's Services. A comprehensive financial analysis and case for new investment is put forward in the report, with £2.6bn of new funding called for to support the proposed transformation. In time, a focus on family support should result in savings and shift the profile of spend from reactive, acute services to early intervention and support (care population could be reduced by 30,000 over the coming years). The report makes numerous references to 'keeping more children safely at home' which is a reference point that we have been working to for several years in Hampshire.

11. Covid-19

- 11.1. The last two years has seen unprecedented disruption to the lives and well-being of children with the arrival of the first global pandemic since 1918. March 2020 saw the country head into a full lockdown, with schools and offices closed and social distancing introduced in order to slow down community transmission. Throughout this Children's Services were cognisant of the need to keep children, particularly vulnerable children, and their families safe and where appropriate, attending school.
- 11.2. However, although Covid-19 may no longer be a visible impact in daily lives, the long-term impact remains. In terms of numbers there has been an increase in demand that has yet to return to pre pandemic levels and we may be experiencing the 'new normal'. Contacts have increased by 18% and total referrals to MASH by 39%. In addition there is evidence of an increase in the complexity of cases related to childhood anxiety, child and family/adult mental health issues as well as domestic abuse and neglect.

12. Homes for Ukrainians

- 12.1. Our district Family Support Service (FSS) teams have taken the lead on supporting Ukrainian refugees and their host families across Hampshire.

Whilst the data does not feature heavily in this report as it focuses mainly on the financial year 2021-22 there are currently almost 2500 Ukrainian refugees being supported in Hampshire.

- 12.2. The processes are now well embedded with the majority of the 'teething issues' ironed out.
- 12.3. Support groups are being run in most districts with FSS teams taking the lead on some of these or working alongside existing support groups.
- 12.4. The government has now opened the scheme to unaccompanied minors (i.e. children who are travelling without or not joining a parent or legal guardian). The scheme is in its infancy, so it is difficult to comment on numbers or the implementation of the scheme. All unaccompanied minors will receive a social work assessment and ongoing social work support, comparable with Private Fostering regulations, as per the government guidance. Numbers at this stage are low, with three arrangements approved as of 9 September 2022.

13. Child exploitation

- 13.1. There are clear links between child exploitation and those children who are trafficked and/or that go missing. The term 'exploitation' includes the following risk areas: child sexual exploitation (CSE), online exploitation, criminal (CCE) exploitation including County Lines, drug related harm, knife crime and serious violence; as well as other forms of exploitation that involve coercion and control such as radicalisation and extremism; forced marriage, female genital mutilation. Child exploitation work remains a major challenge.
- 13.2. The Hampshire, Isle of Wight, Portsmouth & Southampton (HIPS) Child Exploitation Group is a strategic multi- agency group, covering the HIPS areas. The group developed the HIPS Child Exploitation Strategy, which sets out how all agencies will work together to ensure the most effective and coordinated response to identify and protect children at risk of exploitation both within and across the HIPS Local Safeguarding Children Partnership (LSCP) areas.
- 13.3. A HIPS Operational Child Exploitation Group provides strong operational links and dissemination routes in and out of the strategic group, and links into Hampshire district led Missing Exploited and Trafficked (MET) operational sub groups. These ensure the identification, support, safeguarding and diversion of children who are at risk of, or being exploited within Hampshire's districts.
- 13.4. The latest available data for children who go missing in Hampshire, be that from home or for those in care, shows a continued improving position. Fewer children are going missing and when they do, there is a robust and effective response from children's social care and Hampshire Constabulary. Hampshire have employed two specialist workers (based in Willow) who monitor missing children on a daily and weekly basis and work with district teams to ensure appropriate safeguards are in place to prevent repeat occurrences. This is an important area of work and one that Ofsted gives significant scrutiny to.

13.5. County lines and local drug peer networks remain an increasing concern for Hampshire Children’s Services and all agencies concerned with children in the area. All agencies and professionals contribute to tackling this form of exploitation, with more specialist work being undertaken by the pan-Hampshire Police Missing team and the Hampshire Children’s Services specialist Willow team - a multi-agency team consisting of specialist social workers, health professionals and St Giles Trust workers, working closely with Hampshire Constabulary to protect the highest risk children. Together with Hampshire Constabulary there is a coordinated deployment of these specialist resources to identify networks, ensuring the safeguarding of the most vulnerable children and the disruption of county line activity.

