



North Somerset Safeguarding Children Annual Report

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Introduction

Like many multi-agency safeguarding partnerships, 2019-20 was a transition year for arrangements in North Somerset. Working Together 2018 sets out guidance on the way agencies are required to work together to safeguard children and young people and arrangements on the new Safeguarding Children Partnership were published on 26 June 2019. Read the detailed report on safeguarding children partnership governance arrangements for more information. This report covers the period from January 2021 up until the end of March 2022. The Board had three different chairs throughout this period.

- January – December 2021 - Rosi Shepherd, Director of Nursing and Quality
- January 22 - Sheila Smith, Director Children's Services
- February – March 2022 - Ivan Powell, Independent Chair (continuing)

This annual report will be shared with:

- The Chief Executive, North Somerset Council
- The Chief Executive of BNSSG Integrated Care Board
- The Outcomes, Quality and Performance Committee and System Quality Groups of the Bristol, North Somerset, South Gloucestershire Integrated Care Board (BNSSG ICB)
- The Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner
- The Safer and Stronger Communities Strategic Partnership
- Children and Young People's Policy & Scrutiny Panel (NSC)
- Children and Young People's Partnership Board
- The North Somerset Safeguarding Adults Board
- The National Safeguarding Practice Review Panel
- What Works for Early Intervention and Children's Social Care Centre

This report was approved by the Executive of the North Somerset Safeguarding Partnership in October 22.

Should you require the report in any other format to support accessibility please contact tracey.farthing@n-somerset.gov.uk

Foreword from the North Somerset Safeguarding Children Partnership Executive

This is the second annual report from the North Somerset Safeguarding Children Partnership. The report covers January 2021 to March 2022, a period during which we have all been living with the ongoing impact of COVID-19. This has been felt in all organisations across North Somerset.

It has been a huge task, which has affected how we deliver our services now and in the future. It has left indelible marks on wellbeing and mental health, with many more requests for support already starting to emerge. We have developed strong professional networks dedicated to the safeguarding of children, young people, and their families within North Somerset.

We acknowledge the extraordinary efforts made by the communities within North Somerset as well as all voluntary and statutory partners; the efforts which have been made to continue to keep people as safe as possible during this pandemic. It has been remarkable and leaves us feeling very proud to live and work within North Somerset.

This report reflects some of those challenges and the environment in which we have worked, and also highlights some of the excellent practice that has occurred. As this is the second year of the Partnership, we know that there are several key initiatives we have needed to develop in 2021 and 2022. Statutory partners have recognised there have been insufficient resources in the absence of sufficient chairing capacity and a business manager. This has now been addressed by partners.

