

# Adult Social Care

## Self-assessment - Jan 2024



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## Introduction

### What is Adult Social Care and who provides it?

Social care is an essential part of the fabric of our society. At its best, it enables and transforms lives. It supports people to live the lives they want to lead, where they want to live them. The scale of adult social care and support is vast, affecting the lives of over 10 million adults of all ages in England. People of all ages and with a diverse range of needs draw on care and support in different ways and at different stages of their life; some people will require support throughout their life whilst for others care needs will develop suddenly or gradually. Some people may only use social care for a short period (for example after a hospital stay). Care and support can cover a range of activities to promote people's wellbeing and support them to live independently, staying well and safe. It can include 'personal care' as well as wider personalised support to enable people to stay engaged in their communities and live their lives in the way they want.

Local authorities are responsible for assessing people's needs and, if individuals are eligible, funding their care. Our adult social care service in Somerset Council consists of the following functions:

- an operational service (made up of our frontline social care teams)
- a commissioning service working to help shape our care market and provision that meets the needs of our local communities, and
- a strategy, transformation and performance function supporting assurance and improvement activity.

Most social care services are delivered directly by independent care sector providers, which are mainly for-profit companies but also include some voluntary sector organisations. Many people will also have this care organised and purchased by their local authority or will directly employ individuals ('personal assistants') to provide their care and support.

#### **Key Adult Social Care Statutory Duties under The Care Act 2014 include:**

- Provision of social care: including the assessment of individuals' and carers' needs, the provision of detailed care and support plans; a duty to meet the needs of someone assessed as eligible for care and support; financial assessments.
- Provision of preventative services and information/advice: reducing, preventing, delaying the need for care and support.
- Promotion of individual wellbeing.
- Promotion of integration between health and social care services including integrated commissioning.
- Safeguarding adults at risk and Safeguarding Adults Boards.
- Market shaping: quality, choice, sufficiency of provision; provider failure contingencies.



## The local context

*'In Somerset, we want people to live healthy and independent lives, supported by thriving and connected communities, with timely and easy access to high quality and efficient support when they need it'.*

### Our Local Authority

Somerset Council was formed on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023 from 4 District Councils (Mendip, Sedgemoor, South Somerset, Somerset West and Taunton) and a County Council.

The political administration of Somerset Council is Liberal Democrat, following an election in May 2022. The Conservative Party had previously been in charge of Somerset County Council dating back to 2009.

### Our organisational vision and priorities

Somerset Council's vision and priorities are set out in the [Council Plan 2023-27](#).

The vision is that 'Somerset Council will build a fairer, greener, resilient, more flourishing Somerset that cares for the most vulnerable and listens to you'.

The Council agreed four overarching priorities:

- A greener, more sustainable Somerset
- A healthy and caring Somerset
- A fairer, ambitious Somerset
- A flourishing and resilient Somerset.

Our organisational values have been recently updated. 56 workshops across Somerset discussed 'what values and behaviours will make Somerset Council a good place to work?'. 1,500+ employees and members attended the workshops and 96% of survey respondents agreed they felt confident they could demonstrate these values in their role at Somerset Council:



As a county, we benefit from:

- [A new unitary authority](#) (Somerset Council) established from April 2023
- [An Integrated Care Board \(ICB\)](#) into which the functions of the Somerset Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) were transferred from July 2022
- [A Health & Wellbeing Board and Integrated Care Partnership \(Committee in common\)](#) – acting as a key driver for multi-agency change
- A single [NHS Foundation Trust](#) providing integrated Community Health, Mental Health and Acute Hospital services at Musgrove Park in Taunton and Yeovil Hospital
- 13 Primary Care Networks (PCNs) working over 12 neighbourhood areas
- Strong, collaborative relationships with good-quality independent care providers and voluntary and community sector partners, and a thriving micro-provider market.

### **Adult Social Care demand and performance (2023)**

- We received an average 5,462 contacts per month via our Customer Contact Centre for care and support related advice or activity. The overall resolution rate at first point of contact was 60.8% against a target of 60%.
- We supported over 8,000 adults as a Local Authority Adult Social Care service, and many more through our wider health and care system activity.
- Our social care teams completed over 8,740 assessments (including Care Act, Occupational Therapy, Carers, and Mental Capacity Assessments) and 5,456 reviews of individuals care and support needs.
- We undertook 594 Safeguarding Enquiries, reducing or removing the identified risk in 92% of cases.
- We supported over 84.1% of individuals aged 65 and over to be discharged back home from hospital each month - over 26,000 people.
- We sourced 24,371 hours' worth of home care provision for people assessed as requiring care and support at home, and 726 residential and nursing placements.
- We received 282 responses via our Stakeholder Feedback form, of which 226 (80%) rated the service received by our staff as 'Good' or 'Excellent'.
- We received 253 complaints during 2023. The most common primary cause for complaints relate to 'service provision' but we have also seen a rise in the number of complaints attributed to funding in 2023. This is reflective of recognised challenges, both locally and nationally, associated with Council

finances and Adult Social Care budgets, as well as waiting lists for social care support, capacity challenges in the external care market, and workforce pressures.

- We conducted over 490 Practice Quality Audits between September and November 2023 focused on 'working with people', 'case recording', and 'strengths-based practice'. Outcomes of the audits are monitored through our Practice Quality Board which works to progress and embed learning.
- 80.3% of Somerset's active (independent) residential care settings and 85% of active community-based adult social care settings were rated 'Good' or 'Outstanding' by the Care Quality Commission as of end of December 2023. This exceeds national and regional averages in both instances.

## Our self-assessment – January 2024

Assessing how local authorities meet their duties under Part 1 of the [Care Act \(2014\)](#) is a new responsibility for the Care Quality Commission (CQC).

The completion of an objective, honest and authentic self-assessment of a council's strengths and areas for improvement is a valuable opportunity to focus improvement planning and delivery in a way that ensures local ownership.

The following information represents our most recent self-assessment against the CQC's [assessment framework](#) following a review in January 2024. Self-assessment is an opportunity for Local Authorities to assess their performance in relation to the quality statements, use evidence to support those judgements, highlight key successes, risks and challenges, and identify actions needed to address the most pressing risks.

Our self-assessment will be part of a required CQC Information Return to support future notification of assessment. We will maintain this document on a regular basis.

### Somerset Council Adult Social Care Self-Assessment Summary (Jan 2024)

Theme	Quality Statement	Our self-assessment score: January 2024
1. Working with people	Assessing needs	Evidence shows some shortfalls
	Supporting people to live healthier lives	Evidence shows a good standard
	Equity in experience and outcomes	Evidence shows a good standard
2. Providing support	Care provision, integration and continuity	Evidence shows a good standard
	Partnerships and communities	Evidence shows a good standard
3. Ensuring safety	Safe systems, pathways and transitions	Evidence shows some shortfalls
	Safeguarding	Evidence shows a good standard
4. Leadership	Governance, management and sustainability	Evidence shows a good standard
	Learning, improvement and innovation	Evidence shows a good standard

# 1. How we work with people

## ASSESSING NEEDS

### What people expect:

- I have care and support that is co-ordinated, and everyone works well together and with me.
- I have care and support that enables me to live as I want to, seeing me as a unique person with skills, strengths and goals.

### The local authority commitment:

- We maximise the effectiveness of people's care and treatment by assessing and reviewing their health, care, wellbeing and communication needs with them.

### Summary

People with care and support needs, including unpaid carers, those who fund or arrange their own care, and communities have the best possible wellbeing outcomes. This is because:

- Their care and support needs are assessed in a timely and consistent way;
- Assessments and care and support plans are co-produced, up to date, and regularly reviewed;
- Support is coordinated across difference agencies and services;
- Decisions and outcomes are transparent.

People's care and support reflects their right to choice, builds on their strengths and assets, and reflects what they want to achieve and how they wish to live their lives.

### Our self-assessment score: Evidence shows some shortfalls

### Key areas of strength and progress:

- Somerset has long adopted a strengths-based approach to assessment to ascertain people's assets, needs and wishes, and ensure our focus is on improving outcomes for people. [CASE STUDY EXAMPLE](#)

This is an approach adopted from the very first point of contact with our [award-winning Council Customer Contact Centre](#). A deliberate stance was taken many years ago to shift the focus from more traditional 'scripted' conversations and monitoring of contact centre outputs, to one that instead prioritises person-centred conversations and the monitoring of outcomes. By changing the conversation to focus on what matters to the person and what they can do to help themselves as well as promoting support available in Somerset's local communities, the proportion of contacts resolved with no costed service at first

point of contact significantly improved. These are currently averaging around 60% month on month despite call volumes and complexity of need remaining high. The Customer Contact Centre runs reports to undertake a number of quality and assurance checks following advice and signposting given to callers and will also undertake 'call backs' to check if anything has changed since the original conversation.

The degree of joint working between Adult Social Care and the Somerset Customer Contact Centre is significant – for example, our Mental Health community team utilises a Microsoft Teams channel to support rapid communication and engagement on a daily basis, with triage workers identifying themselves and offering instant support and signposting for any mental health calls received. Regular catch ups and training sessions are provided, alongside de-briefing opportunities for any distressing calls. Additionally, our Adult Safeguarding Team works closely with Contact Centre staff providing advice and guidance, feedback and training. The Contact Centre constantly explores ways to increase productivity and ensure the team is as time efficient as possible, with the tools and information they need to answer day-to-day queries.

- Each of our Adult Social Care operational teams runs its own **triage process** at an area level. The triage function is to take calls from members of the public diverted to Adult Social Care via our Customer Contact Centre, as well as to risk assess and prioritise incoming referrals throughout the day. Referrals are either direct from the contact centre or via the professional referral route for NHS staff for example. Using our risk management and prioritisation guidance, triage works to rank risk and urgency with guidance from an Advanced Practitioner. A small amount of urgent work is held on triage prior to allocation and staff are expected to do initial information gathering or signposting as needed. Triage staff will also undertake urgent visits to service users - these are usually planned in the short term but occasionally require a same day response. Our Occupational Therapy teams run a separate countywide approach to triage, with an 'East' and 'West' model.
- A significant Adult Social Care **operational workforce re-structure** was undertaken during 2023 to help us deliver our strategic vision and ensure our operational workforce is both fit for the future and better able to respond to existing demands. The primary objectives of the restructuring were to strengthen leadership and management, improve workforce capacity and practice quality, improve workforce development and career pathways, enhance specific areas of practice, and align boundaries with our system partners.



This work has seen the **introduction of specialist Learning Disability teams and Mental Health teams** under dedicated Strategic Managers, reinforcing the unique identity of these functions and providing expertise and professional leadership and management to drive the performance of the workforce and deliver priorities and service targets for those requiring care and support. The teams work very closely with commissioners and health colleagues, and this degree of collaboration and joint working is a particular aspect of health and social care that we are very proud of in Somerset.

It has also seen the introduction of Advanced Practitioners, and **Learning Development Advanced Practitioners** who hold responsibility for providing high-quality practice education to social work degree students and Newly Qualified Social Workers as well as progressing practice improvement activity that develops new approaches, systems and processes which improve ways of working and outcomes for individuals.

To support individuals leaving hospital we have dedicated social care staff working 6 days a week within our **Acute Hospitals** alongside health and voluntary sector colleagues helping to provide people with the right care, at the right time, in the right place. We also benefit from practitioners aligned to the Hospice playing a fundamental role in supporting people with a palliative or end of life condition or diagnosis. We have **Intermediate Care Teams** placed within our Community Hospitals and Intermediate Care pathway beds supporting individuals to return home.

- Our multi-disciplinary neighbourhood **Peer Forums and Enhanced Peer Forums** help us achieve more ideal outcomes for people through ensuring strength-based conversations **CASE STUDY EXAMPLE**. Bringing the right minds together in the forums allows us to share experience and support each other on managing risk and promoting independence. These forums critically discuss individuals needs following assessment or review and offer creative solutions, including use of community resources, equipment or tech, to meet people's needs and progress funding requests. In light of the Council's financial emergency, our financial management and decision-making guidance was reviewed in November 2023 and now operate daily Peer and Enhanced Peer Forums to ensure robust decision-making is in place based on effective practice and in line with legal frameworks. We have also introduced joint peer forums across our Health Interface Service (HIS) and Intermediate Care, supporting staff to discuss discharge options and situations together, sharing knowledge and delivering transparency and continuity to a person's journey through Somerset's health and care system. Our Mental Health teams also benefit from specialised peer forums with significant input and attendance from health colleagues and representatives from Open Mental Health services (see

*p20 for more detail*); this provides significant professional challenge and enables the multi-professional approach to be promoted.

- A significant amount of focused work has been undertaken over the last year to enhance our **practice development and management oversight offer** and better support our workforce. This activity has been led by our Principal Social Worker and Principal Occupational Therapist. A range of new or revised approaches have been embedded to support us in this space, including:
  - a refreshed and co-produced **Practice Quality Framework (PQF)** aligned to a monthly auditing schedule – *see p55 for more detail*. The PQF sets out clear practice standards and expectations for our workforce and forms an important part of our governance and assurance approach. It clarifies what good looks like and was informed by people who draw on our services;
  - clear **competency frameworks** to support the continued professional development of our operational workforce;
  - **A revised supervision and appraisal approach** (informed by staff feedback and audit findings) and post-qualifying standards for supervisors.

This work was informed by learning to emerge from the most recent November 2022 Local Government Association (LGA) Health Check which identified some further opportunity for Somerset to improve employer standards in relation to supervision and continuing professional development for staff.

In January 2024, Somerset Council's Audit Committee received a final (independent) SWAP Internal Audit Services report relating to Adult Social Care Quality Assurance. It clarified that all recommendations had been implemented and specifically noted the following: *'Overall, there has been a large level of work completed by the Adults Social Care Team in relation to Quality Assurance controls since the 2021 audit, with the successful implementation of all eight actions raised in that review. A new Practice Quality Framework was successfully issued in July 2023 which incorporates and clearly sets out the 10 key standards to which Adults Social Care will now work towards. From the evidence reviewed by audit this framework has been key in implementing a range of Quality Assurance controls that satisfy the original actions and more. A clear audit schedule has been set out within the Practice Quality Framework, with the successful completion of over 490 audits since September 2023 on three of the ten practice standard topics in line with the planned schedule'*.

The Principal Practice Leads will be further strengthening practice in 2024/25 through the development of a practice framework that will sit alongside the Practice Quality Framework. This will set out a framework of practice approaches and models and will inform our Learning and Development offer.

