



Somerset
Council

Adult Social Care

Self-Assessment - November 2024



Issued by: Adult Social Care – Somerset Council

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END




Our self-assessment

The completion of an objective, honest and authentic self-assessment of a council's strengths and areas for improvement serves as a valuable opportunity to focus continuous improvement planning and delivery in a way that ensures local ownership. Self-assessment enables us to assess the performance of our Local Authority in relation to national quality statements, to use evidence to support those judgements, to highlight and celebrate key successes, acknowledge risks and challenges, and identify actions needed to address the most pressing concerns.

Assessing how local authorities meet their duties under Part 1 of the [Care Act \(2014\)](#) is a relatively new responsibility for the Care Quality Commission (CQC), launching from April 2023, and this self-assessment will be part of a required CQC Information Return to support future notification of assessment and will be maintained on a regular basis. We are committed to reviewing this document on a regular basis. The following information represents our most recent self-assessment structured against the CQC's [assessment framework](#) and informed by a Local Government Association (LGA) [Assurance Peer Challenge](#) undertaken in March 2024 in Somerset.

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

Our current overall *self-assessment* rating score is as follows:

Good 

Theme	Quality Statement	Our self-assessment score: June 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 an exceptional standard

About Somerset Council

Demographics

Somerset has a population of 571,600, an increase of around 41,600 people since 2011. About half of the population live in rural areas, and the rest in small to medium sized towns and villages. Taunton is the largest urban area with a population of approximately 70,000 people.

Somerset's population profile is older than the England average, with 25% being over 65. Over the next 25 years the county expects a significant rise in its older population, with a doubling in the proportion of those over 75, compared with an overall population rise of 15%.

Somerset has less deprivation than the England average. Approximately 10% of the Somerset population fall into the England Core 20 most deprived group, which are mainly centred in urban areas.

Somerset Council was formed on 1st 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.

Somerset Council is located within the Somerset Integrated Care System.

Financial Context

In November 2023, Somerset Council was forced to declare a financial emergency in November 2023 in response to soaring costs and demands on services. Budget figures showed we faced a funding gap of £100m for 2024/25 due in large part to an expected increase of £70m in the cost of Adult Social Care.

Immediate action was taken to mitigate the risk of having to issue a S114 notice. Members and officers worked together to make swift and often incredibly difficult decisions regarding the sale of assets and buildings, including offices; increasing Council Tax, fees and charges as much as possible; reducing staffing levels; and reducing council services to statutory levels; while ensuring staff remained supported and informed, alongside our communities and partners.

Somerset Council, through its Leader, wrote to all city, town and parish councils in Somerset to ask them to consider taking on greater responsibility for local community assets and services, and we now have a framework and a prioritised programme for devolution in place.

In order to set a balanced budget for 2024/25, the Council looked for savings across all service areas. We set out to do everything a commissioner would do if a S114 was served, whilst also delivering the Council's priorities. We have stopped all non-essential in-year spending and recruitment, reviewed our contracts, and started programmes to dispose of investments and assets.

Our 2024/25 budget was balanced with **£81.4m of one-off funding:**

Medium-Term Financial Plan Support Reserve	£36.8m
Capitalisation Direction	£36.9m
Council Tax/Business Rates Collection Fund Surplus	£7.7m
TOTAL One-off items to close 2024/25 budget gap	£81.4m

This means the starting point for 2025/26 is minus £81.4m before any new cost pressures are taken into account. The importance of delivering sustainable change through the Council's Improvement and Transformation Plan is critical as significant financial challenges will continue. There is a projected budget gap of £103.9m for 2025/26 and our reserves are almost exhausted:

High-level MTFP Forecast	2025/26 £m	2026/27 £m	2027/28 £m	2028/29 £m
Budget Gap	103.9	147.8	170.0	198.5
Change on Previous Year	103.9	43.9	22.2	28.6
% of Total Gap	52.3%	22.1%	11.2%	14.4%

Somerset Council still faces a stark and challenging financial position and has introduced significant financial controls to mitigate risk.

As part of a Council Improvement and Transformation programme, a top-to-bottom restructure of the whole organisation is currently underway.

1. Working with people in Somerset



This theme explores the following quality statements:

- Assessing needs.
- Supporting people to live healthier lives.
- Equity in experience and outcomes.