Performance and Activity Levels

14. Workloads, as evidenced in contacts, referrals and safeguarding activity, continue to be high with 10,558 cases open to Children’s Social Care as at the end of June. The table below sets out the trends over the last four years including the source of referrals received via the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH).

15. Contacts and referrals

15.1. The total number of contacts as at 31 March 2022 (153,033) is 21% higher than the total received at 31 March 2021 (126,153). This is indicative of the continuing pressures across the child protection system which is reflected nationally. With schools reopened, education has retaken its traditional position as highest referrer at 26.82%, with police in second highest referrer position (24.99%). These percentages have remained fairly consistent over the last three years. Note, as indicated by * in the table, the source of the referral is collated only for those referrals that require assessment hence the numerical discrepancy

Contact and Referrals	2017-18		2018-19		2019-20		2020-21		2021-22	
	Denom	Value	Denom	Value	Denom	Value	Denom	Value	Denom	Value
Number of initial contacts		106010		117188		125413		126153		153033
Number of referrals		35953		40014		44434		48826		60761
Referral source*: Individual	1908	11.50%	1906	10.40%	2303	11.39%	2484	11.41%	2694	9.67%
Education	3862	23.30%	4432	24.10%	5007	24.76%	4230	19.43%	7468	26.82%
Health Services	2251	13.60%	3063	16.60%	3656	18.08%	4259	19.57%	5101	18.32%
Housing	174	1.00%	188	1.00%	248	1.23%	181	0.83%	255	0.92%
Local Authority Services	1704	10.30%	1661	9.00%	1600	7.91%	1856	8.53%	1980	7.11%

Police	4265	25.70%	4559	24.80%	4585	22.68%	5803	26.66%	6958	24.99%
Other legal agency	388	2.30%	593	3.20%	696	3.44%	884	4.06%	1087	3.90%
Other	1194	7.20%	1248	6.80%	1262	6.24%	1166	5.36%	1418	5.09%
Anonymous	384	2.30%	495	2.70%	531	2.63%	643	2.95%	633	2.27%
Unknown	466	2.80%	263	1.40%	332	1.64%	2	0.01%	2	0.01%
Not recorded	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	258	1.19%	252	0.90%

16. Section 47 (child protection) investigations and assessments

Section 47 and Assessments	2017-18		2018-19		2019-20		2020-21		2021-22	
% of S47 going to conference	3926	44.90 %	4317	40.60 %	5035	31.40 %	6048	28.01 %	7948	20.55 %
Assessment Timeliness	1849 6	87.90 %	1800 3	90.90 %	1971 2	92.61 %	1592 4	95.30 %	2118 8	95.90 %

16.1. With regards to assessments, as can be seen in the table above, the percentage of child protection investigations (section 47 investigations) which progress to an initial child protection conference over a year, has reduced slightly in comparison to 2020-21 although the number of investigations has increased. We remain satisfied with the consistent application of thresholds both within MASH and in districts teams which has been endorsed by the positive inspection by Ofsted less than a year ago. We are confident through our quality assurance and performance work that cases requiring an Initial Child Protection Conference (ICPC) are appropriately progressed.

16.2. The timeliness of completing a Child and Family Assessment (C&FA) since their introduction in 2014-15, is a very positive picture given the large number of assessments undertaken over the last year. This has not fallen from the high 80s for the last three years and is higher than the majority of other local authorities in the region.

17. Child Protection Plans (CPP)

Child Protection Plans (CPP) and visits	2017-18		2018-19		2019-20		2020-21		2021-22	
No of children on CPP		1293		1097		938		1000		1022

New CPP in the Year %: Neglect	1080	70.40%	950	64.40%	824	61.36%	747	66.16%	697	50.22%
Physical	122	7.90%	100	6.80%	91	6.78%	72	6.38%	75	5.40%
Sexual	65	4.20%	75	5.10%	50	3.72%	29	2.57%	36	2.59%
Emotions	268	17.50%	351	23.80%	378	28.15%	281	24.89%	360	25.94%
New CPP in Year Rate Per 10,000 : Neglect	1080	38.4	950	32.9	824	28.7	747	25.8	775	26.4
Physical	122	4.3	100	3.5	91	3.2	72	2.5	75	2.6
Sexual	65	2.3	75	2.6	50	1.7	29	1	36	1.2
Emotional	268	9.5	351	12.1	378	13.2	281	9.7	360	12.2
CPPs ending after 2 or more years	108	7.20%	78	4.40%	59	3.90%	41	2.90%	33	2.40%
Current CPs lasting 2 or more years	28	2.20%	35	3.20%	15	1.60%	7	0.70%	16	1.57%
Children requiring a repeat CPP	352	23.00%	317	21.50%	321	23.90%	371	32.86%	303	21.80%