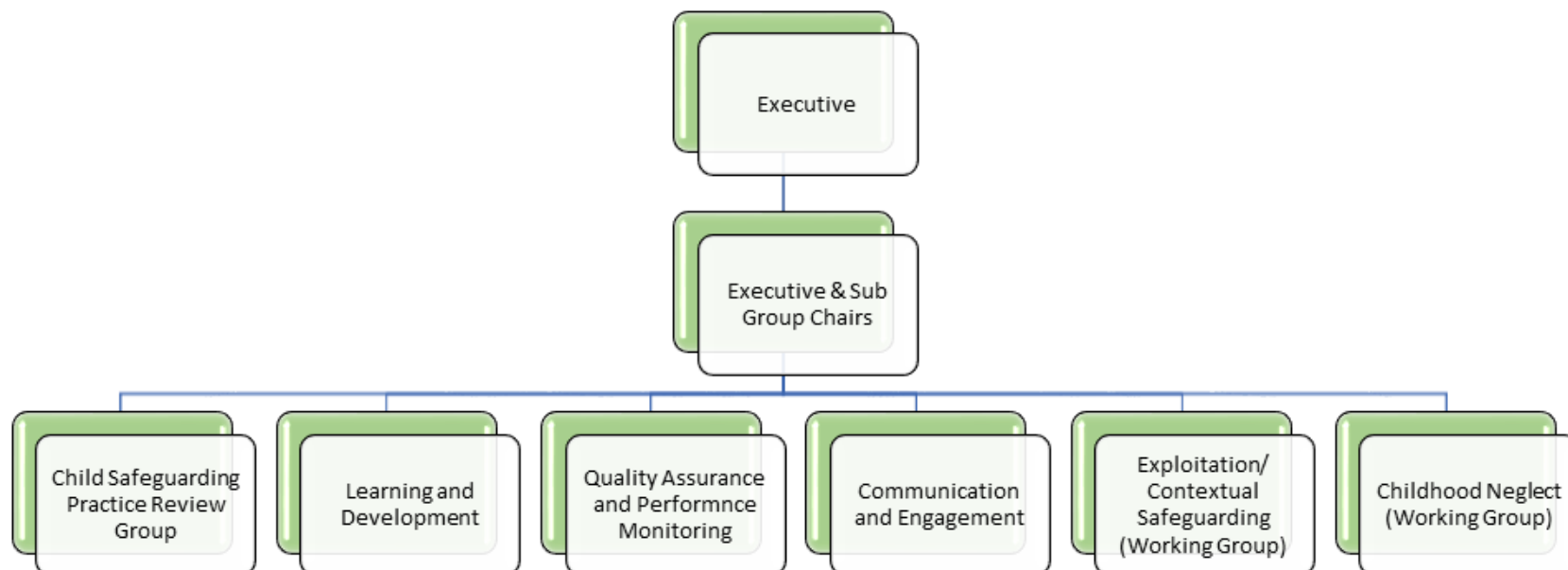
The Executive Board includes the following:

- Rosi Shepherd, Director of Nursing & Quality, BNSSG Clinical Commissioning Group
- Sheila Smith, Director of Children's Services, North Somerset Council
- Jess Aston, Avon & Somerset Police
- Ivan Powell, Independent Chair (from February 22)

North Somerset Safeguarding Children Partnership Structure

During this period the Covid-19 pandemic continued alongside considerable operational challenges. Inevitably this impacted on the Partnership's work programme, which was further delayed by the absence of a Business Manager and latterly administrative support.

Consequently, the subgroups did not have a clear focus and membership was depleted. This resulted in the CSPR subgroup being the only one which was fully operational.



The Work of the Partnership

2020 was a year that will be remembered due to Covid-19, and the significant impact that this has had on us all both personally and professionally. In relation to the North Somerset Safeguarding Children's Partnership, it did affect our ability to strengthen and prioritise the work of the Partnership. This, along with the absence and change of key post holders and an Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services meant that not all the sub-groups were able to focus on developing plans for each of their groups as much as was originally intended.

In response to the pandemic, the Chair of the Executive introduced a Task and Finish Group Covid-19 Multi-Agency Safeguarding Children Forum which finished early in 2021. These meetings were held fortnightly in order to support the constituent and relevant partners of the North Somerset Safeguarding Children Partnership. Key priorities of this group were to:

- Improve the availability and understanding of data in order to assess the quality of the safeguarding system
- Learn from innovative practice created out of necessity due to Covid-19, and maximise opportunities for further developments
- Understand and collaboratively resolve blockers and challenges within the Partnership caused by Covid-19

From these meetings, a fortnightly newsletter was produced and published on the North Somerset Safeguarding Children Partnership website detailing key discussion areas with links to up-to-date resources – such as the Barnardo's See, Hear and Respond service which offers rapid support for children and young people affected by the coronavirus crisis. Areas of good practice were also identified. Support for professionals' wellbeing was also identified and sessions were held on how we could support each other through this crisis. Key areas of risk were highlighted and raised at both the Partnership Leads Group and the Executive.