Our key strengths

- ✓ **Our passionate, experienced and committed staff** focused on providing good outcomes and with considerable ambition for those we support.
- ✓ **A strengths-based approach to assessing people's needs** from very first point of contact.
- ✓ **A thriving and well-established multi-agency approach to community-based early help** that is enabling people to live healthier, more independent lives.
- ✓ Our **multi-disciplinary Peer Forums and Enhanced Peer Forums** allowing us to explore person-centred, creative solutions to best meet people's assessed needs.
- ✓ Our use of **direct payments which exceeds national averages and helps people exercise independence** through greater autonomy, choice and control.
- ✓ Our **specialist adult social care teams** supporting a personalised approach to people with more complex needs.

Our key improvement activity

- We continue to work hard to **improve productivity, reduce waiting lists and ensure people with care and support needs are assessed and reviewed in a timely and effective way**
- We are progressing work to **improve the accessibility of information and advice, and our public-facing Council website** so residents find it easier to understand our prevention offer, and access support from Adult Social Care.
- Through our multi-agency 'Commitment to Carers', we are committed to ensure the **best possible outcomes and effective support for unpaid carers.**
- We are piloting a **new community reablement offer.**
- We are **enhancing effective and meaningful co-production** with people with lived experience of social care with the support of our 'Working Together Board'.
- We are embedding learning emerging from Somerset Council's **Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Peer Challenge** across our organisation.

1a. Assessing needs

What good looks like: People’s care and support reflects their right to choose, 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

Assessment, care planning and review arrangements

The Council’s [award-winning](#) Customer Contact Centre prioritises person-centred conversations and focuses on what matters to the person, how they can be supported to help themselves and promotes support available within our local communities. As detailed in a LGA Assurance Peer Challenge review (March 2024), the Contact Centre ‘has one number and uses artificial intelligence to support the public to navigate to the right place. There is the option for enquiries to be escalated if someone is in crisis and the system is receiving positive feedback...when people are signposted to information, advice and guidance, the customer contact centre follows up one month later to check this met their outcomes’.

This approach – supported by our continued investment in and focus on community-based early help – continues to result in an average 60% of all contacts received being resolved with no costed / statutory service being required despite high call volumes and complexity of need. 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 all queries.

Each Adult Social Care operational team runs its own triage process at an area level. The triage function risk assess and prioritise incoming referrals throughout the day. Using risk management and prioritisation guidance, our triage teams work to assess risk and urgency with guidance available from an Advanced Practitioner. We strive to offer a consistent triage model across the county to provide equitable service delivery to the Somerset population.

“The family were facing an extremely difficult situation with my mother-in-law suffering advanced dementia and living on her own. Benard was extremely professional and gentle when carrying out the mental capacity assessments for both financial and health and welfare and at no point did my mother-in-law become distressed. He communicated well and also listened to members of the family. I can say without reservation that the service provided was exemplary”

Adult Social Care Stakeholder feedback, May 2024

Timeliness of assessments, care planning and reviews

During 2023/24, Adult Social Care staff completed a total of 3,994 Care Act assessments and 4,477 Care Act Reviews. However, as is the case across many Local Authorities nationally, Somerset continues to have waiting lists for care assessment and review due to high demand for support and recognised workforce capacity challenges.

This is a common feature emerging from the Care Quality Commission's initial pilot assessments of local authorities in England as well as others that have now been published, and remains a key priority improvement area for our service.

Somerset continues to work in close partnership with other regional Directors on effective demand management through South West ADASS (the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services), sharing business intelligence and working collectively on improved approaches and outcomes. There is also increased national attention and interest in shared metrics relating to waiting times and waiting lists for adult social care; however, different approaches in how councils understand, manage and measure waiting lists currently makes meaningful and robust comparison difficult to achieve.

Significant work has been undertaken locally to address the waiting times for assessments and reviews, with a focus on ensuring our practice is robust and consistent across our frontline operational teams. This has centred on improving data visibility and control to support oversight, as well as on improving productivity across our teams. Data dashboards created across our service areas are enabling Managers and Advanced Practitioners to more effectively and proactively monitor and manage team priorities and individual waiting times. We also utilise risk priority and timeframe guidance, as well as Manager discretion and expertise, collaborating with other system partners, including health and the voluntary and community sector, to proactively manage waiting lists.