17.1. As detailed above, work within the child protection planning process remains robust with numbers showing a decline from the end of March 2017, but an increase more recently due to the Covid pandemic. The previous positive reduction was considered to be as a result of more effective interventions with children and families at the Child in Need level, meaning less cases are escalated to a child protection plan because risks are addressed earlier. The increase is as a result of additional pressures on families as a result of Covid 19 due to the withdrawal of some services and leading to an increase in the complexity of cases.

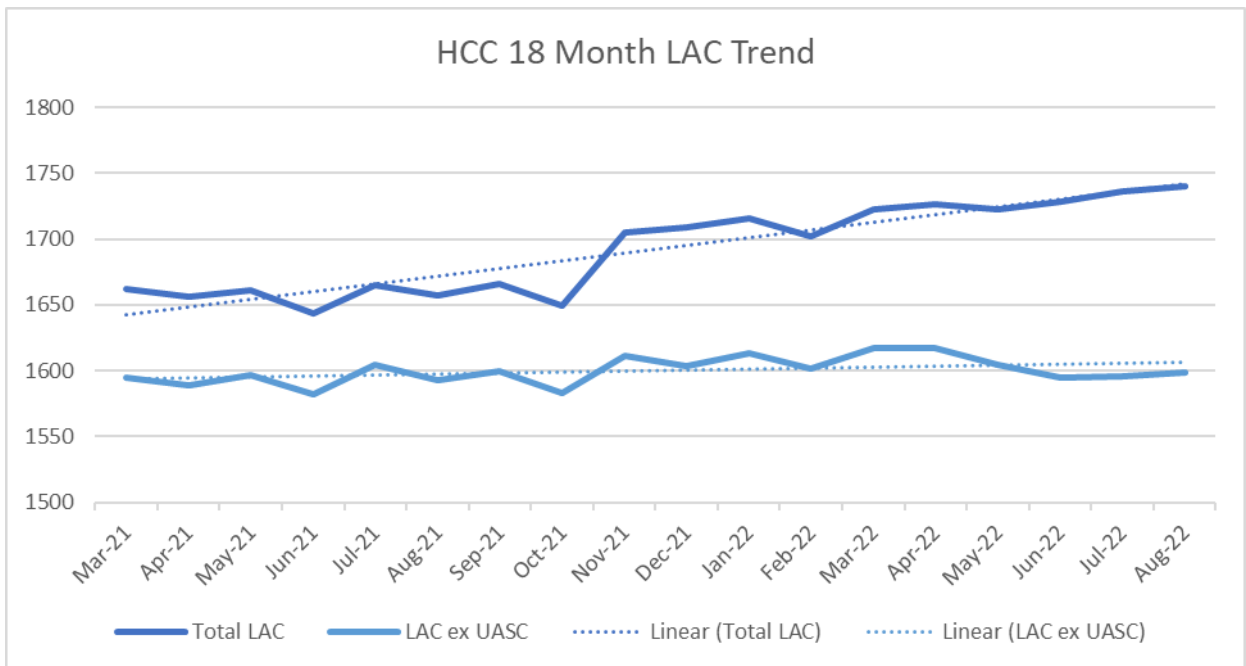
17.2. The number of children subject to a plan for neglect remains in the 50-70 percent (although a word of caution in that categorisation between neglect and emotional abuse can be variable, and neglect while present may not be the main presenting factor). Hampshire Safeguarding Children Partnership (HSCP) launched its Neglect Strategy in October 2016 and again in 2021, and this continues to help professionals better identify neglect.

17.3. A low percentage of child protection plans are lasting beyond two years (which is good as it indicates proactive work) and relatively few require a repeat plan within two years. The number of timely visits made within the required dates remains a significant strength of the service and reinforces that children are being seen and kept safe.