- Somerset has a much higher than national average take-up of **direct payments**. This is a good indicator of how the Local Authority is helping people to exercise independence through autonomy, choice and control, and research shows people who use direct payments generally achieve better outcomes. Based on latest 2022/23 ASCOF data, Somerset performs especially strongly in the proportion of people who receive direct payments when compared with regional and national averages – ranked 11<sup>th</sup> nationally. Much of this is directly associated with the development and success of our thriving micro-provider offer across Somerset, which supports the rurality of the county. Between 2015 and 2019 we had 610 adults join the scheme. The figures for the following four years are:
  - 2020 – 138
  - 2021 – 191
  - 2022 – 356
  - 2023 – 351.

Since March 2023, we have been running a **Direct Payment Plus pilot** with Enham Trust, which is providing options for people who want to exercise strong influence over their support but cannot manage the responsibilities that come with a Direct Payment themselves and have no one available who could support them. 21 individuals are currently benefitting from this pilot out of a possible cohort of 25; the pilot runs to the end of March 2025. Success stories and evidence of the difference the pilot is making to people's lives are being gathered and are available on request. [CASE STUDY EXAMPLES](#)

- 93.2% of people who had received short-term care and support no longer required support – this is above the national (77.5%) and regional (84.7%) values for 2022/23 and demonstrates our focus on enabling people to maintain independence to prevent or delay long-term needs for care through reablement. Somerset is ranked 18<sup>th</sup> nationally for this indicator.

#### **Key areas requiring our continued focus and improvement:**

- In common with many Local Authorities throughout the country, Somerset has **waiting lists for care assessments and reviews** due to high demand for care and support coupled with workforce capacity challenges. This was a common feature emerging from the Care Quality Commission's (CQC) initial pilot assessments of local authorities in England, and one we recognise as a key priority for our service. We have been working hard to address this, ensuring our practice - and the arrangements in place to identify and respond to risk while people are waiting for care - is consistent across our frontline operational teams. Progress is being overseen by our operational productivity and improvement activity, which includes monitoring individual team performance against targets and data quality. Our teams regularly hold 'data days' to review their waiting lists; these events ensure that people waiting are appropriately

prioritised and any immediate action to meet their needs can be undertaken. It also removes individuals from the waiting list if their circumstances have changed.

We benefit from detailed data reports and dashboards, and also report on a quarterly basis to Somerset's Safeguarding Adults Board on our performance and improvement progress and activity; the report is available on request.

Demand management is a key priority for all Assistant Directors. As part of the Southwest ADASS AD group a focus group has explored opportunities for sharing business intelligence around demand management to enable conversations across the region on approaches and outcomes. An initial [analysis of regional waiting list data](#) was gathered in September 2023 through South West ADASS (Association of Directors of Adult Social Care). Further discussions were held with business intelligence leads and a new set of measures were agreed. The report will be run on a quarterly basis commencing in February 2024.

The overwhelming majority of feedback we receive about the approach and impact of our staff from people we care for and support is very positive (averaging over 80% 'Good' or 'Excellent' monthly). However, where this is not the case, feedback and complaints most commonly reference waits or delays in assessments or support.

- We are committed to **increasing the number of carers assessments** undertaken by our operational teams and improve areas of concern emerging from the annual Carers Survey to ensure that unpaid carers have the best possible wellbeing outcomes and support. This will include supporting more carers to receive a Direct Payment if they wish, so they can have more choice and control with their care and support arrangements.

A Commissioning Plan has been developed to drive continuous improvement across all the carer services that we commission as well as to develop new ways of working within our operational teams to ensure that services are flexible and deliver the best outcomes for Carers. This includes working much more closely with health and Children's colleagues to co-design with Carers a truly integrated approach to the way we offer care and support. This will be very much influenced by the refresh of Somerset's Commitment to Carers that will be launched in March 2024. The Commitment document (*available on request*) was co-produced with carers in Somerset alongside voluntary sector and health and social care partners. The document sets out some key priorities and recommendations to ensure that services continue to meet the needs of Carers. This should influence all future service re-design and developments and will be presented to the Somerset Board for their formal endorsement by the Carers Strategic Partnership Board who will have overall responsibility for measuring the effectiveness of the Commitment going forward.



- We will establish a **Mental Health Transformation Board** to improve outcomes and promote independence and Mental Health recovery, through collaboration with system partners and co-produced improvement. This will enable individuals in Somerset with mental health needs to live more independent lives.
- ASCOF data highlighted a need for our further attention in relation to the proportion of older people (65 plus) still at home 91 days after discharge from hospital into reablement/rehabilitation. The work of our 'My Life, My Future' transformation programme includes as one of its key priorities a focus on designing and implementing an **improved reablement model** for Somerset. Reablement is a short-term service that aims to support people to recover skills, confidence and live more independently in the long-term. Some encouraging early results are evident, with 10% more people finishing reablement per week across the county.

## SUPPORTING PEOPLE TO LIVE HEALTHIER LIVES

### What people expect

- "I can get information and advice about my health, care and support and how I can be as well as possible – physically, mentally and emotionally."
- "I am supported to plan ahead for important changes in my life that I can anticipate."

### The local authority commitment

- We support people to manage their health and wellbeing so they can maximise their independence, choice and control, live healthier lives and where possible, reduce future needs for care and support.

### Summary

- The local authority works with people, partners and the local community to promote independence and support people to prevent, reduce or delay the need for care and support. It does this by providing or arranging provision of services, facilities, resources and other measures.
- The local authority takes steps to identify people with needs for care and support that are not being met.
- People in the area have access to the information and advice they need to make informed decisions about how to meet their care and/or support needs.

**Our self-assessment score:** Evidence shows a good standard

### Key areas of strength and progress:

Local Authorities have a duty under the Care Act 2014 to ensure the provision or arrangement of services, facilities or resources to help prevent, delay or reduce the development of needs for care and support.

Our Adult Social Care Strategy includes a clear priority focus on **early help and prevention**, recognising the importance of supporting residents physically, mentally and emotionally to live good lives and reduce or delay their needs for more formal care. We are very proud of the way we work to support people to manage their health and wellbeing so they can maximise their independence, choice and control, and live healthier lives.

Somerset is very proud of its collaborative, early help and prevention-focused work, and our long-standing investment in and commitment to supporting individuals in accessing care and support services within their local area with the support of a range of voluntary and community services.

- [Connect Somerset](#) is a partnership approach that includes Somerset Council, Somerset NHS, voluntary, community, faith and social enterprises, and schools, colleges and early years settings so, together, we develop an early help system that works well across all communities that need it. It has been a key approach to everyone working together to increase early help in the community in recognition that residents are going through challenging times, and across state-funded and community sectors, Somerset services are finding it difficult to meet demand and help those who need support.
- Our [Community and Village Agent Service](#) takes a whole-population approach, working with a range of people who may benefit from support, including people who are lonely, have complex social needs, low level mental health and learning disability and/or autism related needs and long-term conditions. The service works directly with Adult Social Care in identifying community solutions for those with assessed needs, with the Agents service playing a fundamental role in our outcomes and financial-decision making processes through their active and equal engagement in our Peer and Enhanced Peer Forums. Agents are managed by the [Community Council for Somerset](#), a charity dedicated to helping people, place and enterprise to help Somerset thrive. [CASE STUDY EXAMPLE](#)

In-person [Talking Cafes](#), run by CCS Village and Community Agents, operate across Somerset and provide invaluable free advice and support to the public. [CASE STUDY EXAMPLE](#)

The Agent Service is one part of a wider integrated service of social prescribing, delivered by one community organisation. This links into a network of social prescribing roles that includes Intermediate Care Community SPOC Service (with the Red Cross), Agents within Public Health, Social Prescribing Link Workers and Health Coaches in primary care. [CASE STUDY EXAMPLE](#)

The Local Authority have made a commitment with colleagues from across the Integrated Care System, including Integrated Care Board, VCFSE and Public Health, to develop a social prescribing framework for Somerset, which will be linked to the Neighbourhood Approach that is being developed as part of the Improving Lives Strategy. Social Prescribing involves helping people to improve and maintain their health and wellbeing by connecting them to non-medical activities and local community services.

- We recognise and greatly value the contributions that **carers** make to our communities and want to ensure we are supporting them to carry out their caring role and to achieve their aims and ambitions. A range of work has been progressed with carers kept at the heart of the design process to ensure unpaid carers benefit from access to information, training, support and equipment to help them undertake their role; this is in recognition that we have historically performed below average in relation to the proportion of carers who report finding it easy to find information about support.

Somerset Council jointly commissions a [Somerset Carers' Support Service](#) with Somerset NHS Integrated Care Board. Our carers service provides a one-stop shop approach to ensure that all unpaid carers in Somerset can receive the support they require, when they need it, via a single point of contact. There is a focus on early help and prevention, with the service helping carers to find support within their local communities. It supports approximately 3,000 carers directly per annum, with the addition of a digital offer for carers supporting approximately 20,000 carers currently and continuing to rise. The Carers Support Service is one part of a wider integrated service of social prescribing, delivered by one community organisation.

Carers Groups are supported through the contract with the Community Council and provided by [SPARK Somerset](#). There are on-line groups as well as face to face; these provide a chance for carers to have some respite and socialise, some groups run with the carer and the cared for. [CASE STUDY EXAMPLES](#)

A new contract will be in place from April 2024 for the Carers Support Service, with an outcomes performance framework co-produced with the provider alongside Carers and other voluntary sector and health partners to ensure that services are continuously developed to meet the needs of carers in Somerset.

- **Our occupational therapy services within the community** focus on assisting individuals within their own homes to alleviate barriers that hinder everyday activities. They conduct assessments under Care Act 2014 to identify strengths, delay the development of care and support needs and promote independence, including provision of equipment or adaptations—whether minor

or significant—to support independence. Their primary aim is to help individuals achieve the outcomes that matter most to them.

- Somerset Council has established three [Independent Living Centres \(SILCs\)](#) – operating in Wellington, Shepton Mallet and Yeovil. These help people find equipment and solutions to stay active, independent and make life easier. Our SILCs are therapy-led services with a focus on prevention. They offer practical advice and enable our experienced staff to help guide people through options that best suit their needs. Demand for SILC appointments continues to grow and customer feedback is very positive. SILC intervention was projected to delay the need for/an increase in home care services in 16% of attendees looking at the period Dec 2023-Jan 2024, delaying 168 projected home care hours (per week) at a cost of £3,722.
- In line with our overarching commissioning strategy, we take a **whole life approach to how people use technology to support all aspects of their lives** – managing health conditions, reducing falls, supporting daily tasks such as preparing a meal or reducing social isolation by working in partnership to improve digital poverty. **Technology Enabled Care (TEC)** enables people to use their strengths and assets to maximise their independence, staying safe and well in their own homes, as well as remaining connected within their communities. We have appointed a new dedicated Advanced Practitioner Occupational Therapist lead for the development of TEC in Somerset and have applied to be a beacon site as part of a research project looking at coastal communities as areas of deprivation and the use of TEC on health and wellbeing. User led design is always at the heart of our intentions and in our scoping and planning of the new TEC service we have engaged with residents of Somerset to explore their opinions and needs, utilising their feedback on how TEC could help them live safely and independently. In addition to delivering TEC drop-in sessions to support staff knowledge and awareness and undertaking a TEC Workforce Survey with our frontline staff to help us identify and progress training needs over the coming months, we have also approved a business case for an online training system to reflect the new TEC service from Somerset Lifeline and Medequip.

We have established a 'TEC Influencers' group who will play a key role in the strategic and ongoing engagement of TEC operationally and are aligning our values, principles, and practice with the 7 success measures for digital working in adult social care services under the Local Government Association and Association of Directors of Adult Social Services' "What Good Looks Like" digital framework. Recent [regional analysis](#) across the South West region revealed Somerset to be progressing well in this space, with a 'strong foundation on digital leadership', 'safe practice' and 'healthy foundations'. This



review has helped us identify our strengths as well as our ongoing priorities for development.

Our Independent Living Centre offer has TEC incorporated into it [CASE STUDY EXAMPLE](#); this supports our strategic focus on prevention and health promotion. We are working collaboratively with our ICS and NHS partners to co-produce innovative projects that align our practices with the main proposals around the use of technology and digital tools as set out in the People at the Heart of Care: Adult Social Care Reform White Paper.

- Following Unitary, Somerset's 3 Lifeline services merged to form [Somerset Lifeline](#). Providing services for vulnerable people across the county, Somerset Council's personal emergency alarm service helps maintain independence for vulnerable people and provides peace of mind for those using our services and their families and friends, knowing our highly trained staff are always at hand at the touch of a button. Provision includes emergency alarm monitoring and a trained emergency response team.
- [Somerset Active Sports Partnership \(SASP\)](#) includes an [Active Ageing offer](#) with a range of activities created to keep people fit and well in Somerset including online workshops designed to support older adults to move more and live longer better.
- Our Adult Social Care teams are contributing to the use and development of the **Brave AI** system to help map out individuals with co-morbidities (supporting prevention and informing future demand management for services).
- In order to support the oversight of complex case management, Somerset operates a **Complex Case Panel** in collaboration with Somerset Foundation Trust. This enables us - as a system - to review the needs of individuals, promote independence and agree shared funding through our joint responsibilities under Section 117 of the Mental Health Act. Individuals are closely managed and reviewed to ensure a high degree of interprofessional scrutiny.
- In addition to the personalised advice, guidance and signposting provided by our Customer Contact Centre, Somerset has a range of **public-facing websites promoting services and support available** to prevent, reduce or delay the need for care and support. We also maintain an annual [Care Choices Directory](#) to provide essential and specific guidance to support people with arranging care. The Council's [website](#) also includes information relating to care and support for adults, including some easy read documents (e.g. Direct Payments).

- Our **COVID-19 pandemic response** represented a strong example of how we work effectively in partnership to support people to manage population health and wellbeing. The level of joint working between social care, public health and the NHS ICB's Infection Prevention and Control Teams was significant, and in 2022 Somerset was an Infection Prevention Society Award Gold Winner. This was one of three awards issued called the 'Infection Prevention Impact Awards' which demonstrate excellence, innovation and improvement in infection prevention and control.
- Somerset's '[Improving Lives Strategy \(2019-2028\)](#)' sets out how Somerset Council and its key partners will work together to improve the lives of our residents, recognising that health and wellbeing is paramount to all. The priorities in the strategy are backed by a strong evidence base considering the local [Joint Strategic Needs Assessment](#) which provides information about the local population and its current and future health and care needs.
- The **Somerset Board** as the high-level strategic partnership provides leadership to improve the health, care and wellbeing of the residents of Somerset leading the health and wellbeing agenda, deciding its strategic direction, and holding key organisations, agencies, and sectors to account to ensure the health and wellbeing, including a focus on improving the health and care of the local population is maximised. The Somerset Board identifies and unifies strategic action to tackle some of the significant challenges facing the county over the medium and longer term. It has senior leaders from across the local health and wellbeing system as members and includes both the Somerset Health and Wellbeing Board and the Somerset Integrated Care Partnership as committees in common.