In response to learning from customer feedback, we are developing further our communication with individuals on waiting lists, providing expected timescales within which we will provide an assessment, review, or intervention. The letter will also inform people how to contact us if their situation has changed or changes.

Directors oversee the data fortnightly, with assurance reports on waiting lists also submitted regularly to the Somerset Safeguarding Adults Board's Quality and Performance Subgroup. Performance Indicators are also included on the Corporate Performance Report and further analysed by our Adult Social Care Assurance Board. Latest performance in this area was shared with the [Adults & Health Scrutiny Committee on 11 July 2024](#).

Whilst progress and improvements have been made surrounding our response and completion times, ongoing oversight and monitoring of our waiting lists continues to be a high priority for us. This work is closely aligned to how we support and address workforce capacity, recognising that vacancies, absences and staff skills and experience can affect our productivity.

Assessment and care planning for unpaid carers, child's carers and child carers

In March 2024, Somerset Council renewed its joint [commitment to carers](#) with a refreshed strategy. The Local Authority worked with Evolving Communities (an independent community interest company who help people who use health and care services to have a voice to shape the services they use) to ensure the Strategy was developed with and informed by unpaid carers.

It aims to enhance the quality of life for carers and those they care for, enabling, supporting, and empowering them to easily access information, education, training and health and care services to support them whilst they carry out their vital caring roles.



This commitment sets out some key priorities and recommendations to ensure that services continue to meet the needs of carers (including young carers) and is intended to influence all future service re-design and developments.

Our Carers Strategic Partnership Board has overall responsibility for measuring the effectiveness of the Commitment going forward.

We remain committed to increasing the number of carers assessments undertaken and benefit from direct payments if they wish and have ensured that learning to emerge from the biennial carers' survey informs our local response activity.

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, in recognition that we have historically performed below average in relation to the proportion of carers who report they find 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.

The Carers Support Service is one part of a wider integrated service of social prescribing, delivered by one community organisation. The service will meet the needs of a wide range of Carers, acknowledging different conditions and issues that can impact on Carers needs through working with a range of specialist organisations and support groups. This will include access to a wide range of information and advice that will help Carers continue in their caring role and reduce the likelihood of the cared for person requiring more intensive and institutional forms of care. Carers will be supported and feel more confident with their role which will prevent them reaching crisis point as well as improving their own well-being.

The service will also offer on-going emotional support to Carers in ways that meet their needs and preferences, using a variety of approaches. This will include a telephone support service, an on-line service, a befriending service and community/home visits when appropriate.

We acknowledge that it is important for carers to take some time out and meet other people who really understand their situation. Carers Groups are therefore also supported through the contract with the Community Council. 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. Taking time out as a Carer is so important for their health and mental well-being.

The service will also consider other interventions which can maximise a Carer's ability to continue to carry out their caring role, along with supporting Carers who wish to continue their employment or return to work whilst caring or following the end of their caring role. This will include developing and delivering a range of training and development opportunities in partnership with Carers and professionals.

A new contract was put in place in April 2024 for the Carers Support Service, and an outcomes performance framework is currently being 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.

CASE STUDY EXAMPLES

Mental Health Carers: The Somerset Carers Service is currently developing their offer to support more carers of people with mental health. A dedicated role has been funded through the [Open Mental Health Alliance](#) to develop bespoke support for those Carers including an enhanced offer of Carers Support Groups.

Somerset Council also contributes towards the provision of a mental health Carers Assessment service. The Service is commissioned with Somerset NHS Foundation Trust to undertake Carers Assessments and provide support to carers of adults with mental health conditions where the client is registered with Somerset NHS Foundation Trust secondary mental health services.

The service receives approximately 1,200 referrals per year. A team of Assessment Workers provide support over support over the phone, email and face to face. Specialist Carers Support Groups are also set up and are supporting in excess of 238 Carers across Somerset currently.

To further enhance our offer to Somerset's unpaid carers, our Adult Social Care Taunton and West Somerset Neighbourhood team worked in collaboration with the Community Council for Somerset, commissioning colleagues, partner agencies and the local community to pilot an information and advice event for unpaid carers. This multi-agency day event was delivered on Monday 9th September and enabled carers to be connected to a network of support within their local community.

Adult Social Care staff pre-booked a number of onsite assessments and reviews for those waiting for a service whilst also welcoming carers within the local community to drop-in and learn more about the local support available to them. The objective is to deliver another event in the East of the county later in the year.