18. Full Time Children Looked After (CLA)

Full Time Children Looked After (CLA)	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22
No of full time CLA	1339	1305	1440	1592	1664	1602	1656	1725

18.1. With regards to children in care, the number has increased by 69 (4%) over the last 12 months, however this increase is due to an increase in Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) numbers with 1,591 CLA if we exclude UASC. UASC now make up 8% of the total cohort, whereas 18 months ago in March 2021 they were around 4% of the cohort. It should be noted that the ability to keep children safely at home through high quality social work practice has meant that the underlying trend of CLA has remained broadly static.



18.2. The financial cost of CLA is significantly affecting the financial challenges the Council is facing.

	Apr - Jun 2019	Jul-Sep 2019	Oct - Dec 2019	Jan - Mar 2020	Apr - Jun 2020	Jul-Sep 2020	Oct - Dec 2020	Jan - Mar 2021	Apr - Jun 2021	Jul-Sep 2021	Oct - Dec 2021	Jan - Mar 2022	Apr - Jun 2022
Entering full time care	135	155	121	159	158	166	152	157	156	155	192	136	165

Leaving full time care	161	153	148	166	107	136	184	139	176	134	147	113	150
Net increase	-26	2	-27	-7	51	30	-32	18	-20	21	45	23	15
Of those new UASC	7	8	3	13	0	20	4	7	3	7	46	18	41

18.3. It should be noted that there is of course significant churn throughout the year of the children in care population. Nationally the picture of demand continues to outstrip the supply of placements for children in care, and the costs of placements are rising significantly. The increasing complexity of the children coming into the care system has meant additional costs associated with their placements. There is no doubt that the paucity of mental health services for some children has led to them coming into the care system. The costs (or more accurately, the price) of those placements continue to rise year on year. Significant work is carried out by our Placement Commissioning team (such as working through framework contracts and contract specification) to ensure that Hampshire achieves the best value that it can in what is an 'overheated' market.

19. Hampshire UASC Arrivals

19.1. As at 30 June 2022 the total number of UASC (under 18 years) looked after by Hampshire is 134. (Nb the figure now stands at over 160)

UASC Arrivals	Apr - Jun 2019	Jul-Sep 2019	Oct - Dec 2019	Jan - Mar 2020	Apr - Jun 2020	Jul-Sep 2020	Oct - Dec 2020	Jan - Mar 2021	Apr - Jun 2021	Jul-Sep 2021	Oct - Dec 2021	Jan - Mar 2022	Apr - Jun 2022
Quarterly Data	7	8	3	13	0	18	4	7	3	7	46	18	41

UASC Care Leavers	Apr - Jun 2019	Jul-Sep 2019	Oct - Dec 2019	Jan - Mar 2020	Apr - Jun 2020	Jul-Sep 2020	Oct - Dec 2020	Jan - Mar 2021	Apr - Jun 2021	Jul-Sep 2021	Oct - Dec 2021	Jan - Mar 2022	Apr - Jun 2022
Period End	328	329	327	334	335	341	347	363	365	369	402	417	423

- 19.2. The table above shows the number of UASC Care Leavers at each period end. There has been a 209% increase in the number of UASC care leavers since June 2017 (137), which is to be expected given the age demographic of UASC arrivals with an average age of 17 years.
- 19.3. Since July 2016, Hampshire has been accepting children through the National Transfer Scheme (NTS). Hampshire have always been proactive in the NTS scheme and have previously been supportive with the closure of the Calais camp and more recently with the large influx of children arriving through Dover. Between August and October 2020 Hampshire took children direct from the Port of Dover as Kent County Council were unable to support more arrivals. The scheme became Mandatory in April 2021 and Hampshire has continued to be proactive in receiving children through this scheme. Through the NTS it is expected that each Local Authority will care for a number of UASC equivalent to 0.1% of the child population. For Hampshire this is 285 UASC. Not counted in these figures are the support that Hampshire is required to give to former UASC who are now care leavers. For Hampshire, because we have been on a traditional route (i.e. M3, A34) our figures are now over 350 young people being supported in this way which creates an additional financial strain as this element of support is not fully funded by government.
- 19.4. The majority of the children are placed in independent fostering agency (IFA) placements and a significant number are placed outside of Hampshire, in order that we can better meet their cultural and individual needs. The age range is from 11 years old and the significant majority are males. They will need to be looked after by the local authority until they reach 18 years and will then have care leaver status with continuing support from the local authority until they are 25 years of age. Whilst the Home Office provide set funding for UASC, an Association of Directors of Children's Services report evidenced that the funding only covers 50% of the actual costs to the local authority. It should also be noted that around 30% of UASC will not be given leave to remain in the UK and as such will have 'no recourse to public funds' requiring the local authority to entirely fund all of their living costs until they reach 25 years of age.
- 19.5. Given the rise in activity in respect of UASC it has been agreed that a specialist UASC team will be set up, specifically to support UASC and former care leaver UASC in Hampshire.