Examples of areas identified were:

- Recognising signs of neglect and hidden harm
- The increase in domestic abuse referrals and each agency's ability to meet demand
- Young people's mental health, with links to resources for support
- The impact of not being able to have face-to-face visits with families and children
- Increases in the numbers of children electively home educated and what this might mean for children and families
- Children going missing
- Highlighting best practice in relation to keeping schools open

Tackling Child Exploitation, working with Research in Practice

This Task and Finish group ended in December 2020 but was replaced by an ongoing working group. It was deemed felt that services and organisations were able to deliver “business as usual” within the constraints of the pandemic and the forthcoming third lock down. Strong networks had been established, and it was felt that these meetings may duplicate discussions or pieces of work that were already in place.

Subsequently, challenges have been raised in relation to identifying and responding to child exploitation. Evolving practice across the Partnership is a priority that has spanned a range of internal and inter-agency operational and strategic challenges.

Core service delivery has remained in place between statutory partners. This has been supplemented and supported by partners and commissioned services such as Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) and Barnardos against Sexual Exploitation (BASE) as well as the support, training, and guidance provided through our Trusted Relationships project. Trauma-informed practice has been introduced for partners across social care, the police, and education. A multi-agency approach to training and awareness has gone from strength to strength over the past three years. The Trusted Relationships funding has now ceased and we as a Partnership will continue to review, build, and adapt our practice whilst benefiting from the solid foundation this funding provided.

As a Partnership we were fortunate to be successful in our bid for bespoke ‘Tackling Child Exploitation (TCE)’ support from Research in Practice and the University of Bedfordshire.

The act of coming together to systematically approach a shared challenge - the process of asking questions, being curious, identifying needs and strengths - is often as important and powerful as the strategy identified at the end. The development phase to start the change we are working towards has been the central focus. We have set out to create the conditions that mean the end strategy has the best chance of succeeding. Our learning from the TCE programme suggests that partnership strategy development requires some core ingredients. Our starting point was a mandate to review and, where necessary, reform current arrangements.

Our project priority and strategic goal was to explore how the use of data and intelligence can support and inform the Partnership as we embed a contextual approach to child exploitation. Overall, within the TCE project, 4 core themes have emerged:

1. Data mapping and exploring the gaps and opportunities within it
2. Ensuring the voice of children, young people, and families are a core feature of the work going forward
3. Developing an approach which allows for earlier intervention and shifting system response to child exploitation upstream
4. Developing and nurturing an approach which is based on professional curiosity

Tackling Child Exploitation, working with Research in Practice (cont.)

Over the past year, the Partnership has been developing the foundations to better address these core themes. We have a core set of principles that our Partnership agreed on to tackle child exploitation and extra-familial harm. We have successfully developed operational practice in many areas which help us better identify and support children, young people, and their families.

For example:

- Operation TOPAZ expanding its remit
- The development of a Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) – expected launch late 2022
- Developing our business intelligence and information sharing for children missing from home and education
- Our Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) evaluated risk of offending and victimisation
- Improved our training offer, awareness, and profile raising of the issue across our networks through multi-agency training and online seminars
- Reviewed and refreshed our practice guidance documents, protocol, and policy
- Introduced quality assurance frameworks
- Brought scrutiny to our Partnership arrangements and as well as connectivity to our approach
- Responding to these challenges set against the backdrop of COVID 19 has created new ways to innovate as we face and overcome unexpected barriers. As a Partnership we can be proud of how we work together, the trajectory and direction of travel to improve our response to children and their families

There is still further work to be completed and the next steps will be focus on the maturation of what has already been developed, as well as defining new initiatives and strategies to successfully disrupt and respond to the exploitation of children in North Somerset.

- We would like to observe greater maturation of our business intelligence to identify and highlight our strengths and area for improvement
- We would like to develop our strategic position and partnerships further through our child exploitation working group
- We would like to bring closer alignment on exploitation with our adult safeguarding partners relating to transition to adulthood
- We intend to develop our multi-agency auditing review of our commissioning arrangements

Multi Agency Safeguarding Training

The year continued to present challenges providing face-to-face training for partners. Much of the first half of 2021 continued to be delivered online, however, this has slowly changed into a more hybrid form of delivery as COVID limitations became less restrictive.