Somerset has a [single footprint for both the Health and Wellbeing Board and the Integrated Care Partnership](#), and the decision was taken to run these as committees in common. Somerset was included as a case study within the government [guidance](#) issued for Health and Wellbeing Boards issued in November 2022.

#### **Key areas requiring our continued focus and improvement:**

- The **financial emergency status of Somerset Council** risks impacting on our non-statutory, preventative ambitions as a wider organisation and the viability of some VCSFE organisations.
- There is a **systemic underfunding of public health in Somerset**. The Public Health Grant is significantly below the national average being 141st out of 153 local authorities nationally in terms of per capita allocation. A new operating model for public health is underway in order to focus the activity of the Public

Health Team towards influencing policy, commissioning and spend right across the Somerset system towards improving health and tackling inequalities. Spending has been realigned within the grant to focus more on the wider determinants of health through the development of a Public Health Ambassador Programme working with colleagues across the council and the wider system to take a public health approach within the work that they do. This allows for greater influence across the wider determinants of health, for example housing, education, employment etc.

- Somerset Council has been successful in winning a major five-year £5m programme, funded by the National Institute of Health Research (NIHR), to build a culture of being evidence informed and research active within the organisation. Led by Public Health, the programme is all about improving our use of evidence to tackle the wider social and environmental determinates of health such as inequalities in education, employment, housing etc. It will create a Health Determinants Research Collaboration with the University of West of England and the University College, London, to help deliver against the business plan of the organisation. The programme will fund a small team of people working across five workstreams spanning public involvement, research partnerships and infrastructure, training and development and communications. The programme will seek to involve all functions of the Council and seek to find answers on how best we can address some of the root causes of health inequalities in Somerset, with a particular focus on giving children and young people a fair chance of a healthy life.
- We are keen to enhance our ability to **better monitor, evaluate and evidence the impact of our community prevention strategies** and develop detailed datasets and assurance activity to support this.
- **Improving the accessibility of information and advice, and further promoting and celebrating our adult social care ‘offer’ in Somerset**, in recognition that the proportion of service users and carers who report finding it easy to find information about support is below national and regional averages.

## EQUITY IN EXPERIENCE AND OUTCOMES

### What people expect:

- “I have care and support that enables me to live as I want to, seeing me as a unique person with skills, strengths and goals”.

### The local authority commitment:

- We actively seek out and listen to information about people who are most likely to experience inequality in experience or outcomes. We tailor the care, support and treatment in response to this.

### Summary

This quality statement covers:

- Understanding and addressing barriers to care and support
- Understanding and address inequalities in experience and outcomes
- Ensuring care and support meets the diverse needs of communities
- Ensuring people are encouraged to give feedback which is acted upon and used to drive improvements
- Meeting legal requirements relating to equality and human rights.

**Our self-assessment score:** Evidence shows a good standard

### Key areas of strength and progress:

We undertake and commission a wide range of activity that seeks to understand and address barriers or inequalities our local residents experience. Specific examples include:

- [Open Mental Health](#) - an alliance of local voluntary organisations, the NHS and social care, Somerset Council, and individuals with lived experience of mental health. We are working together to improve the way people in Somerset receive support with their mental health by providing access to a number of specialist services including NHS support, housing advice, debt and employment advice, volunteering opportunities, community activities, peer support and local exercise. In May 2022, the alliance won a major national award from NHS Improvement recognising the collective achievement in developing and delivering new ways to enhance care within Somerset's mental health system. The collaboration has already helped to remove many of the barriers to support and thresholds for treatment, reducing waiting times and giving early access to primary care assessments and interventions. [CASE STUDY EXAMPLE](#)
- Under the Equalities Act 2010 and the Care Act 2014, the Local Authority is required to make its services and information provision accessible to all individuals who have specialist communication requirements, including sensory loss. Our current contracts for **support for Sensory Loss** are delivered by [Somerset Sight](#) and [DeafPLUS](#). The service empowers all people with sensory loss (including dual sensory loss) to take control of their health and wellbeing by giving people time to focus on 'what matters to me' and take a holistic approach to an individual's health and wellbeing. This includes people with learning disabilities and/or autism and mental ill health. 4,870 people have



been supported through both DeafPLUS and Somerset Sight in the last 12 months at a cost of £27.72 per person.

- It is estimated that 1 in 6 people have a neurological condition. With 571,600 people in Somerset, this equates to around 91,500 people living with a neurological condition in our county. In Somerset every year 3,000 people are admitted to hospital following an **Acquired Brain Injury** (ABI). Traumatic Brain Injury and Stroke are by far the highest cause of admission with comparable rates of around 1.500 per year. Somerset Council currently commissions an Acquired Brain Injury (ABI) service from Headway. The service delivers 3 main activities:
  - Support provided on 2 acute hospital wards (Musgrove and Yeovil) and in the Somerset Neurological Rehabilitation Centre (SNRC) in Dene Barton.
  - Provision of a rehabilitation service via the offer of 1:1 support or centre-based services in Bridgwater, Yeovil, West Camel, Henton and Taunton. The rehabilitation service provides support for up to 45 clients at any one time one.
  - Provision of training to raise awareness of ABI in Somerset and with professionals supporting survivors of ABI and their families.

The Council improved training opportunities in relation to working with people with brain injuries following learning emerging from a 2016 Safeguarding Adults Review ('Tom') in Somerset, and recently included Headway Somerset on its 2023 Carnival of Practice programme to continue to raise awareness of ABI and the support available locally to support people.

- We also commission an **employment Support service for adults with learning disabilities** who are unable to access universal services, such as Job Centre Plus, in order for them to gain and maintain real, paid employment. We also commission a carers employment support service from Somerset NHS Foundation Trust to support the unpaid carers of adults with mental ill health to maintain their employment or help to find or return to work.
- Our **Learning Disability social work teams** have been operational since November 2023 following our operational restructuring. There are four small teams across the county staffed by social care practitioners who are trained to undertake specialist assessments with people with learning disabilities and autistic people. Autism (although not a learning disability) is included in this defined pathway to ensure that autistic people have access to specialist support and are not excluded by or hidden in services who may not understand their specialist need.

Assessments and reviews are strengths-based and focused on the outcomes people want to achieve to lead a life as fulfilling and independent as possible. The impact of this approach is starting to show. Reviews undertaken by the

teams are leading to an increase in care 33% less often than previously (when undertaken by non-specialist teams). The creation of specialist, dedicated teams has reinvigorated existing relationships with service user and care networks and care providers. For example, work is ongoing with one of our biggest providers to roll out the strengths-based approach through the Trusted Assessor project. In addition, specialist strengths-based peer forums ensure a holistic approach to interventions after assessments and reviews have been completed. This multi-agency, multi-disciplinary practice forum is chaired by a Learning Disability Service Manager and includes representatives from Community Agents, Learning Disability Health, Continuing Healthcare, Commissioning, and Occupational Therapy to promote a community-led approach to support planning. Data from the first 6 weeks of operation, shows an increasing trajectory of cases having more independent outcomes after attending our specialist peer forum.

The teams work very closely with commissioners and health colleagues and are committed to improving outcomes for individuals across the health and social care system. For example, we attend the Transforming Care Board, Dynamic Risk Meetings and Leader Reviews to help improve outcomes for individuals (learning from the latter will also be shared in the Practice Quality Board).

- We are proud to be working alongside our colleagues in Children’s social care and others to develop a multi-agency **protocol for parents with a learning disability** based on research from Bristol University regarding good practice for supporting disabled adults in their parenting capacity.
- In line with the TLAP (Think Local Act Personal) Making it Real themes and the Good Lives framework, we remain committed to working more equitably with the people we support and their carers. In doing so, we invited a person with lived experience of learning disability and carers to a ‘Team Day’ as part of a co-production exercise where we discussed what a good Local Authority Learning Disability service would look like. We did not ask people to stand up and share but instead our guests sat around tables with Practitioners, with cake, tea and coffee and shared ideas equally. Some of the most impactful and feasible ideas came from Yvonne (consent given), which we are putting into our practice. These are:
  - Changing terminology - using “people I support” instead of “cases” in supervision notes and instead of Service Users in conversation or discussion.
  - Producing a one-page profile for Practitioners to share when they visit someone for the first time; we ask them to share information about themselves, so we should do the same. This will help to develop more equal and trusting relationships.

- Using [easy-read letters with pictures and symbols](#) – feedback has been sought from the people we support.
- Using a business card format with a photograph and our professional title and Somerset Council logo for people to know who we are before we arrive, so that they can identify us more easily.

We have also developed a case transfer summary to support safe transfers between teams. In light of learning emerging from wider Practice Quality Audits, this template will be adapted and used to cover *all* teams to support safe transfers across the service (internally and with hospitals etc). The final version will be embedded in our Eclipse case management system.

- The Council has taken the opportunity in its first year of operation to put Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) at the heart of the work of the Council by agreeing to undertake both an [Equality Framework for Local Government Peer Challenge](#) and an [Internal Race Audit](#). Both pieces of work will support the Council's EDI delivery for our residents and staff by progressing and improving areas identified as requiring further development. The Internal Race Audit is now complete and a report awaited. The audit framework included an organisational-wide survey which received over 400 responses, two focus groups with staff from the RISE (Race Inclusion Supporting Equality) staff network, 16 individual interviews across the organisation, and 2 self-assessments.

The Council has taken this opportunity to update and agree the Council's [Equality Objectives](#) following community engagement and consultation during 2023. These Objectives set how we contribute to improving the outcomes of those individual protected under the Equality Act 2010.

These objectives will run from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024 till 31<sup>st</sup> March 2026 and will aim to make a difference to the communities that we will work with as they are now more focused, with specific goals to achieve. The Objectives, Equality Framework for Local Government Equality [Peer Challenge Feedback Report](#) and [our response](#) were presented to the Council Executive on 15<sup>th</sup> January 2024. The Peer Challenge Final Report references '*good practice in adult social care e.g. Carnival of Practice; use of micro-providers in social prescribing*' and also acknowledges '*EDI being a golden thread throughout all learning and development activity in Adult and Children's Social Care*'.

- In the autumn of 2023, Somerset Council contributed to a South West ADASS (Association of Directors of Adult Social Services) [Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion \(EDI\) survey](#) to support peer learning in this area and offering those participating the opportunity to reflect on their individual EDI position. Results evidenced greater regional conference in topics such as workforce

engagement, workforce and commissioning data profiling, the reinforcement of good practice, and demonstrating commissioning practices to be equitable and inclusive. Topics where there was least confidence centred on engagement strategies being inclusive and reaching all groups and being able to confidently demonstrate outreach to under-represented communities or groups.

- The Council's **employee support networks** reflect the diverse nature of our workforce. These include an Equality and Diversity Forum, an Armed Forces Network, RISE Network (for ethnic minority employees), a Carers Network, Disability Network, Rainbow Network – LGBTQIA+, and more. In May 2023, Somerset Council held its first RISE Conference to celebrate racial diversity and to provide a safe space to discuss race and challenge the Council to adopt a stronger anti-racist position. Our Adult Social Care Workforce Board completed a detailed Equalities Impact Assessment relating to our workforce strategy to assess the impact of the intent and focus of our ambitions on our staff and invited a Social Worker recruited from overseas to share their experience of moving to, and working in, Somerset at its meeting in August 2023. Learning from this feedback has helped enhance our induction offer to better reflect topics such as diversity, emotional intelligence, resilience, housing options, LGBTQ+ awareness, and UK Culture.
- The term [Gypsy, Roma and Traveller](#) is a collective term used to describe a wide variety of cultural and ethnic groups. There are 3 permanent Gypsy and Traveller sites in South Somerset. Somerset Council benefits from having dedicated Gypsy Liaison Officers in place as part of **Somerset's Gypsy Liaison Project**. Adult Social Care staff benefitted from Cultural Awareness Training from a GLO as part of our November 2022 Carnival of Practice, with the presentation available on our A-Z of practice resources for staff.
- Following our Operational Restructure, our **Sensory Loss teams** are now placed within **Somerset Independent Living Centre (SILC)**, overseen by our Principal Occupational Therapist. This has strengthened our preventative and therapy-led services. We have dedicated Sensory Loss Social Workers and have recently introduced an Apprenticeship role for Rehabilitation Officer for Visual Impairment (ROVI).
- The Council benefits from a **Business Intelligence Unit** with a corresponding website to support its work [www.somersetintelligence.org.uk](http://www.somersetintelligence.org.uk). Through the unit, the Council captures and analyses a range of local, regional and national data including our [demographic profile](#). This supports the development of annual Joint Strategic Needs Assessments and feeds into a variety of supportive information used to inform our equalities impact assessments, strategic planning and other key documentation and research.

### Key areas requiring our continued focus and improvement:

- Following recommendations and **learning emerging from the Peer Challenge on the Council's compliance with the Equality Framework for Local Government**, a two-year action plan has been produced linked to:
  - Understanding and working with our community:
  - Leadership, partnership and organisation
  - Responsive services and customer care; and
  - Diverse and engaged workforce.

Adult Social Care will work to ensure we support and contribute to this important corporate activity.

- We will enhance opportunities for **meaningful co-production**, ensuring we actively seek out, listen and respond to information about people most likely to experience inequality in experience or outcomes, and tailoring our care and support offer in response to this learning.
- 94% of Somerset's population is white British and 96% of residents speak English as their main language – a much higher proportion than equivalent figures for England and Wales as a whole. However, the diversity of our population (and health and care workforce) is shifting and we are committed to **enhancing and further embedding a commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion throughout our organisation.**

## 2. How we provide support

### CARE PROVISION, INTEGRATION AND CONTINUITY

#### What people expect:

- "I have care and support that is co-ordinated, and everyone works well together and with me".

#### The local authority commitment:

- We understand the diverse health and care needs of people and our local communities, so care is joined-up, flexible and supports choice and continuity.