Consultation and Equalities

20. There is no adverse impact on equalities and no consultation is required.

Other Key Issues

21. **Recruitment and retention**





- 21.1. The recruitment and retention of social workers continues to be a key issue. This is a national problem which is particularly acute in the South East region.
- 21.2. The retention of children's social workers is a significant challenge for Hampshire as it is all local authorities and can undermine the work being undertaken to bring new staff into the service. In the last 12 months, turnover amongst children's social workers increased from 13.5% to 20.6%. This challenge is shared by other local authorities and reflects changes in the wider recruitment market following the pandemic.
- 21.3. The Independent Review of Children's Social Care has afforded us the opportunity to consider the employment and use of alternatively qualified professionals to support children and families. We are currently commencing the planning of two pilot schemes in Hampshire to consider the roles of differently qualified case-holding professionals in our statutory teams and historically we have had some success in recruiting differently qualified professionals, as evidenced with the Intensive Workers. This change would increase the capacity of our Qualified Social Workers.
- 21.4. There is a proactive recruitment strategy in place which utilises a positive partnership with Community Care, through regular national and local marketing targeted campaigns and advertisements. This is alongside events such as Social Work in the South, and Community Care Live.
- 21.5. We are focussing on direct recruitment of graduates from universities to our highly regarded newly qualified social worker programme, utilising the National Step Up to Social Work Programme and over the last three years have successfully supported staff through the Social Work Apprentice programme, with the first cohort graduating in August 2022. When this scheme began it was fairly unique, but most local authorities now offer similar schemes, which means it is now more difficult to recruit to cohorts.
- 21.6. Given the challenges in recruitment and retention, there is a need to be more ambitious in growing our own social workers. There is a range of highly skilled and experienced differently qualified workers currently employed within the department. It is our intention to support a greater number of these individuals through the apprentice scheme, increasing our current yearly intake of 10 to 32 for this financial year.
- 21.7. The Department is also working on the recruitment of 25 overseas social workers during this financial year, primarily from South Africa and Zimbabwe. There are plans to form a longer-term relationship with overseas universities in order to promote HCC and ensure that we become the first choice for overseas graduates.

22. Transforming Social Care (TSC) in Hampshire




- 22.1. The Transforming Social Care Programme continues at pace to deliver innovative whole system change and continuous improvement to our social work practice. The 2020 and 2021 Annual Safeguarding Report gave an overview of Phase 1 and Phase 2 projects.

22.2. Phase 3 projects being delivered during 2022 include:

What we're delivering in Phase 3

Project	Objective	Outcomes / Impact
Family Connections Service  SDQs 	Implement the 'Family Connections Service' as a central team to carry out the assessment of connected carers and SGO. Implement a support package for Special Guardians. Review the way in which SDQs are carried out. With the aim of making them easy to use, meaningful and lead to impactful interventions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More children placed with Family and Friends carers outside of the care system. • Eight tasks have been identified split into initial tasks and longer term projects focusing on improving the completion rate, embedding within planning both health and social care and increased awareness and training in the process.
PEPs – Education & Social Care 	To plan and implement improvements to the PEP processes, forms and systems to ensure the end-to-end process is efficient and effective, meets the statutory requirements and ultimately supports our CYP to attain highly.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved efficiency and effectiveness of the PEP process. • Improved knowledge of PEP quality and child progression • Improved staff satisfaction. • Enable the CYP known to social care to attain highly and where needed provision will be adapted to enable them to succeed.
Virtual School & College – Education & Social Care 	Virtual School (and Virtual College) review to identify potential service delivery improvements, highlight any gaps in service provision, ensure that services are delivered as per the statutory duty and are effective, timely and efficient. To ensure VS can meet their statutory responsibility for monitoring, promoting and improving the educational experiences and outcomes of our looked after (and previously looked after) children and to meet the new requirements due to the extended duties to provide strategic oversight of the education of all pupils with a social worker.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CYP known to social care will be supported to attain highly, and where needed provision will be adapted to enable them to succeed. • Improved placement stability through increased school attendance, enabled by appropriate education provision. • Improved cross-branch collaboration and raised profile of Virtual School. • Service is fit for purpose and meets statutory obligations.