The onset of the pandemic initiated some reflection on the content and quality of the training offer and allowed reworking of courses to take place with an emphasis on the quality assurance process. New courses for Domestic Abuse and Neglect have been developed and a future 'Contextual Safeguarding' course is in the planning stage.

A rolling programme of training events is now scheduled through to end of 2023 with 80% of these planned for face-to-face delivery. The newly reconstituted Learning and Development subgroup will focus on ensuring the offer continues to provide relevant, high quality training events.

Early Help

The Early Help teams within the local authority have realigned and are now the Family Wellbeing Service, and provide early help and intensive early help for children and young people aged 0-19 years (up to 25 for young people with Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND)). The service provides the following:

- The Early Help Hub at the Front Door to ensure children and young people are receiving the right service at the right time
- Intensive early help for families – 1:1 support via a Family Support Worker. This includes carrying out Return Home Interviews for children that have been reported missing
- UK Re-Settlement programme for refugees from Syria and Afghanistan
- Advanced parenting offer (evidenced based) and groups for children aged 9-18 years
- Provide and run three nurseries
- Provide and run 11 children centres and provide outreach to 3 other community buildings
- Support children with SEND via Portage, SENDCAS (clubs and activities for children aged 5-18 years) and the Sitting Service
- Provide universal as well as targeted services
- Developing 3 of their children centres to become Family Hubs

What are Family Hubs?

Family Hubs provide families with children aged 0-19 (25 years of age for young people with SEND) with somewhere they know they can go if they need information, advice, or guidance about parenting difficulties, concerns about family breakdown, and other worries. The hub is a central access point for services and support. With the community and support services we hope to ensure families with children and young people aged 0-19 (or 25 for young people with SEND) receive early help and support to overcome a range of difficulties and build stronger relationships. Effective early help can improve:

- children's wellbeing
- education achievement
- life chances, i.e., opportunities to improve quality of life
- reduce family poverty
- Improve mental health
- lead to lower crime, unemployment, or other negative outcomes.
- work with other services, e.g. midwives, health visitors, children centres, SEND, parenting, housing, debt and welfare

Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews (CSPR)

The Child Safeguarding Practice Review (CSPR) sub-group was initially set up to meet on an ad-hoc basis, as and when required, but by the middle of 2020, it became clear that regular fortnightly meetings were needed to keep abreast of the number of referrals it was receiving. Between January 2021 and March 2022 there have been two rapid reviews and one Appreciative Enquiry. [Read the safeguarding children partnership learning reviews for more information.](#)

Section 11 Audit 2021 - 2022

Section 11 was issued under the Children Act (2004) and has been reinforced in Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018. Section 11 places duties on a range of organisations and individuals to ensure their functions, and any services that they contract out to others, are discharged having regard to the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.

The five children's Partnerships across the Avon & Somerset Region worked together to audit organisations working with children and families. The audits took place via a series of peer review workshops and the findings and learning were merged into one report across the children's partnerships in Bristol, Somerset, North Somerset, Bath & North-East Somerset and South Gloucestershire. North Somerset undertook reviews with Sirona Care & YMCA. [The full report is available here.](#)

Children's Services Audit of Multi-Agency Working - Strategy Meetings

Following performance data informing us we were undertaking an increasing number of strategy meetings that were resulting in No Further Action, a single agency audit was undertaken. However, Strategy meetings take place on a multi agency basis and the focus on this audit was on all agencies contributions.

- 83% evidenced good examples when considering future impact of harm on the child
- 70% evidenced good examples when making plans focused on the child
- 78% evidenced good examples of the decision-making rationale

The following areas were identified for improvement:

- 56% of those partners invited to Strategy didn't attend, of those 66% provided no information into the process
- 43% of minutes were not sent out promptly (within 3 working days)
- 43% recorded no balanced perspective of both positive and negative factors (recorded only negative factors)

We have identified next steps to address these concerns including a multi-agency working group to focus on the areas for improvement, such as agency attendance, written contributions, minutes, and agenda. This was well attended and proved an effective opportunity for co-production. A repeat dip audit will be undertaken in October 2022, to re-examine this area to see what impact this QA has had on practice.