#### Summary

- The Local Authority understands the care and support needs of people and communities. There is a good variety of care providers, provision is resilient, and there is sufficient capacity to meet demand now and in future.
- Local people have access to a range of safe, effective, high-quality support options to meet their care and support needs. This includes unpaid carers and those who fund or arrange their own care. Services are sustainable, affordable and provide continuity for people.



### Our self-assessment score: Evidence shows a good standard

#### Key areas of strength and progress:

- Adult Social Care has progressed a revised Commissioning framework bringing together our **commissioning strategies** under three themes:
  - Early Intervention and Prevention
  - Long Term care and support
  - Specialist care and support. *(Available on request)*
- There are numerous examples of how we work collaboratively in partnership across Somerset to commission effective models of care and support that meet the needs of our population. Many of these have already been detailed above within our Theme 1 evidence. An additional example includes our work with the NHS to launch a new [Community Equipment and Wheelchair service](#) from August 2022 to help people live more independently. The new system allows people to use one portal to access wheelchairs and a range of community equipment, saving time and making it easier for people to access the equipment they need. The integrated service is a great example of the deepening partnership between health and social care to jointly deliver services for the benefit of the people of Somerset. We also offer an [online assessment tool](#) giving people free impartial advice about all types of equipment to make daily living easier.
- Since 2014/15, **Somerset Council has supported the development of over 1,250 new [micro-providers](#)** with numbers continuing to rise. They are collectively delivering over 30,000 hours of support a week to just under 6,000 people in Somerset. This increased personalised ‘care at home’ capacity of local, flexible and responsive support has meant that people are getting a greater opportunity to choose bespoke, local and small services to help meet their care and support needs. Not only do small enterprises come up with unique ways of supporting people, but people are also able to design and manage the right support that suits them, their families and where they live. The greater variety of local support has meant Somerset has seen more people choosing to self-direct their care, establishing Somerset as a national leader around self-directed support with significant increases in direct payment uptakes. [CASE STUDY EXAMPLE](#)
- Adult Social Care Fees and Charges for 2023/24 were published<sup>1</sup> in March 2023, adjusted to take account of cost of living, market factors, national guidance and more. The **fee settlement for care providers** represented a further significant investment into the sector by the Council, representing a permanent increase of between 8.8% and 12.8% for the financial year, and representing a total investment of £24.9m into the social care sector. We are currently finalising fees and charges for 2024/25 in consultation with the care market.

<sup>1</sup> [Adult Social Care Fees and Charges](#)

- **Home care sufficiency** - We have recently completed a [procurement process](#) to award a number of home / domiciliary care block contracts. This involved a competitive procurement process to secure the supply of quality care and support at home services. This approach is designed to help develop a market that delivers a wide range of sustainable high-quality care and support services in difficult to source or high demand areas, and will offer guaranteed hours under 6 lots for the following areas:
  - Lot 1 – Glastonbury and Street, 150 hours
  - Lot 2 – Shepton Mallet and Wells, 200 hours
  - Lot 3 – Frome, 100 hours
  - Lot 4 – Yeovil, 150 hours
  - Lot 5 – Bridgwater, 200 hours
  - Lot 6 – Minehead, 200 hours

This service, to be implemented from April 2024 will deliver better outcomes for people, enabling them to continue living at home for as long as it is safe to do so. This will contribute to the reduction of hospital admissions, delayed discharge or long-term care home placements and the costs associated with these.

- **Robust arrangements exist that help us monitor and support the quality and sustainability of local services**, including our investment in PAMMS (Provider Assessment and Market Management Solutions) technology and the oversight of our multi-agency Commissioning and Quality Board. The proportion of active social care settings in Somerset rated 'Good' or 'Outstanding' by the Care Quality Commission exceeds national and regional averages despite falling over the past year. There is currently 1 active social care provider in Somerset recently rated as 'Inadequate' by the CQC; we are actively working with them under quality improvement. Where necessary, we manage placements into provisions pending quality or safety improvements being progressed. We work closely with key stakeholders, including health colleagues and the Care Quality Commission, to share intelligence and support quality improvement and knowledge across the sector. We benefit from the insights of Healthwatch Somerset who share their 'enter and view' visit reports into local care settings with us as part of wider monitoring of people's experience of local health and care services, as well as feedback they receive more generally from local residents to help influence change and offer a chance for learning. 93% of feedback received during 2023 regarding the work of our Care Provider Quality and Contracts functions rated the overall service provided as 'Good' or 'Excellent', with 97% of this feedback stemming directly from local registered care providers. Our quality and contracts staff benefit from and receive regular training opportunities to support their knowledge and expertise in this area, with recent examples including Home Office 'Right to

Work' training to support knowledge around immigration, and Contract Management training provided by the Government Commercial Function.

- **Levels of unmet home care need have vastly improved and are being sustained at very low levels, despite demand for homecare remaining significant.** We are presently in a position where provision of domiciliary care outstrips demand, meaning we are not currently accepting any new home care providers onto our procurement framework. This is a significantly improved position to where we were a year ago and consequent to a variety of focused commissioning and workforce related activity, and supported by our dedicated Sourcing Care team. Care package contract handbacks from home care providers have also significantly reduced when compared with recent years suggesting a stabilisation in the market. Somerset saw these rise sharply during the pandemic as evidenced by annual stats below:

  - 2020 – 54 package handbacks (average per month – 4.5)
  - 2021 – 233 package handbacks (average per month – 19.4)
  - 2022 – 238 package handbacks (average per month – 19.8)
  - 2023 – 157 package handbacks (average per month – 13.0)
- There is a strong appreciation of, and commitment to, **addressing the current and future care workforce needs as a wider health and care system.** Whilst we are proud of our care sector here in Somerset with high levels of good or outstanding CQC-rated provision we very much recognise the considerable and growing pressures they are facing in recruitment, retention and sustaining their businesses financially. Our ICB People Board is committed to supporting the wider health and care workforce and is progressing plans for a [Somerset Training Academy](#) for Health and Social Care to help establish occupational parity of esteem. The Board includes representation from [Skills for Care](#) which helps inform understanding of key workforce needs. Additionally, our [Proud to Care Somerset](#) initiative works hard to support the wider workforce by raising the profile of the care sector and address recruitment challenges. In January 2023, Somerset launched its bold new recruitment campaign, '[My Time to Care](#)', which was shot entirely in the county and starred real local carers in [six impactful videos](#). The campaign emphasised how careers in care present an opportunity to 'break free from behind a desk' and embark in roles filled with meaningful human interaction and job satisfaction. Each video was specifically tailored to target different age groups that may be interested in a care career. In February 2024, Somerset Council will deliver a communications campaign in recognition of national 'You Can Care Week', as part of shining a spotlight on the importance of social care roles and the positive impact they have on individuals and communities. The event will challenge misconceptions about care work and also encourage people to explore career opportunities in the social care sector.

- Support for our wider external care workforce can also be evidenced through the enhanced communication tools and forums established since the pandemic – this includes **weekly care provider briefings** (newsletters) containing updates and relevant information from the health and care system locally and nationally. Care Providers told us they valued the improved engagement with us during COVID-19 and we have worked hard to sustain and improve this, also launching **monthly Care Provider [Learning Engagement Meetings](#)** which have a broad and dynamic agenda and are focused on informing and supporting the care sector on topics as diverse as dysphagia to fire safety; these are recorded and widely promoted.
- Our commissioning approach is for the delivery of services in the least restrictive way possible for all individuals, regardless of their levels of need. We have relatively small numbers of people with learning disabilities placed outside of Somerset, or a short distance from Somerset's borders, and actively work to avoid placing people long distances away unless this is as a result of personal choice. In January 2024, two-thirds of *all* individuals placed out of county were living in local authority areas directly bordering Somerset.

#### **Key areas requiring our continued focus and improvement:**

- Adult social Care has a duty to develop and publish a Market Position Statement (MPS). Due to the Council's financial position, we have deferred publication of our current detailed draft MPS (available on request) until after the Council's 2024/25 budget had been agreed in February 2024. In May 2023 we published a Market Sustainability Plan for the older people care and support market which has informed our Market Position Statement. It highlighted the Council's ambition to meet the **fair costs of care** by 2025. This ambition was set prior to the Council's financial emergency, and consequently work is underway to review what we can offer in relation to Adult Social Care fees and charges for the coming 2024/25 financial year. There are significant upward pressure on fees for specialist services for adults with learning disabilities and mental ill-health in particular.
- Having listened to care provider feedback about our existing procurement framework, we are introducing a more robust process to support the **sourcing and monitoring of specialist services** as part of the implementation of a Dynamic Purchasing System from April 2024. This will also offer us greater transparency about care delivery to support us with effective contract management as well as informed analysis of market gaps or need.
- **Reshaping the local care market in order to ensure that people with more complex needs are supported in the least restrictive way**, with progression embedded and independence maximised.

- Redesign and recommissioning of our **arrangements for Extra Care Housing** to ensure that this model is sustainable and available to as broad a spectrum of individuals as possible, including both those with existing relatively high levels of need (but not requiring a care home environment), those with learning disabilities and mental ill-health, and those with an escalating trajectory of need as part of enabling them to proactively plan for the future.
- We will be working with the market to develop and fund future arrangements for employment opportunities for Somerset residents.
- We will develop a joint strategy to address a recognised current gap in our **commissioning offer for adults with autistic spectrum conditions who do not also have a learning disability**.

## PARTNERSHIPS AND COMMUNITIES

### What people expect:

- “I have care and support that is co-ordinated, and everyone works well together and with me”.

### The local authority commitment:

- We understand our duty to collaborate and work in partnership, so our services work seamlessly for people. We share information and learning with partners and collaborate for improvement.

### Summary

- The local authority works actively towards integrating care and support services with services provided by partner agencies. This achieves better outcomes for people who need care and support, and unpaid carers, and helps to reduce inequalities.
- Partnership working helps to ensure that care and support meets the diverse needs of individual people and communities. People experience a seamless care and support journey, and their support is coordinated across different agencies and services.

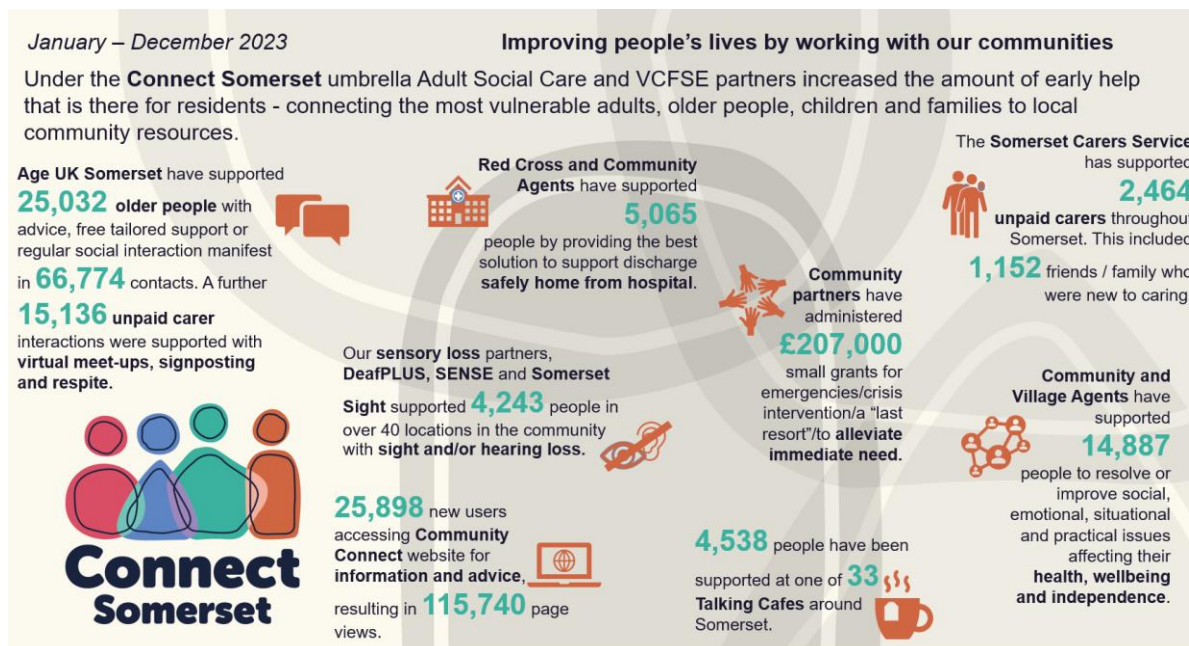
**Our self-assessment score:** Evidence shows a good standard

### Key areas of strength and progress:

- We have clear evidence of how we prioritise, invest and support **integration of services** such as reablement, intermediate care and end of life services through our discharge to assess work, our dementia service and pathway, and end of life pathway.



- This is supported by the work of our Somerset Health and Care **Joint Commissioning Steering Group** providing overall strategic oversight and direction to the joint commissioning arrangements in Somerset. The Steering Group agrees shared commissioning priorities for Somerset Council and NHS Somerset based on where a partnership approach will improve outcomes and promote greater efficiencies. This includes all schemes established under the **Better Care Fund (BCF)**. The BCF helps us look beyond the demands of today and take a more preventative approach, reducing demand and poor health in the future.
- As outlined in Theme 1, we recognise the unique contribution of our community and voluntary sector in the provision of care and support, and actively promote their involvement as evidenced through our work with the **Community Council for Somerset**, the engagement of village and community agents in our own peer forums, our commitment to supporting micro-providers as a key component of our care market offer, and the involvement of charities in our intermediate care delivery response.



- In Somerset, **dementia** prevalence is growing faster than the national average (as is the 65+ population). The number of people with dementia is now likely to double by 2035 to around 18,000. In a substantive effort to meet the challenges posed by these demographics and a commitment to foster sustainability in our provider market, our adult social commissioners (in collaboration with system partners including health and third sector colleagues) have designed and implemented a range of interventions to meet the needs of our ageing population and specifically those living with a dementia.