What we're delivering in Phase 3

Project	Objective	Outcomes / Impact
Residential – Education & Social Care 	To identify improvements to ensure CYP in Residential settings are obtaining the routine, structure and support they require to attain highly and where needed provision will be adapted to enable them to succeed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved educational outcomes for children in Residential settings. • Education provision is aligned to the Residential Strategy.
Resilience in Schools – Education & Social Care 	To ensure there is C&F representation at the relevant forums to contribute to the outcomes of the cross branch Early Help programme and the Hampshire Education in Schools Survey action plan, with the overall aim of ensuring that education settings have the relevant skills and resilience to support/refer/signpost appropriately.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • C&F support the actions that are put in place to help ensure teachers and other professionals in education settings have the relevant skills and resilience to support children and/or refer and signpost appropriately.
Creating Capacity /Family Help pilot 	New roles in CAST teams to increase resilience and optimise the skills and experience of differently qualified workers. Pilot 'family help model' as recommended in the care review, to achieve local, multiagency support, at the right time for children and families.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce social worker caseloads increasing the time social workers have to support children and families and achieve sustained change. • Reduce handovers and maintain relationships with children and families, which will decrease re-referrals. • Children and families are supported at the right time, by the right person, in the right place.

23. Youth Offending Service

23.1. During the last year Hampshire Youth Offending Team (HYOT) has continued to deliver youth justice and youth crime prevention to the children of Hampshire.

23.2. Progress against last year's plan is as follows:

- a) Improving assessments including understanding children's diverse needs and taking a trauma informed approach.
- b) Implement the improvements identified following the National Standards Self-Assessment. In particular, the work done with children who are experiencing a transition.
- c) Reducing the number of first-time entrants to the criminal justice system by working together with the other Hampshire YOTs and Hampshire Police to develop a youth diversion programme.

24. The Priorities for 2022/23 include:

- a) To develop understanding of disproportionality in Hampshire Youth Offending Team and to implement the findings of the HMIP black boys thematic inspection
- b) To improve the participation of children in the service delivery
- c) To continue to develop practice in relation to the assessment of risk of harm
- d) Developing a strategic response to children excluded from school.

25. Sector Led Improvement

25.1. Hampshire has been a Partner in Practice (PiP) with the Department for Education since 2016, and as such, has provided for several years social work improvement support and advice to other local authorities across the region and nationally. This improvement work under PiP came to an end in March 2021 when Hampshire, jointly with the Isle of Wight, was successful in bidding to deliver improvement support in the DfE's newly established Sector Led Improvement Programme (SLIP). This began in July 2021 and we have indicative funding initially for three years until 2024, for Hampshire and the Isle of Wight to deliver over a thousand days of support to other children's services per year. Our SLIP work over this past year has supported improvement in several authorities including Buckinghamshire, West Sussex, Southampton, Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole (BCP), Reading and Solihull.

25.2. In addition to the SLIP work, Hampshire has continued to work with the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) to undertake some specific social work improvement support with the British Overseas Territories. Currently this work is ongoing with St Helena, Ascension Island and Tristan da Cunha. Furthermore, this year, Hampshire has consolidated its position as the regional facilitator of DfE funded improvement packages in the south east. Hampshire leads this work under the South East Regional

Improvement and Innovation Alliance. Our regional work under this programme currently includes Wokingham, Medway and Reading.

- 25.3. Members can be assured that, even with the work of the Director of Children's Services and his senior managers in the above authorities, there is no detriment to the oversight and management of Hampshire Children's Services, as evidenced by our most recent Ofsted inspection report. Hampshire receives full financial recovery for Sector Led improvement from the DfE or FCDO. A small central team of social work managers has been established with the funding to further support capacity in this area and ensure that the work in Hampshire maintains due focus. As with all work undertaken in other authorities, there is always positive learning gained to further improve services in Hampshire. These benefits to Hampshire are significant and enable both staff and services in Hampshire to be continuously developed. Ofsted commented that, 'Leaders recognise the benefits that come from being an improvement partner, not only in creating income, but also in the learning that is gained from other local authorities and from keeping its own staff stimulated and stretched.'