Data from the Partnership

Children's Support and Safeguarding Overview

During January 2021 and March 2022 the following data was collected:

- North Somerset's children and young people (0-17) population was 43,820
- 1,018 contacts were received, of which 432 were domestic violence contacts and 589 progressed to referral
- There were 786 referrals to Children's Support and Safeguarding of which 101 were re-referrals
- There were 561 Children in Need
- 93 children with Child Protection Plans of whom the majority were on a plan due to neglect
- There was 27% of children on a child protection plan for a 2nd or subsequent time
- There were 199 children in care of which 68 children started to be in care

Police Overview

The data covers the period 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022 and provides data for the period 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021 for comparison.

Child Protection

The "Child Protection Crimes (excluding Domestic Abuse Crimes)" in the attached table are recorded crimes where there are child protection concerns (Child Abuse, Child Sexual Exploitation, Child Safeguarding), with this measure excluding Domestic Abuse Crimes where there are child protection concerns. The measure was considered by the former local safeguarding children boards to be a useful headline measure and includes crimes where the victim is a child, crimes where the suspect is a child and crimes where the child is an involved party. The measure also includes peer-on-peer crimes where both the victim and suspect are children. The measure includes non-recent child abuse allegations, regardless of whether the victim was a child or adult at the time of reporting.

The data below shows that the volume of recorded "Child Protection" crimes in North Somerset rose by 35.4%, or by 115 crimes, in the last 12 months compared with the previous 12 months, rising to 440 crimes. The 35.4% rise in North Somerset is above the 29.8% increase experienced across the force area. The recorded increases in these offences can reasonably be attributed, at least in part, to the increased contact that professionals have had with children as measures to slow the spread of COVID-19 within the population were eased and removed, which enabled increased recognition of child abuse concerns and increased reporting to Children's Social Care and the police. National reports suggest that lockdown measures increased the risk of abuse to some children, and reduced the risk to others, by changing the degree of access perpetrators had to children and the presence of protective factors which reduce the risk of abuse.

Data from the Partnership

Police Overview cont.

Over the decade prior to COVID-19, the long-term trend was one of increasing recorded Child Abuse offences and it is difficult to determine the extent to which the increase in the volume of recorded “Child Protection” crimes reported here also reflects wider influences, and indeed whether there might be an increase in prevalence.

2 Month Rolling	Current	Previous	Chg	% Chg
Number of Child Protection Crime (excluding Domestic Abuse Crimes)	440	325	+115	+35.4%
Number of Child Protection Serious Sexual Offences	176	86	+90	+104.7%
Number of Non-Familial Sexual Crimes - Child Victim	222	116	+106	+91.4%
Number of Child Protection Crimes for Cruelty and Neglect of Children	109	76	+33	+43.4%

Within that broad measure, there were increases in recorded offences in North Somerset in the offence groups selected previously by the former local safeguarding children boards for reporting: recorded Child Protection Serious Sexual Offences rose by 104.7% (or by 90 crimes); non-familial sexual offences against children rose by 91.4% (or by 106 crimes); and child neglect offences rose by 43.4% (or by 33 crimes). The rate of increase recorded in North Somerset for each of these measures was well the rate of increase recorded for the force area.

Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) is not a Home Office “offence type” and CSE offending is made up of a wide range of offences. As reported last quarter, the data in the attached report concerning the change in the number of CSE crimes should currently be disregarded. This is due to changes made to the way in which the CSE flag is attached to qualifying offences on police systems, to improve accuracy. The Constabulary introduced an automated process for newly recorded offences in October 2021 and applied this retrospectively to offences dating back to 1 October 2020. It will be October 2022 before 12 month rolling data can be more accurately compared with data for the previous 12 months.

12 Month Rolling	Current	Previous	Chg	% Chg
Number of Child Sexual Exploitation Crimes	294	129	+165	+127.9%

Data from the Partnership

Police Overview cont.