Initiatives include our **Older People's Mental Health + Model** introduced in the winter of 2022 in recognition of the significant challenges faced by our Integrated Care System in relation to the discharge and appropriate onward placement of people presenting with complex behavioural needs as part of their dementia. The system was experiencing delayed transfer of care for people with No Criteria to Reside (NCTR) and additional hospital bed days on our acute and mental health wards. Further to this, people who were discharged from hospital settings were often commissioned packages of care that included the harmful practice of 1:1 support, resulting in heightened costs to the system and heightened stress for those being supported. To address this challenge, we designed and successfully commissioned a new model of therapeutic care, which we called OPMH+. This new service delivered 12 beds across two sites where more specialised interventions could be delivered. The service was underpinned by the Newcastle Model, a tried and tested, evidence-based intervention to improve outcomes for people presenting with complex behaviours as a result of their dementia. We commissioned Reminiscence Learning, a community sector provider, to deliver 12 months of intensive training to five providers to support them to deliver more specialised dementia support. The outcomes of this collaborative endeavour have been noteworthy:

- Reduction in the number of individuals with dementia diagnoses being sectioned under the Mental Health Act.
- Enhanced wellbeing for our workforce.
- Significant reduction in hospital bed days.
- Zero declines with robust triage and transfers.
- Decrease in the need for long-term one-to-one support upon discharge, with only one discharge requiring such support.
- Up-skilling of the provider workforce.
- Improved support for End of Life and terminal agitation in dementia cases.
- Expanded support footprint of mental health trainers and liaison staff with providers across Somerset. [CASE STUDY EXAMPLE](#)

Somerset Council are proud to be a valued founding member of the [Dementia Wellbeing Model](#) which represents a significant collaboration effort between Somerset Council and over 60 third-sector providers, showcasing exemplary cross-functional working across health and social care. Drawing inspiration from nationally recognised models such as the 'Bristol Dementia Wellbeing Model' and the 'Sandwell Model,' as well as our locally acclaimed 'Open Mental Health' model, this alliance prioritises community provision and support for people living with dementia and their caregivers. Co-designed with input from our Dementia Conversations Group, comprising of people with lived experience of dementia and their caregivers, this model aims to promote healthy, independent living, prevent avoidable illnesses, and support active self-

management. It is underpinned by the collective goals of improving dementia diagnosis rates and meeting statutory requirements under the Care Act.

The Dementia Wellbeing Model offers a range of services, including newly commissioned Alzheimer's Society Dementia Connect Workers, a specialised phonenumber, and a website designed to assist people living with dementia in navigating local support options. Through warm introductions to a diverse range of support services.

- Somerset [Intermediate Care](#) Services are run jointly by NHS Trusts in Somerset and Somerset Council and bring together other providers such as care homes, home care agencies and voluntary services. Together, we support acute hospital discharges and prevent admissions. Intermediate Care provides support to help people:
  - remain at home when they start to find things more difficult.
  - recover after a fall, an acute illness, or an operation.
  - avoid going into hospital unnecessarily.
  - return home more quickly after a hospital stay.

Centred on a 'home is best' ethos, we work with all the services involved in patient discharge and prevention of hospital admissions. The service offers people varying levels of support, with the ultimate aim of getting them back home as soon as they are well enough, and back to their normal standard of independence as soon as possible.

All partners are focussed on joint working and shared practice. Supported discharge decisions are made by multi-disciplinary teams away from wards and assessments are carried out in a person's home, or an intermediate care rehabilitation or reablement unit. The voluntary and community sector is an important part of the intermediate care team. These teams support people with their recovery at home after a period in hospital or avoid unnecessary hospital admission altogether.

The whole system has been transformed, from the creation of a central Somerset Hub for Coordinating Care to community beds being coordinated and monitored from one place. Data from partner services is shared and analysed to help the service improve.

- Multi-disciplinary teams are now the norm across intermediate care thanks to the strength of the partnership. Decisions around pathways and bedded placements are made with a clear picture of the person's wants and needs and involves input from all relevant disciplines. During 2023, we supported over 84.1% of individuals aged 65 and over to be discharged back home from hospital each month - over 26,000 people. [CASE STUDY EXAMPLES](#)

- The Care Act recognises the role adequate housing plays in wellbeing. We benefit from the expertise and support of 4 **Housing Occupational Therapists** covering our county, who deliver vital work in the assessment and delivery of housing options and adaptations, and the promotion of people's independence.

#### CASE STUDY EXAMPLES

As one lady matched to a bespoke adapted three bed commented this year 'my life begins again today'. Housing Occupational Therapists take seriously the transformative effective of accessible housing and the need for a preventative approach to assessment and support. They work with partners across Health, social care and social housing to help match people to adapted stock, assess and adapt existing units where needed and help inform the building of new homes to meet the needs of people in Somerset. Housing Occupational Therapists work actively across all tenures, also taking a leading role in advocating for homeless people with disabilities, removing the barriers to hospital discharges where people cannot go home because of their environment and training and mentoring Occupational Therapy assistants within our Somerset Independent Living Centres to carry out more housing assessments to increase our capacity to manage this growing area of work.

- **Somerset Independence Plus (SIP)** is the council's preferred home improvement agency. Home improvement agencies are local, trusted organisations that help older, disabled and vulnerable people with reliable information and advice. They support people to make modifications to their homes as their health and needs change, through later years especially. SIP – which is part of Somerset Council – provides a range of services to make homes safe, secure, warm and easier to manage including home safety checks, full support with applying for Disabled Facilities Grants and other financial assistance, information, advice and guidance about options available to improve independence, and the comfort, safety and security of homes, and assistance with home improvements. The service also offers detailed customer assessments, and the option to receive advice with any equipment needs, which can be done at one of our Independent Living Centres, offering customers an efficient solution, creating a more joined up approach between statutory services. Additionally, it offers a Hoarding Service, with a team of Independent Living Officers helping people to reduce clutter, address hazards within properties, repair damage, remove category and trip hazards and more.
- **Housing** is a fundamental building block of health and care ('every decision about care is a decision about housing'), and we recognise that people facing multiple disadvantaged experience a combination of problems including homelessness, substance misuse, contact with the criminal justice system and mental ill health. They can fall through the gaps between services and systems



making it harder for them to address their problems and live fulfilling lives. In September 2022 Somerset made a successful application to join the MEAM (**'Making Every Adult Matter'**) Approach Network, a high profile, national initiative provided by a coalition of homeless charities. MEAM provides advice, guidance and (non-financial) support to the delivery of the **Better Futures Programme**. Key to our successful application to join MEAM was the establishment of the Better Futures programme and our governance arrangements. The BF/MEAM programme is now a single programme of activity overseen and monitored by the **Somerset Homelessness Reduction Board** and various subgroups. The Board is also responsible for the statutory Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy. Adult Social Care also contribute to East and West **Creative Solutions groups** supporting those with severe multiple disadvantage. We are actively building on strengthening links and relationships between Housing and Adult Social Care following the move to being a Unitary Council; a 'Housing with Care Strategy' is being developed.

- The principle of Personalised care is about empowering people to lead the lives they wish to live, asking the person what matters to them and giving them choice and control in their health and care. A social worker in our South Somerset neighbourhood team was nominated in recognition of her contribution to the Wincanton [Complex Care team](#) at the South West Integrated Personalised Care Collaborative's second **Integrated Personalised Care Awards** held in December 2023. The community is the heart of this neighbourhood team focussing on a collaborative approach to delivering local services, joined up support for people locally, improving outcomes in population wellbeing and is making a positive difference for local people. The awards are a way to give back, recognise and thank those people who work within health and care, who focused on the '*What Matters to You*' approach and have had influence on the life of an individual/s and the health and care system as a whole.
- **Optimal Handed Care** (previously referred to as Single-Handed Care) is being implemented across the Somerset Health and Social Care system. It promotes an individual's physical and mental health and wellbeing by way of their active participation in their care routine. It uses equipment and safe techniques to enable proportionate Moving and Handling assistance to be provided in a dignified and respectful way. It is founded in the person-centred approach and enables individuals to retain choice and control by involving them in individualised risk assessment and decision making. Our vision and focus has been to provide optimised person-centred care which is safe and dignified, using shared risk assessment, equipment and techniques. Targeted at practitioners across the system and delivered as a 3-day RoSPA L4 Award in Advanced Moving and Handling for Single Handed Care, this work not only



supports person-centred care through assessing the most optimum package of care for individual physical and mental health and wellbeing, but also enables greater efficiency by releasing human and financial resources. Benefits include improving care pathways, integrated training, inclusive person-centred practice, and the active participation by the individual in their care routine. [CASE STUDY EXAMPLES](#)

Somerset Council delivered a presentation about our system-wide approach to delivering care and providing people with moving and handling assistance at The OT Show in November 2023, held at Birmingham NEC; this event showcases innovations in the world of Occupational Therapy.

- Somerset Council and NHS Somerset have teamed up to provide funding to care providers who want to go digital by introducing electronic care records which replace paper-based admin systems. The project is now in its second year and has already helped over 30 care providers in the county to adopt a [digital record system](#), reducing risks in addition to helping reduce the time care staff need to spend on admin tasks and increase their capacity to care. The project has also implemented new technology which could help reduce falls. A number of care homes and individual homes have had sensors installed.
- On 28 April 2023, we launched a repeat **Care Provider Survey** following the previous survey launched in 2021 which led to changes and improvements across the system. The survey was shared and repeatedly promoted across all care providers in Somerset via a range of forums and means, including our weekly provider briefings and the Registered Care Provider Association. The survey ran throughout the month of May, closing on 31<sup>st</sup> May 2023. Views and comments were sought in relation to the extent to which local care providers feel supported by Somerset's health and care system, and the asks of the providers for their residents/clients, workforce, and organisations. The survey responses revealed that 73% of care providers surveyed feel well or very supported by the health and care system in Somerset. The aspects felt to be working especially well in relation to the support provided by the wider health and care system centred on good communication and engagement opportunities provided (including webinars, briefings, opportunities to inform and influence service design and development), positive working relationships, and being able to access help, support or advice when required. There were also a number of very complementary references to the work of the adult social care sourcing care team and the NHS's LARCH (Listening and Responding to Care Homes) team and Primary Care Networks. The aspects that would most benefit the care provider workforce related to higher wages/rates of pay to in turn support recruitment and retention, benefitting from more clinical/specialist training opportunities, improving the response time from system partners (GPs,

social workers) to help keep people safe and well, and obtaining more equity with the NHS.

- The number of individuals in our Transforming Care cohort is small and there is an effective partnership in place in Somerset to proactively manage it.

#### Key areas requiring our continued focus and improvement:

- We have been **enhancing some elements of the Better Care Fund, Continuing Health Care and Transforming Care activity** ensuring clear roles, responsibilities and accountabilities exist with partner agencies for delivering our shared priorities.
- Further seizing the enhanced opportunities that arise from becoming a unitary council, and through the work of the Integrated Care Board, to **develop our work to integrate care and support services with those provided by the NHS and other partners, including housing, employment, transport and leisure**. This includes links with Planning around future accommodation and care options.
- We are focused on reviewing and **enhancing our existing reablement response** in order to deliver high quality, responsive intermediate care provision that enables people to return to their optimal independence.
- **Co-production arrangements for adults with learning disabilities at a system level** need to be addressed. We will lead in re-establishing such arrangements in partnership with our system-wide Learning Disabilities Partnership Board.

### 3. How we ensure safety within the system

#### SAFE SYSTEMS, PATHWAYS AND TRANSITIONS

##### What people expect:

- “When I move between services, settings or areas, there is a plan for what happens next and who will do what, and all the practical arrangements are in place. I feel safe and am supported to understand and manage any risks.”
- “I feel safe and am supported to understand and manage any risks.”

##### The local authority commitment:

- We work with people and our partners to establish and maintain safe systems of care, in which safety is managed, monitored and assured. We ensure continuity of care, including when people move between different services.

### Summary

- Safety is a priority for everyone. There is a strong awareness of the risks to people across their care journeys. The approach to identifying and managing these risks is proactive and effective. The effectiveness of these processes is monitored and managed to keep people safe.
- Care and support is planned and organised with people, together with partners and communities, in ways that improve their safety across their care journeys and ensures continuity in care. This includes referrals, admission and discharge, and where people are moving between services.
- The views of people who use services, partners and staff are listened to and taken into account.
- Policies and processes about safety are aligned with other key partners who are involved in people's care journeys to enable shared learning and drive improvement.

**Our self-assessment score:** Evidence shows some shortfalls

### Key areas of strength and progress:

- Our **Preparing for Adulthood** team sits within the Learning Disability Service and we have reviewed and re-focussed the remit of the team. Its reach is countywide, working alongside all young people needing care and support as they transition to adulthood. Improvements have been made within our referral processes to ensure earlier identification of young people aged 14+ who may need support from Adult Social Care in adulthood; this includes monthly area transition meetings with key partners across children's social care, health, and education to identify, discuss and agree plans for young people. We also hold monthly escalation meetings to specifically explore and address young people with complex needs who will require bespoke provision when they turn 18 in partnership with our commissioning colleagues and children's social care.

All young people aged 17+ are allocated to a worker; we aim to increase allocation from an earlier age once capacity within our team improves.

Preparing for adulthood is one of Adult Social Care's 'My Life, My Future' transformation programme workstreams. As part of this we are focused on achieving more ideal outcomes for young people transitioning into adulthood and have a range of activity underway to establish more efficient processes and information sharing across children's and adults' services to enable early identification and support planning, as well as to inform our future commissioning needs so we have appropriate and cost-effective services available to promote people's independence. In October 2023 our Service Director for Adults Social Care, Operations and our Service Director for Children and Families presented to a joint Children & Families and Adults

and Health Scrutiny Committee to provide an update to Elected Members.

- Key principles of good transition planning and the Service Improvement Plan for Preparing for Adulthood align well with the central themes of the [Somerset SEND \(Special Educational Needs and Disabilities\) Strategy](#):
  - Working together
  - Getting help as early as possible
  - Access to the right support and provision
  - Preparing for the future.

Our Service Manager for Preparing for Adulthood has a lead role in this supporting this work and is involved with the monthly EHCP (Education Health and Care Plans) standards improvement group to monitor our key performance data and review quality, pulling out themes and any learning and recommendations to improve quality and performance.