Future Challenges and Operational Priorities

26. The future challenges and priorities can be summarised as follows (this is not an exhaustive list and the history of this type of work is that new priorities will continue to emerge in much the same as child exploitation and county lines):
- 26.1. The full long-term impact of the pandemic is not yet known. Children's social care have seen a sustained increase in referrals over the last 2 years of over 30% compared to pre-pandemic levels. It is not yet known how long that will continue but experience shows us this might now be the new normal level of demand going forward. At this stage the increase in demand has not led to a similar increase in the numbers of children coming into care due to the effective practice of our front-line staff.
- 26.2. The costs associated with the placements for looked after children will continue to be a significant pressure for the County Council. Significant additional corporate funding has already been given to the department, but as demand increases and the supply of placements comes under further pressure, inevitably costs will rise. Our Modernising Placements Programme aims to increase our numbers of Hampshire County Council foster carers, thereby reducing costs in the longer term.
- 26.3. It should be noted that the challenges faced within the placement market are significant. There are well acknowledged shortfalls in available beds both within the secure welfare estate and in Tier 4 psychiatric provision which compound the issue for social care. In terms of residential provision, demand is outstripping current supply which is resulting in escalating pricing and providers able to select from a multitude of referrals for each available bed, with a local provider referencing over 100 referrals per available bed. The Competitions and Market Authority report identifies the inflated profit margins within external placement suppliers. Hampshire is fortunate to have in house

provision, which regularly supports the most hard to place young people but the placements issue remains a significant challenge.

- 26.4. It is essential that our transformation work continues at pace to keep more children at home, where it is safe and appropriate to do so. Transforming children's social care will deliver a modern social work service fit for the future challenges over the next decade. Where children do come into care, our Modernising Placements Programme, will ensure children have the right placement to meet their needs.
- 26.5. Child exploitation, in all its forms, continues to be an increasing area of work, particularly the 'County Lines' issues. Although Hampshire is well placed to meet these challenges, it is important that we remain vigilant and responsive, working in tandem with partners to protect children.
- 26.6. The recruitment and retention of social workers will continue to need to be addressed.

Climate Change Impact Assessment

27. Hampshire County Council utilises two decision-making tools to assess the carbon emissions and resilience impacts of its projects and decisions. These tools provide a clear, robust, and transparent way of assessing how projects, policies and initiatives contribute towards the County Council's climate change targets of being carbon neutral and resilient to the impacts of a 2°C temperature rise by 2050. This process ensures that climate change considerations are built into everything the Authority does.
28. **Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation.** The carbon mitigation and climate change adaptation tools were not applicable because this report is to provide details of Children's Services safeguarding activity and does not recommend changes or require any decisions which would have any climate change considerations. However, this does link to other strategic priorities as listed in the relevant section at the end of the document. Children's Services are aware of the importance of climate change and plan for this in new projects.
29. **Carbon Mitigation.** The carbon mitigation and climate change adaptation tools were not applicable because this report is to provide details of the contribution of Children's Services safeguarding activity and does not recommend changes or require any decisions which would have any climate change considerations. This report is not relevant as above. Children's Services regularly feedback to the Corporate Climate Change Action Plan.

Conclusions

30. Throughout 2021/22 there continued to be a highly effective strategic response to the safeguarding of vulnerable children and a robust operational response. This is despite the challenges presented by Covid-19, including an increase in demand, and tested via external validation from the Ofsted inspection in November 2021.

REQUIRED CORPORATE AND LEGAL INFORMATION:

Links to the Strategic Plan

Hampshire maintains strong and sustainable economic growth and prosperity:	yes
People in Hampshire live safe, healthy and independent lives:	yes
People in Hampshire enjoy a rich and diverse environment:	no
People in Hampshire enjoy being part of strong, inclusive communities:	yes

Section 100 D - Local Government Act 1972 - background documents

The following documents discuss facts or matters on which this report, or an important part of it, is based and have been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of this report. (NB: the list excludes published works and any documents which disclose exempt or confidential information as defined in the Act.)

Document

Location

None

EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT:

1. Equality Duty

The County Council has a duty under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 ('the Act') to have due regard in the exercise of its functions to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by or under the Act with regard to the protected characteristics as set out in section 4 of the Act (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation);
- Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic within section 149(7) of the Act (age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation) and those who do not share it;
- Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic within section 149(7) of the Act (see above) and persons who do not share it.

Due regard in this context involves having due regard in particular to:

- The need to remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic that are connected to that characteristic;
- Take steps to meet the needs of persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of persons who do not share it;
- Encourage persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.