Missing Children - 143 children were reported missing in North Somerset in the last 12 months, 26 more than in the previous 12 months. 67 of these children were reported missing repeatedly, 10 fewer children than were reported missing repeatedly in the previous 12 months. The overall number of missing children reports in North Somerset rose significantly, by 130 reports or by 40.0%, meaning that the frequency with which children were reported missing repeatedly had increased. The number of children missing from care increased by 10 children to 34 children in the last 12 months. The number of children repeatedly going missing from care fell by one child to 16 children in the last 12 months.

12 Month Rolling	Current	Previous	Chg	% Chg
Number of Missing Children	143	117	+26	+22.2%
Number of Missing Children Reports	455	325	130	40.0%
Number of Repeat Missing Children	67	77	-10	-13.0%
Number of Children Missing from Care	34	24	+10	+41.7%
Number of Repeat Children Missing from Care	16	17	-1	-5.9%

Safety and Anti-Bullying - The overall number of child victims of crimes in North Somerset rose by 275 victims to 1042 victims in the last 12 months, or by 35.9% compared with the previous 12 months. This is in line with the 37.1% rise recorded across the force area. The number of child suspects of crimes in North Somerset in the last 12 months rose by 21.2% to 710 child suspects. This is below the 31.6% rise experienced across the force area. The number of recorded Domestic Abuse Crimes with a victim aged 16 or 17 in North Somerset rose by 16 crimes to 103 crimes in the last 12 months, equating to an 18.4% increase, above the 14.9% increase recorded across the force area. The percentage increase in the number of child victims of recorded Race Hate Crimes should be disregarded as the numbers are so small. The under reporting of all forms of Hate Crime is a significant issue and the prevalence will be far greater than is indicated by the number of child victims of recorded offences.

Data from the Partnership

Police Overview cont.

12 Month Rolling	Current	Previous	Chg	% Chg
Number of Child Suspects of Crimes	710	586	+124	+21.2%
Number of Domestic Abuse Incidents (Excluding Crimes)	1524	1707	-183	-10.7%
Number of Domestic Abuse Crimes	2960	2768	+192	+6.9%
Number of Domestic Abuse Crimes - Victim Age 16 - 17	103	87	+16	+18.4%
Number of Child Victims of Crimes	1042	767	+275	+35.9%
Number of Child Victims of Race Hate Crimes	24	19	+5	+26.3%

Supplementary measures - In addition to the police measures originally agreed, the Constabulary has been providing the Partnership with supplementary data. The Police were invited to 22 Initial Child Protection Conferences (ICPCs) in North Somerset in the fourth quarter of 2021/22 and attended all 22. The Police attendance rate at ICPCs in North Somerset through 2021/22 was 97.0%, with the police attending 65 of the 67 ICPCs.

Across the force area, the Constabulary used police protection powers under Section 46 of the Children Act 1989 on 320 occasions in the last 12 months, compared with 139 occasions in the previous 12 months. It is possible that a contributory factor to this increase is additional awareness of the powers by frontline officers due to officer briefings and the creation of new recording templates within the Constabulary crime and incident recording system, Niche. However, the Constabulary is aware that the use of police protection powers is increasing as children and young people are continuing to struggle with existing care or family placements. The Constabulary has raised this issue at the Avon & Somerset Strategic Safeguarding Partnership where agreement was reached to set up a Task and Finish Group. Case audits have found that in cases where police protection powers were used, their use was necessary, and that in each audited case they were used appropriately.

The reporting of the use of police protection powers at local authority area level is subject to data quality issues, whereby 20 records in the last 12 months were not linked to a beat code. There are 39 records of the use of these powers linked to beat codes in North Somerset in the last 12 months, compared with 19 records in the previous 12 months.

In the last 12 months, 77 children and young people aged under 18, whose latest recorded address was in North Somerset, were arrested and brought into custody, one of whom was charged and detained. Of these 77 children and young people, 10 were arrested and brought into custody in the fourth quarter of 2021/22, none of whom were charged and detained.