- **Transitional Safeguarding** focuses on safeguarding young people from adolescence into adulthood, recognising transition is a journey, not an event, and that every young person will experience this journey differently. It is not simply transition planning from moving from children's to adults social care services. It is about activity that falls outside of traditional notions of both 'transitions' and 'safeguarding', emphasising a needs-led, personalised approach. Our area Preparing for Adulthood Transition Meetings support the early identification of young people moving into adulthood and share information surrounding young people who may have identified risk factors. These meetings are a useful environment to support and create opportunities for mutual learning within children's safeguarding colleagues and share expertise surrounding rights-based and person-centred practice.
- We recognise the importance of Adult Social Care contributing to work taken to safeguard vulnerable people at risk of radicalisation from extremist groups. Our operational Learning Disabilities team and Preparing for Adulthood (PFA) teams participate in supporting the multi-agency [PREVENT](#) agenda in Somerset. We have designated representatives for both under 18 and adult panels. These panels have a statutory function and adult services is a core agency. For those people aged under 18, our PFA service manager attends local channel panel meetings; for those aged over 18, our LD service managers attend PREVENT meetings. The Strategic Manager attends the PREVENT board. This means that themes and issues at a local or strategic level can be disseminated across teams and the wider service. This is a good example of multiagency working across the Somerset system.
- We benefit from an intermediate care model that encompasses all services providing either support on discharge or on preventing admission, based strongly on 'discharge to assess' principles. We have developed collaboratively a **Transfer of Care Hub** in Somerset. Teams have worked very hard since its

introduction in early December 2023. Results have been variable across the county. We are continuing to use a test, learn and change process to improve performance and achieve greater consistency as a result.

- Adult Social Care attend weekly **long length of stay meetings** with our NHS colleagues and our own sourcing care colleagues to look at people in acute hospitals and intermediate care units with extended length of stays. This enables us to share the oversight and barriers to hospital discharge and also discuss potential solutions collectively, sharing knowledge or signposting as necessary.
- We have worked with carers to understand how to better support **earlier identification and support for those people in informal caring roles**. These has resulted in us undertaking monthly Talking Cafes with Community Agents where people are able to seek advice and information in line with our preventative agenda.
- We have strong evidence of our ability to effectively respond to unplanned events or emergencies in the care market to minimise potential risks of people's safety or wellbeing. This includes very **effective multi-agency working aligned to our robust and well-tested business failure/closure policy** led by our Quality Assurance and Contracts team. There are currently no closures underway across the county but the service efficiently supported 5 closures during 2023 where the provider had taken their own decision to rationalise their services or, in one instance, in light of an 'inadequate' CQC inspection outcome. We ensure we maintain effective communication with all affected stakeholders during these difficult situations, including local Councillors, health colleagues as well as residents, families and staff., and receive positive feedback about our support and intervention. [CASE STUDY EXAMPLE](#)
- We commission a **crisis service** with a single person residential care element and a skilled domiciliary care element to reinforce existing arrangements and de-escalate a crisis then withdraw for individuals who exhibit behaviours of distress and are at risk of escalating into the Transforming Care cohort.
- We have a dedicated **Continuing Healthcare (CHC)** Service Manager who is the responsible practice lead for working collaboratively with NHS ICB senior managers. The Service Manager tracks CHC cases, monitors and report on outcomes and performance, develops quality assurance measures, and acts as the local authority representative on multi-disciplinary team meetings and other panels. We have restarted our collaborative CHC steering group meeting with system colleagues which provides us with an opportunity to monitor our



performance and set actions in place to improve in this area. We recognise that we perform below average in terms of referrals and use the monthly meetings to monitor improvements. Additionally, we participate in national and regional professional networks, attending national and regional forum meetings, to exchange knowledge, resources, and information about CHC developments and best practice, develop the CHC Lead leadership role, and contribute to the development of national policy and expectations about high quality practice. Joint policy arrangements are being reviewed to ensure fair decision making in Continuing Healthcare process and compliance with National Guidance, and an escalation process is in place.

- Our **Approved Mental Health Professional (AMHP) Hub and Out of Hours Service** work closely together and are overseen by one Service Manager and Strategic Manager for Mental Health Services. We have a dedicated AMHP Lead who has a key role in embedding high quality professional AMHP practice across the service. We work in collaboration with our health colleagues and ICS partners, we hold monthly Interface meetings to monitor the impact of the service and pull out any learning to improve our practice to achieve the best outcomes for individuals. An AMHP report is shared at the Mental Health, Autism and Learning Disability ICS Programme Board on a quarterly basis (*available on request*).
- We work hard to ensure funding decisions / disputes do not lead to delays in the provision of care and support through our peer forum arrangements – *detailed in Theme 1*.

#### **Key areas requiring our continued focus and improvement:**

- **Preparing for adulthood:** As one of our five 'My Life, My Future' transformation programme workstreams, we are focused on achieving more ideal outcomes for young people transitioning to adulthood. Our work is concentrating on establishing more efficient processes and information sharing between childrens and adults services to enable early identification and planning of support, and on shaping the availability of suitable and cost-effective services to promote independence.

Ensuring that we engage in proactive discussions and contingency planning with individuals and their families in relations to transitions that may take place at key points in their lives other than when transiting from child to adult services. This will include, but not be limited to, adults with learning disabilities who are living with their parents who are developing their own health and care needs.

- Opportunities exist to improve safety and continuity in care when people move between different services or agencies, including within mental health social care and in our links with housing. We look forward to enhancing our links with, and influence on, housing as one of the many benefits of coming together as a new unitary Council. We are also progressing work on 'Transfer of Care' summaries on the back of learning to emerge via our Practice Quality Board and audits to support effective practice.

## SAFEGUARDING

### What people expect:

- "I feel safe and am supported to understand and manage any risks".

### The local authority commitment:

- We work with people to understand what being safe means to them and work with our partners to develop the best way to achieve this. We concentrate on improving people's lives while protecting their right to live in safety, free from bullying, harassment, abuse, discrimination, avoidable harm and neglect. We make sure we share concerns quickly and appropriately.

### Summary

- There are effective systems, processes and practices to make sure people are protected from abuse and neglect.
- Section 42 Safeguarding Enquiries are carried out sensitively and without delay, keeping the wishes and best interests of the person concerned at the centre. People can participate in the safeguarding process as much as they want to.
- There is a clear understanding of the key safeguarding risks and issues in the area and a strategic plan to address them.
- Lessons are learned when people have experienced serious abuse or neglect and action is taken to remove future risks and drive best practice.
- People are supported to understand safeguarding, what being safe means to them, and how to raise concerns when they don't feel safe, or they have concerns about the safety of other people.
- People are supported to make choices that balance risks with positive choices and control in their lives.
- People are supported to understand their rights, including their human rights, rights under the Mental Capacity Act 2005 and rights under the Equality Act 2010.

**Our self-assessment score:** Evidence shows a good standard

### Key areas of strength and progress:

- Our [Adult Social Care Strategy](#) (2023-26) includes an ongoing commitment to continuing to focus on 'ensuring safety, preventing abuse and neglect, and identifying risk early through effective local safeguarding arrangements'.
- Somerset has benefitted from a **centralised, dedicated Adult Safeguarding Service** since May 2015, with the Service Manager still in post from that point in time offering significant knowledge and experience. In November 2022, she was named the overall winner in the Accountability Champion category of the national Safeguarding Adult Board 'We See You – We Hear You' Excellence Awards. Nominations were invited for professionals and teams who had demonstrated an outstanding commitment to safeguarding adults and their families. Her success came on the back of her nomination in the national [Social Worker of the Year Awards](#) where she was a finalist in the 2022 Team Leader of the Year category alongside another of our Social Work Managers.
- Our Safeguarding Adults service comes under the remit and responsibility of our Principal Social Worker following an operational restructure in early 2023. The Council **applies relevant guidelines/criteria of what constitutes a safeguarding concern**. Audits of decision making and recording help reinforce and test this, and we are currently undertaking some additional focused 'Safeguarding People' audits – aligned to our Practice Quality Framework approach - during January 2024 as part of our internal quality assurance approach. Results of these will inform our Practice Quality Board and our Safeguarding Board's Performance and Quality subgroup in February 2024.
- Our **multi-agency [Somerset Safeguarding Adults Board](#)** (SSAB) was established in 2015 on the back of the Care Act 2014 and has a clear understanding of the key safeguarding risks and issues in the area. It is well informed by detailed performance analysis and regular self-assessment at both Board and organisational-member level. It is benefitting significantly from the appointment in January 2023 of a nationally renowned and very experienced independent chair (Professor Michael Preston-Shoot) who has helped us 're-invigorate' our partnership, 're-set' our ambitions in response to local need and hold all members to account as part of a revised SAB [strategic plan](#). He has been very active in supporting awareness raising and best practice. The SSAB is required to publish an [Annual Report](#) which details how effective its work has been each year – our most recent report for 2022/23 is available on the SSAB website and was formally presented to the Adults & Health Scrutiny Committee on 12 September 2023. The Board holds regular 'development days' to inform its ongoing learning and focus.
- Our Safeguarding Board benefits from an active multi-agency Policy and Procedures subgroup, which produces and maintains a **range of professional guidance to support practitioner confidence and knowledge in adult safeguarding** which includes '[Multi Agency Risk Management](#)' and '[Risk Decision Making](#)' tools.

- We have a good understanding of our strengths and areas for development in relation to adult safeguarding, and **routinely monitor the effectiveness of our SSAB as part of our quality assurance arrangements and to support our continuous improvement against 12 statements that reflect the characteristics of well-performing and ambitious partnerships.** Our latest SSAB Effectiveness Survey (January 2024) evidenced significantly improved confidence levels across all bar 1 of the statements when compared to outturns from our survey in early 2023 at the start of our Independent Chair's tenure. There is consensus from Board members in the areas of strength and the aspects requiring our ongoing focus and attention:

Statement No.	Board Effectiveness Statement	% Agreed / Strongly Agreed (2024)	% Agreed / Strongly Agreed (2023)
1	The SSAB demonstrates effective leadership and coordinates the delivery of adult safeguarding policy and practice across all agencies with representatives who are sufficiently senior to get things done	100% ↑	71%
2	Partners contribute human and financial resources to the SSAB to enable it to function effectively	79% ↑	53%
3	The SSAB provides challenge and support on the outcomes for and experiences of people needing services and the impact and effectiveness of service delivery to its member organisation	74% ↑	65%
4	The SSAB has a clear understanding of how well it is performing and what difference it makes through regular self-assessment and benchmarking, and has a positive attitude to learning and improvement across partners	95% ↑	59%
5	The SSAB safeguards adults both proactively, through awareness raising and prevention of abuse and neglect, and responsively, by creating frameworks to effectively respond once concerns are raised	89% ↑	53%
6	The SSAB uses data, information and intelligence to identify risks and trends, and formulates action in response to these	84% ↑	65%
7	The Board has good quality legal, medical, nursing, social work and other advice available to it as necessary	89% ↑	65%
8	There are strong links between the SSAB and other local partnerships (eg the Health and Wellbeing Board, Community Safety Partnership and Children's Partnership)	74% ↑	29%
9	There are clear policies and protocols in place that integrate agency procedures in relation to adult safeguarding	74% ↓	76%
10	There are mechanisms in place to ensure that the views of people who are in situations that place them at risk of abuse and carers inform the work of the Board	47% ↑	41%
11	Reporting mechanisms (to the SSAB and from the SSAB to the Council and Boards of partner organisations) are clear and effective	63% ↑	47%
12	Board partners/members work in an atmosphere and culture of cooperation, mutual assurance, accountability and ownership of responsibility	95% ↑	94%
NEW	The SSAB is compliant with its statutory duties under The Care Act 2014	100% NEW	

As a group of safeguarding partnerships, we have also worked together to create a Safeguarding Adults organisational self-assessment for all Board member organisations who work with adults in the five local authority areas of Bath & North East Somerset, North Somerset, Bristol, Somerset, and South Gloucestershire. An Adult Social Care response to this request was submitted in late December 2023 and we currently await regional analysis of key themes and findings arising from the review.

The Board has a good appreciation and understanding of system risks and receives regular quarterly assurance reports on identified areas of focus including adult social care waiting lists, safeguarding training delivery, and Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS). This is supported by detailed performance and quality reports maintained by the SSAB's Performance and Quality subgroup.

- We invest in a **range of communication channels and approaches to promote awareness of abuse and neglect**, and practical ways to safeguard adults at risk. Our public-facing SSAB website has recently been refreshed,

has over 1,160 followers on [social media \('X'\)](#) and a current [newsletter](#) distribution list of almost 600 recipients.

- Somerset has again actively promoted and contributed to national **Stop Adult Abuse Week** (20-24 November 2023). Our SSAB and neighbouring Boards delivered a week of focused webinars to support safeguarding awareness activity. Somerset's session ('What's My Role in Safeguarding Adults') attracted the highest number of delegates with 149 attendees virtually joining the webinar. Across the whole week, the average delegate rating (where 1 star is poor and 5 stars is excellent) was 4.5 stars.
- Coinciding with the national Safeguarding Adults Week, the SSAB launched its new **public awareness and poster campaign** encouraging residents to look out for members of their community who might be experiencing abuse. The campaign, 'Safeguarding is everyone's business', asks that people do their part in supporting their communities by recognising the signs of self-neglect, in response to the rise of instances of self-neglect experienced in Somerset since the pandemic, and was widely promoted across local media.
- Starting from February 2024 the Somerset Safeguarding Adults Board will be hosting Safeguarding Adults Practice Updates on the first Thursday of each month exploring different topics. These are open to all interested professionals across Somerset and are widely promoted across our health and care system.
- The [Safeguarding Adults Collection](#) (SAC) national return was published by NHS Digital in September 2023, providing findings for the period 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023. Whilst Somerset has an overall lower and reducing number of safeguarding concerns in contrast to national trends, a higher proportion of concerns are accepted as requiring a safeguarding enquiry (42% of concerns become enquiries in Somerset, compared to 33% nationally and 28% in our peer group). This helps offers **assurances that our approach to triaging contacts received via our Customer Contact Centre and determining which meet the threshold for a safeguarding response is effective.**

Somerset has long performed very strongly in comparison to regional/national averages in relation to **Making Safeguarding Personal** measures. **CASE STUDY EXAMPLES**

Latest SAC data reveals that risks were identified in Somerset in 84% of cases, compared to 75% both nationally and in our peer group. Where a risk was identified in Somerset, this was reduced or removed in 92% of cases, compared to 91% Nationally and 89% in our peer group. Individuals were asked about their desired outcomes in 91% of cases in Somerset, compared to 81% Nationally and 78% in our peer group. Somerset is the only council in the country that fully achieved all desired outcomes. As a safeguarding service, we



seek and record desired outcomes as part of the triage decision process. The Protection Plan review also checks outcome and comments on whether achieved or not.

Results from the 2022/23 **Adult Social Care Outcomes Framework (ASCOF)** revealed that 87.8% of service users in Somerset feel their care and support has contributed to making them feel safe and secure (compared to 87.1% nationally); this is particularly the case for people aged 65 and over (88.2%).