Data from the Partnership

Health Overview

The following data has been collected for 2021 - 2022

- 52 Child Protection Referrals were made during 2021-22 by Community and Mental Health Providers
- Two webinars aimed at GP Practice staff were delivered during 2021-22 on domestic abuse and female genital mutilation.
- Three Level 3 safeguarding training sessions were also delivered during this same reporting period aimed at Safeguarding GPs in Primary Care.

The following illustrates our compliance against what is expected in the Framework.

Leadership and Organisational Accountability - A clear line of accountability for safeguarding, reflected in the ICB governance arrangements, i.e. a named executive lead to take overall leadership responsibility for the organisation's safeguarding arrangements. In addition, a team made up of designated professionals for safeguarding children, looked after children, care leavers and adults - **Achieved**

Training - Training all ICB staff to recognise and report safeguarding issues supported by a training strategy and compliance percentage in line with Intercollegiate Documents and national guidance for Prevent - **Partially Achieved** - Position - currently not compliant at less than 80% consistently, training matrix has been revised to reflect what is required for each team.

Safer recruitment - Clear policies describing the commitment and approach to safeguarding, including safe recruitment practices and arrangements for dealing with allegations against people who work with children and adults, as appropriate - **Achieved**

Inter-agency working - Effective inter-agency working with Local Authorities, the Police and third sector organisations, including appropriate arrangements to co-operate with Local Authorities in the operation of safeguarding children's partnerships, Corporate Parenting Boards, Safeguarding Adults Boards and Health and Wellbeing Boards - **Achieved**

Implementation - Appropriately engaged with all safeguarding investigations, multi-agency case reviews or safeguarding practice reviews and that the evidence of learning has been embedded into practice - **Partially Achieved** - Position - progress on system change recommendations have halted due to Covid-19 pandemic, however with creation of the Strategic Safeguarding Health Working Group has enabled system health learning conversations to take place.

Patient Engagement - Ensures appropriate and accessible information is provided for its population in relation to how it discharges its duties for safeguarding - **Achieved**

Data from the Partnership

Health Overview cont...

Supervision - Safeguarding supervision is available to staff in line with Intercollegiate Guidance - **Achieved**

Assurance - As a commissioner of local health services the ICB must be assured that there are effective safeguarding arrangements in place in the services and gain assurance throughout the year to ensure continuous improvement - **Partially Achieved** - Position - assurance is limited owing to no specific quality and safeguarding visits of our main providers. Assurances sought from attendance at some internal governance meetings and reports.

Review of the North Somerset Safeguarding Partnership

The North Somerset Safeguarding Children's Partnership infrastructure has been reviewed during 2021-22 in partnership with system partners. Sub-groups have been re-established with support of revised Terms of Reference. In addition to this, there has been the development of an enhanced Front Door with the support of North Tyneside as a Partner in Practice.

Local Area Designated officer (LADO) Annual Report

This sets out the key findings from North Somerset's Local Area Designated Officer for Allegations (LADO), and activity using both data analysis and commentary between April 2019 to March 2020. Read the [LADO Annual report April 2020 - March 2021](#) here.

North Somerset Safeguarding Children's Partnership remains a member of the West of England CDOP as it did as an LSCB. Read the [CDOP annual report 2021-2022](#) to learn more.

Partnership Priorities from March 2022

- Accelerate our work on contextual safeguarding
- Embed the learning from Rapid Reviews across in all agencies
- Refresh and embed best practice on neglect
- Review of NSSCP structures and resourcing

What to do if you are Worried about a Child

If you are worried about a child, contact our safeguarding team:

Monday to Thursday 9am to 5pm - Friday 9am - 4.30pm - 01275 888808

Out of hours and at weekends Emergency Duty Team (EDT) 01454 615165

If you are deaf or hard of hearing text 'EDT' followed by your name and message to 60066

Visit the Safeguarding Children Partnership website for more information.