- **28 Practice Quality Audits** were undertaken within during January 2024 focused on 'Safeguarding People'. Overall results emerging from these audits evidence very good levels of assurance and positive practice in many of the quality standards set (particularly those relating to personalised and proportionate approaches, and to managing risk). Feedback from individuals directly involved in the safeguarding process sought and encouraged as part of the audit approach. Further safeguarding audits are scheduled for May 2024.
- We have seen an improved picture in relation to the number of **complaints received by Safeguarding** over recent years. There have been 5 complaints received by the Safeguarding Service to date this financial year. No adult social care safeguarding complaints/enquiries were received by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman in 2022/23; the average of all English single tier and county councils for the same time period was 2.
- Our Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) has a dedicated, highly skilled, team to manage applications from care homes and hospitals. **Robust mechanisms are in place for the quality of DoLS work in terms of appropriate prioritisation** (by experienced assessor leads) and assessments undertaken, which are all scrutinised by the team leads and by a senior adult social care manager before being signed on behalf of the Council. The Council funds a strong advocacy provision via SWAN Advocacy (about 75% of DoLS authorisations involve an independent advocate) as well as spot purchased support to enable advocates to instruct solicitors whenever CoP proceedings are required.

In the last 12 months, 3377 DoLS applications were made. The DoLS Team triages the applications using prioritisation criteria. 22% (740 people) of applications were allocated. Work took place within the DoLS Team in the autumn of 2023 to increase capacity within existing resources by streamlining assessments; this has resulted in an increase in assessments completed each week from, on average, 15 to 20.

Our MCA (Mental Capacity Act) and DOLS Service Manager is chair of the regional DoLS Leads Group and actively contributes to the development of practice nationally, regionally and here in Somerset. An example of developing practice is the integration of executive function into update training and the

introduction of MCA Drop-in sessions for staff. Audits exploring the use of the Mental Capacity Act in practice are being carried out in February and March 2024. The outcomes will inform our Learning and Development offer. Alongside this, additional training is being provided for Practice Development Advanced Practitioners to enable them to become MCA/DOLS champions in their respective teams or services.

#### Key areas requiring our continued focus and improvement:

- As a multi-agency Safeguarding Board, we are conscious of the **workforce capacity-related challenges facing our health and care system and the consequences of this on safe and effective practice**. Our own safeguarding service is currently holding vacancies; we are continuing to monitor the impact of this and seeking temporary staffing to mitigate risks whilst we continue to recruit.
- Somerset has seen a **rise in instances of self-neglect** related safeguarding enquiries over recent years (*rising from 3.57% in 2019/20 to 7.69% in 2022/23, which is slightly above the national average*) and recognises the risks facing people within their own homes, 'behind closed doors'. It is worth noting that the second *national* analysis of SARs found that 60% of all SARs completed between 2019 and 2023 feature self-neglect. Consequently, we have been working very hard to improve understanding, identification, multi-agency risk management and practice in this area in order to deliver improve outcomes for people. Examples include:
  - A specific focus on understanding and managing self-neglect as part of the SSAB's Strategic Plan for 2023-26;
  - [Self-neglect focused webinars](#) and presentations at our multi-agency SSAB conference in February 2023 and our internal November 2023 Carnival of Practice, from both the Independent Chair of our Safeguarding Adults Board and a Social Worker who shared her experience of supporting a Somerset resident who was hoarding [CASE STUDY EXAMPLE](#)
  - Self-neglect focused episodes feature as part of our Principal Social Worker's podcasts, 'Social Work Sessions';
  - New SSAB public awareness raising campaign focused on self-neglect awareness and understanding
  - The launch of a [revised self neglect toolkit](#) on our SSAB website with practical tools and guidance for practitioners to utilise.
- There have been a **growing number of statutory Safeguarding Adults Reviews (SAR)** referrals during and since the pandemic in line with national trends. Resourcing and responding to these in a timely way remains a challenge, alongside ensuring impactful responses to recommendations emerging from these across system partners. During 2022/23, Somerset concluded a total of 5 SARs (3 where one or more individual had died,

and 2 where no individuals had died). A total of 25 SARs were concluded across the south west region in total during this time. As of November 2023, the SSAB had 12 SARs in train, 4 of which were at the draft SAR Report Stage following learning events. Self-neglect has been a common feature in these cases which has contributed to our strategic focus on this abuse category as a county (outlined above). The SSAB hosted a development day on 15 January 2024 which included a focus on reviewing themes and learning taken from SARs locally. Our internal, monthly Practice Quality Board also has a remit to review the learning outcomes from all learning reviews, statutory and non-statutory.

- Whilst our policies and processes promote awareness of modern slavery, sexual exploitation, criminal exploitation and other forms of exploitation, there are **further opportunities for us to promote understanding and awareness of exploitation and exploitation risks**. Whilst there is a Somerset Children's Exploitation Strategy, no 'through life' exploitation strategy currently exists for the county. The partner organisations consisting of the Somerset Safeguarding Children Partnership (SSCP), Somerset Safeguarding Adults Board (SSAB), Somerset Corporate Parenting Board (SCPB) and the Safer Somerset Partnership (SSP) have re-established a joint partnership and are committed to working together at every level to keep Somerset people safe from harm and improve their health and wellbeing. The Group is progressing work to help collectively tackle the exploitation of both children and adults in Somerset during 2024. We have also recognised growing concerns nationally associated with International Recruitment and the fact that some care providers have been losing their licences to support those. We have ensured our Care Provider Quality Assurance team bolster their knowledge in this area through attending Home Office-led training on 'Right to Work' requirements so we can advise providers accordingly and respond in line with latest expectations, and our local Safeguarding policies and approach include a focus on responding to modern slavery. We are working to update our provider failure policy on back of recent learning regarding loss of licences.
- There are further opportunities to enhance the SSAB's ability to hear and learn from the **lived experience of those supported through a Safeguarding Adults process**. Although we have existing and well-promoted feedback forms and surveys (co-designed with Somerset Healthwatch) and hear from some individuals via Board meetings or through audits, engagement through these routes is relatively limited and we feel has been insufficient to offer meaningful assurance or information to the Board. The Board is committed to exploring alternative routes and means to meaningfully engage with and hear from those supported through adult safeguarding and undertook a survey in the summer of 2023 to 'kick-start' some of this work. The Board is also keen to focus on significantly enhancing the **accessibility and inclusivity** of the materials

available for our local communities to support meaningful engagement and awareness. This is an identified priority in our refreshed strategic plan.

- In common with most other local authorities nationally, Somerset Council is unable to fully comply with its statutory duties under the Mental Capacity Act in relation to ensuring that any person who may be deprived of their liberty as a consequence of lacking mental capacity is accorded the relevant safeguards, given the proposed replacement scheme (the Liberty Protection Safeguards) will not come into operation for the foreseeable future. The current level of resourcing in the DoLS (**Deprivation of Liberty**) team – primarily for assessment and administration – only allows for completion of about 25% of applications, and therefore a considerable part of the team’s senior worker capacity is taken up with prioritising these. In general, the only applications which receive full consideration – progressing via assessment to authorisation – are those where there is a strong objection to or some other concern about the suitability of, the care arrangements. One consequence of this focus is that Somerset Council has a high proportion of DoLS authorisations being challenged in the Court of Protection. This is an indicator that people are being well supported by families and advocates to access their rights and not per se a criticism of any aspect of the DoLS process. Usually, people are challenging being kept in a location they have not chosen – often a care home. The DoLS process gives them the formal mechanism with which to challenge.

## 4. Leadership

### GOVERNANCE, MANAGEMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY

#### The local authority commitment:

- We have clear responsibilities, roles, systems of accountability and good governance to manage and deliver good quality, sustainable care, treatment and support. We act on the best information about risk, performance and outcomes, and we share this securely with others when appropriate.

#### Summary

- There are clear and effective governance, management and accountability arrangements at all levels within the local authority. These provide visibility and assurance on the delivery of Care Act duties; quality and sustainability and risks to delivery; and people’s care and support experience and outcomes.
- The local authority uses information about risks, performance, inequalities and outcomes to inform its adult social care strategy and plans, allocate resources, and deliver the actions needed to improve care and support outcomes for people and local communities.
- There are robust arrangements for the availability, integrity and confidentiality of data, records, and data management systems.

## Our self-assessment score: Evidence shows a good standard

### Key areas of strength and progress:

- The service has **clear [governance and performance management arrangements in place](#)**, with a range of mechanisms in place that support the visibility and assurance of performance, risk, finance, quality and sustainability. We benefit from **strong and engaged corporate business partners** from finance, business change, and HR, who understand our service needs well and offer expertise and support to help us progress our ambitions and priorities. Our 2023-26 [Adult Social Care Strategy](#) was published in the summer of 2023, informed by feedback from staff and the public.
- **Regular opportunities exist for staff to engage with and hear from the senior leadership team**, including Q&A sessions with the Chief Executive and with Adult Social Care Directors. Since July 2022, we have produced detailed monthly Highlight Reports to support effect communication and transparency of updates and key development with our staff, elected members and the Council's executive leadership team. This is in addition to our Adult Social Care online newsletter for our staff ('The Loop') which also communicates updates on a weekly basis via email.
- Our **understanding of our performance and key risks helps to drive and inform our strategic plans and response activity**. This can be evidenced through the operational restructuring activity we implemented, our transformation programme of work, our commissioning focus and activities, and approach to enhanced peer forums amongst others. We have Adult Social Care Deputy Director-level membership on the Council's Strategic Risk Management Group.
- Our adult social care service has benefitted from **strong and well-engaged political leadership**, with Councillors well-informed about potential risks facing adult social care and engaged in service improvement activity. We report regularly to the Adults and Health Scrutiny Committee on our performance and financial position and deliver themed workshops to Members on topics of interest and relevance. In January 2024, the Lead Member for Adult Social Care sadly passed away unexpectedly; the Leader of the Council is currently providing support and oversight whilst we await formal re-appointment to this important position.
- The service ensures effective **budget oversight, accountability and governance**, evidenced through regular financial challenge and Medium-Term Financial Planning (MTFP) sessions, our transformative work with Newton Europe, monthly monitoring and promotion of our budget position and service risks, and the mitigation focus of our Peer and Enhanced Peer Forums.



- Our Adult Social Care Performance Leads work closely with corporate Business Intelligence colleagues. Together they possess a very strong knowledge and understanding of our data reports and national returns and maintain a **detailed suite of performance reports designed to support our workforce using Power BI**. They actively contribute to supporting sector-led improvement as part of the South West ADASS Performance Leads group. The service reports frequently to the Adults and Health Scrutiny Committee on performance. A key strand of our 'My Life, My Future' programme is centred on 'Data Visibility and Control'. This work is focused on enhancing proactive performance management and establishing clearer links between operational teams, their decisions and finance data. It is also looking at fostering a culture of performance and improvement through data-driven behaviours and evidence-based decision-making.
- We have invested in developing our own workforce and that of partner organisations involved in providing services as a way of supporting sustainability and filling hard-to-recruit critical posts. This has included overseas recruitment initiatives, with 12 Social Workers recruited to date into adult social care as part of our **International Recruitment project with Morgan Hunt** since September 2022. We are now commencing the recruitment of a third cohort as part of this approach. In 2023, the South West ADASS region was successful in its bid for grant funding to provide regional and sub-regional support and interventions to support and meet the employment, pastoral and training needs of overseas workers living and working in the region as well as new recruits. The three top priority areas for recruitment in the South West are home care, nursing in care, and social workers and occupational therapists.
- We recognise **psychological safety** as one of the most critical factors in high performing, happy teams and are committed to improve wellbeing across our teams and services. We issued an anonymous survey to our workforce to help us understand the baseline position as part of our focus on building psychological safety in our organisation. Results from the survey informed our January 2023 Workforce Board and were shared across the managers and teams subsequently, with post-survey action prompts tailored to individual service areas to support improvement where needed. Overall levels of psychological safety across the whole adult social care service were highest in relation to 'people understanding what is expected of them within their team' (87% in agreement), 'people feeling it is easy for them to ask other team members for help' (85% in agreement) and 'people feeling confident that nobody in their team would deliberately act in a way that undermines their efforts (78% in agreement)'. We will repeat the survey in 2024.

**Key areas requiring our continued attention and improvement:**

- Supporting the **stability of our workforce**. We have secured a permanent appointment of our Deputy Director of Adult Social Care Operations following recruitment activity launching in January 2024 and are working to secure the same for our Deputy Director of Adult Social Care Commissioning and Deputy Director for Adult Social Care Strategy, Transformation and Performance. We are working hard to reduce our reliance on **locums / agency staff**, resulting from national challenges in recruiting social workers and occupational therapists, as part of wider establishment control and recruitment activity, and have had some success in converting locums to permanent staff. The Council will be launching a Voluntary Redundancy scheme in February 2024 as we take steps to move towards a smaller, leaner Council. Whilst many adult social care roles will be exempt due to their criticality to the delivery of statutory duties, we will need to monitor and respond to the impact of this on our service and partnerships.
- We maintain a detailed risk register for our service which is routinely monitored by the senior management team and Council's Audit Committee where these risks are escalated to strategic level. We are facing **broader operating environment risks and workforce impacts associated with the Council's financial pressures and the wider risks facing the independent care market** and must continue to assess and mitigate these wherever possible in terms of their impacts on our communities, services and ambitions for adults in Somerset.
- Working in partnership with Somerset Council's Equalities Manager, we will work to **ensure that equality and diversity principles are firmly embedded in our values, culture and leadership behaviour** across our council services, progressing the learning and recommendations that have emerged from the corporate peer review undertaken in 2023.

## LEARNING, IMPROVEMENT AND INNOVATION

### The local authority commitment:

- We focus on continuous learning, innovation and improvement across our organisation and the local system. We encourage creative ways of delivering equality of experience, outcome and quality of life for people. We actively contribute to safe, effective practice and research.

### Summary

- Learning from people's feedback about their experiences of care and support, and feedback from staff and partners, is embedded throughout the local authority's work and informs strategy, improvement activity and decision-making at all levels. Co-production is embedded throughout the local authority's work.

- There is an inclusive and positive culture of continuous learning and improvement. The local authority has strong external relationships that support improvement and innovation. Staff and leaders engage with external work, including research, and embed evidence-based practice in the organisation.
- There are processes to ensure that learning happens when things go wrong, and from examples of good practice. Leaders encourage reflection and collective problem-solving.

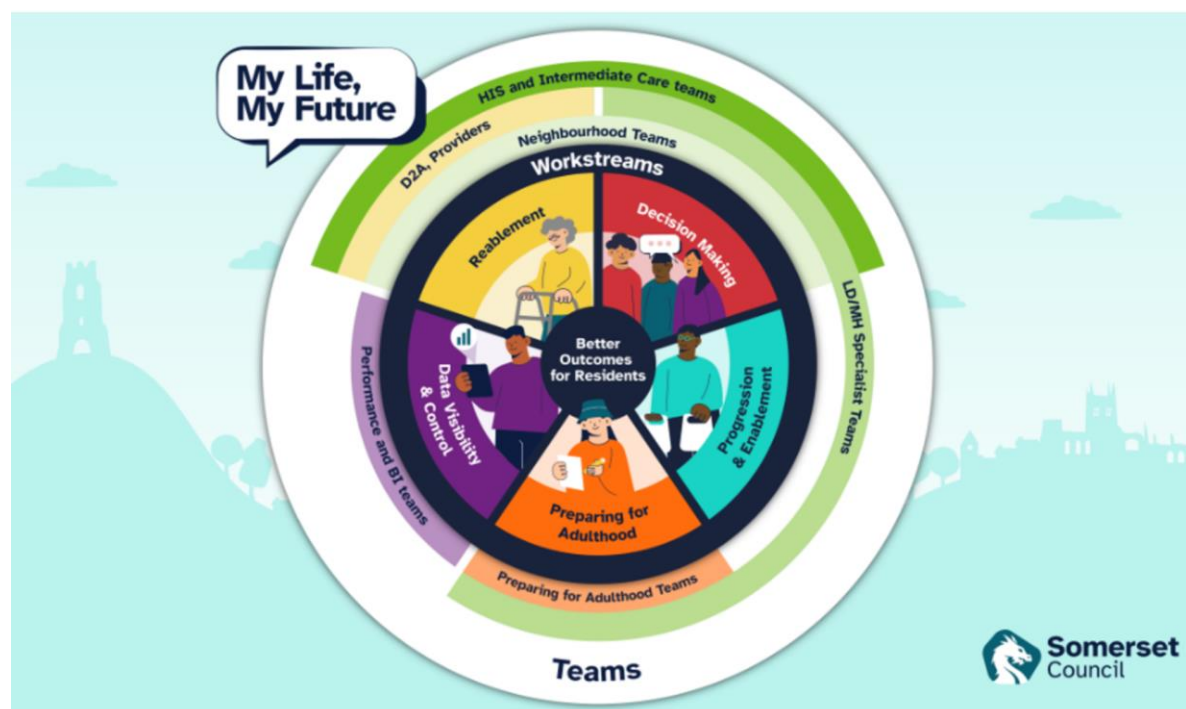
**Our self-assessment score:** Evidence shows a good standard

#### Key areas of strength and progress:

- Somerset Council's Adult Social Care service continues to be a very **active participant in sector-led improvement activity across the region**. The Executive Director chairs the South West Association of Directors of Social Services (SW ADASS) and also co-chairs the national ADASS Policy and Use of Resources group. Our Service Director for Operations co-chairs the SW ADASS Operations and Practice Group, and our Service Director for Commissioning co-chairs the SW ADASS Commissioning Group. Senior Managers contribute to other SW ADASS Subgroups, including performance leads, assurance, and safeguarding. Our Principal Social Worker is also the Co-Chair of the South West Principal Social Worker network. Senior leads within our service, and corporate leadership team, also contributed to Local Government Association Peer Challenge events in other Local Authority areas to support sector-led improvement.
- Our Principal Occupational Therapist is a founding member of the **Somerset Occupational Therapy Leads network** set up to provide a collaborative system-wide forum to develop pathways and ways of working for all OTs in Somerset. It has a strong focus on workforce and career development through the Somerset [OT Strategy](#). Recent innovations include opportunities for secondments from OTs working in acute hospitals to spend 1 day per week working in our Independent Living Centres.
- We actively seek, invite and welcome guidance, expertise or support as part of our efforts to continually drive forward local improvement and challenge our own performance and approaches. This can be evidenced in multiple ways including external audits, the commissioning of additional resources to address performance, peer reviews, and our [Adult Social Care transformation programme, 'My Life, My Future'](#) being delivered in partnership with Newton Europe.

We initially undertook an evidence-based review (diagnostic) of our services to identify what we needed to change, and how to deliver that change successfully. This provided us with a deep understanding of our current services, our areas of strength and pressure, and generated prioritised

opportunities for change and a clear plan linked to our Adult Social Care Strategy to improve outcomes, staff and resident experience, and finances. We are now implementing the change programme which is focused on five key workstreams:



Progress on delivery of 'My Life, My Future' is reported routinely through the Council's Adults and Health Scrutiny Committee, most recently in [December 2023](#). [CASE STUDY EXAMPLES](#)

- We invited **Local Government Association and South West ADASS representatives to join one of our routine Performance Improvement Meetings** and observe some of our self-assessment activity in the role of a 'critical friend' in late June 2023. A feedback report received in September summarised their key reflections to help contribute to our process of continuous improvement including work to improve outcomes for local people, the breadth of our transformation programme, empowering people and carers to be involved in shaping our work, safeguarding adults, and reflecting on the feedback and experience of those using our services.

The feedback report (*available on request*) acknowledged Somerset's commitment to learning and innovation, stating that "*it was inspiring to hear you share the strengths across adult social care in delivering positive outcomes and engagement with people who live in Somerset. The transparency and openness in identifying and addressing areas for improvement, which will lead to better outcomes for your residents, was a great strength of the conversation*".

- Somerset Council has commissioned a **Local Government Association Assurance Peer Challenge** for its Adult Social Care service which will take place in early March 2024. This will form part of our wider work to assess how well the Council is working – alongside our partners and providers – to deliver Care Act duties relating to Adult Social Care. The Peer Challenge will also help inform our ongoing improvement journey and self-assessment and offer input to assist our ongoing readiness for Care Quality Commission (CQC) assessment, with the LGA drawing on the CQC framework to inform their activity. It will be a valuable opportunity for us to showcase our best practice and reflect with openness and honesty about areas of strength and areas of challenge.
- We remain committed to supporting our staff grow their skills and progress their career. We have a **large and varied training and development offer to help staff develop their knowledge** and encourage staff to undertake specialist training and professional qualifications. We offer apprenticeships as a way of recruiting and training staff who want to start a professional career in Adult Social Care and have a ‘grow your own’ scheme (including a new ‘Stepping Towards Social Work programme) giving staff the opportunity to train to achieve professional qualifications in Social Work and Occupational Therapy. Qualified social workers and occupational therapists take advantage of annual training programmes of core skills development including safeguarding, mental capacity, and moving and handling update. They benefit from specialist skills training, professional workshops, and academic learning including best interest assessor, practice educator training, advanced practice with adults at risk, end of life, fundamental principles of dementia, and practice learning and student support. In 2023 we also commissioned the delivery of the Post Qualifying Standards for Practice Supervisors. Newly qualified social workers and occupational therapists benefit from a dedicated training programme in their first year.

In an effort to boost social worker capacity in English Councils, the Department for Health and Social Care invited [expressions of interest from Councils for up to £30k per social work apprentice](#) to help Local Authorities resource the recruitment, supervision and training of additional trainees up to the end of March 2025. Our service has submitted a bid via Somerset Council’s Apprenticeship Lead to request funding for 4 x apprentices.

- Alongside our core training and Learning and Development offer for our staff, we have over many years also run an **annual ‘Carnival of Practice’** during a week in November, which prove very popular with staff. From 20-24 November 2023, we ran a series of very engaging and well-received events around the theme of ‘Storytelling’. The programme included a session from Headway Somerset, along with some of their customers sharing their experiences of brain injury, as well as Young Carers’ stories, and a session on ‘Storytelling



through photos' looking at the value of images and creative research methods to understand people's experiences of different daily occupations. Recordings and resources from the sessions and those from previous years are available to our staff on our intranet.

- The launch of our revised **Practice Quality Framework (PQF)** in the summer of 2023 coincided with the roll out of a new **auditing process** across our service, aligned to the practice quality standards identified in the framework. The PQF sets out clear practice standards and expectations for our workforce and forms an important part of our governance and assurance approach. It clarifies what good looks like and was informed by people who draw on services. Between September 2023 and January 2024, a total of 668 Practice Quality audits have been undertaken by staff at various levels, including Directors, across our service; the audits have focused on the following practice standards:

Month	Audit focus	Total audits completed
September 2023	Working with people	180
October 2023	Case recording	172
November 2023	Strengths-based assessments	142
January 2024	Working with risk	146
	Safeguarding people	28
<b>Total:</b>		<b>668</b>

Staff and managers are encouraged to gather feedback from people or their carer/representative as part of the audit process to support understanding of their experience of the work undertaken and to ensure a rounded and well-informed assessment of practice. These have reassured us of practice in aspects such as how we work with people (with 95.4% of audits undertaken evidencing we built positive relationships based on trust, kindness and respect) and the quality of case recording (with 88% evidencing that our records are person-centred and capture the views, wishes and feelings of the person or their representative). They also continue to offer us valuable learning opportunities including improving the use of case transfer summaries and reducing the use of acronyms in our records. Actions are being progressed with the support of our Practice Development Advanced Practitioners and Practice Quality Board.

- In May 2023, our Principal Social Worker launched a new **public-facing podcast** ([‘The Social Work Sessions’](#)) providing information and promoting learning through discussions with people in social work, from the front line, academia and elsewhere. Episodes have included discussions with members of our own workforce, as well as renowned national figures in the world of social work including Bryony Shannon, Lyn Romeo, and Professor Michael Preston-Shoot.

- Our own staff are hugely driven to make a difference and have a positive impact on people's lives. We launched our **2022-2024 ASC Workforce Strategy** in July 2022 as a means of more formally setting out our ongoing commitments to support our internal workforce at a time of heightened demand and specific challenges relating primarily to the recruitment and retention of qualified social workers and occupational therapists.

Our Workforce Strategy clearly set out our ambitions for the workforce over that two-year period, acknowledging and seeking to address the identified risks and key pressures facing us as well as identifying how we intend to recruit, retain, support, and develop our staff across both our operational and commissioning team functions. Progress is monitored by our **monthly Workforce Board** attended by Service Directors, Strategic Managers and HR engagement partner colleagues. The Board routinely reviews progress against actions across the 10 theme priorities as well as monitoring workforce data, equality and diversity impacts, and staff feedback. We have made some significant strides over the past year including progressing our international recruitment of social workers, assessing psychological safety across our functions, improving our supervision and appraisal offer, securing more young people into our workforce through our support of the Council's graduate scheme, and developing competency frameworks to support continuous professional development. The Board undertook an annual refresh of its Strategy during the summer of 2023 assessing its achievements to date and ensuring priorities for the next 12 months remained appropriate given the current context and social care landscape. An Equalities Impact Assessment was undertaken as part of this annual review which was also informed by recommendations arising from an independent SWAP Internal Audit of our Workforce Planning activity published in March 2023. This offered a 'reasonable' assurance rating and concluded that *"there is a generally sound system of governance, risk management and control in place"*.

- We can evidence a clear **commitment to sharing learning, best practice and innovation** with peers and system partners, through conferences, events and regional implementation of initiatives or shared areas of interest (e.g. waiting lists or provider quality). Examples include the 'Community Pull events' in our Acute Hospitals in January 2023, where over 30 senior managers from adult social care, community health, intermediate care and the integrated care board spent 3 days at each site working on wards to support discharges and observe working practices.
- Two of our Adult Social Care operational teams participated and contributed to **The Social Work with Older People (SWOP) research project**, led by the University of Birmingham and the University of Bristol. It started in November 2021 and ran for two years, in a study funded by the NIHR School for Social Care Research. Researchers followed 10 social workers over a period of six months (between summer 2022 and spring 2023) covering a time of acute pressure in health and social care services. In November 2023, the [initial](#)

[findings report](#) was published and included as part of our 'Carnival of Practice' programme of learning.

- Somerset has recently joined the [Peninsula Adult Social Care Research Collaborative \(PARC\) project](#). Funded by the National Institute of Health and Care Research (NIHR) the project is a collaboration between Adult Social Care Services in Torbay, Cornwall and Somerset and the University of Plymouth. It will bring together adult social care, experts by experience and research to learn from each other, to identify areas of research that are relevant and important to practice here in Somerset. We have offered two internal staff an exciting opportunity to undertake a research secondment as 'Research Practitioners' up to the end of October 2024. The aim of the project is to develop research capacity and capability in Adult Social Care Services in Somerset with the intention of improving design and delivery of services over the medium to long term and improving the experiences and outcomes of care for people.

#### **Key areas requiring our continued focus and improvement:**

- Adult Social Care, and the Council as a whole, is committed to **improving opportunities for effective and meaningful co-production**, taking every opportunity to include people with lived experience and community organisations in the development of new and existing services. The Working Together Board was formed in November 2023 following a series of co-production workshops. This is a partnership arrangement with people with lived expertise and carers.

Alongside this, we want to ensure that the feedback and experience of people using services and our key partners informs strategy, improvement activity and decision making at all levels more consistently as part of **meaningful co-production**.

- We will ensure we maintain a strong focus on workforce **training attendance and completion**. In common with trends seen in the wider health and care system, rates are shown to have been impacted by demand and capacity pressures across our teams.
- We are committed to enhancing our ability and improving confidence in reviewing, disseminate and implement learning outcomes from all reviews (statutory and non-statutory) and incidents, which is in part supported by the Practice Quality Board. In December 2023, the first cohort of staff (predominantly our new Practice Development Advanced Practitioners) received bespoke 'incident review' training from an experienced independent lead reviewer and we are now supporting the phased introduction of an Adult Social Care '**Learning from Serious Incidents**' policy and approach.

- We will **refresh our Adult Social Care Workforce Strategy** in 2024 and also establish a formal **staff forum** to support new ways of working as part of enhancing mechanisms to hear from and respond to our workforce. This is continuing to be explored with Union colleagues by our HR engagement partners.
- Somerset has confirmed our participation in the LGA's Employer Standards **Health Check Survey 2024** and await further information regarding the launch. This survey was last undertaken in November 2022, and was broadened to include feedback from non-registered social care practitioners and occupational therapists as well as Social Workers.

*Our self-assessment will be reviewed and updated on a quarterly basis.*