Open Mental Health (OMS) and the Community Council for Somerset (CCS) will be holding monthly meet-ups for carers to share their experiences and access support in Bridgwater. Adult Social Care are exploring our opportunity to work alongside OMS and CCS at the monthly meetups to support unpaid carers in the community.

Whilst there is more we want to achieve, our latest Carers Survey submission return is evidencing some positive improvements consequent to our collective work and focus:

- The proportion of carers satisfied with social services has risen from 28.6% in 2021/22 to 37.7% in 2023/24 – this compares to an England average of 36.3% in 2021/22.
- The proportion of carers who report they have been included or consulted in discussions about the person they care for has risen from 63.6% in 2021/22 to 68.6% in 2023/24
- The proportion of carers who report finding it easy to find information about services has risen from 46% to 59.3%

Somerset Council is dedicated to supporting all unpaid carers, including Young Carers and Young Adult Carers in Somerset. In collaboration with the Family Intervention Service, which conducts statutory assessments of young carers, provides advice, and directs them to local support resources, we have commissioned local YMCAs, Minehead EYE, and The Pod Charity to run dedicated support groups for young carers across the county.

As of October 2024, over 259 of the 494 officially recognised young carers in Somerset have attended at least one support group session. Additionally, through the Somerset Community Foundation, we have funded a bespoke Young Carers in Schools project via Youth Unlimited. This project works with schools to achieve the national Carers Trust Young Carers in Schools accreditation.

We also collaborate closely with external partners such as the Somerset Carers Service, Healthwatch, and the Friends of Young Carers Charity to ensure that all young carers have access to the support they need

[Young Carers in Somerset](#) are supported by Somerset Council's Social Care with a young Carers Commitment. Somerset Young Carers are also served by the [Friends of Somerset Young Carers charity](#).

Help for people to meet their non-eligible care and support needs

People in Somerset benefit from a range of help, information and advice to help with non-eligible care and support needs, including for people with no recourse to public funds.

Our Customer Contact Centre and frontline staff teams have a good understanding and knowledge of services available locally and are able to offer advice as well as signpost people directly to the resources and community services on offer, including those available as part of our Connect Somerset offer or via our Independent Living Centres which are able to advise on self-funding options, particularly around home adaptations. Further support is available for self-funders on the Council's website: [information for people who pay for their own care](#).

Information also includes the range of micro-provider provision that is available in Somerset to support those with low level support needs and also domestic services such as gardening, home help or shopping. Community Power is real and growing locally - we have seen a significant increase in the network of community organisations providing support to people. Since the pandemic over 40 structures or organisations have established themselves to identify and respond directly to challenges faced by our communities. Wincanton Cares and Wivey Cares have a particularly strong evidence base for the impact of community led approaches to care and support.

Through opportunities, including external funding such as the Accelerating Reform Fund, we will be offering targeted support and investment to these hyper-local structures to scale and spread their impact, and enhance and diversify their offers around:

- Unpaid Carers Support (access to information, training and technology)
- Community Capacity Building (Shared Lives)
- Social Prescribing (connecting people to information and support)

Eligibility decisions for care and support

Our framework for eligibility is clear and consistently applied. Our multi-disciplinary neighbourhood Peer Forums and Enhanced Peer Forums also help us achieve more ideal outcomes for people by encouraging professional curiosity and ensuring conversations are strengths-based. **CASE STUDY EXAMPLE.**

Bringing the right knowledge and expertise together in the forums allows us to share professional 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 originally in November 2023 and enhanced further in the Autumn of 2024.

We operate daily Peer and Enhanced Peer Forums to ensure robust decision-making is in place based on evidence based, effective, best practice 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 benefit from their own specialised peer forums with significant input and attendance from health colleagues and representatives from Open Mental Health services; this provides significant professional challenge and enables a collaborative, multi-professional approach to be promoted.

Financial assessment and charging policy for care and support

We have a clear and transparent framework for assessing and charging adults for care and support, and also promote the availability of direct payments as part of our 'Money Matters' information sheets: [Adult Social Care information sheets \(somerset.gov.uk\)](https://www.somerset.gov.uk/adult-social-care-information-sheets)

Following the recommendations emerging from a recent audit carried out by an external agency, our Council's Financial Assessments and Benefits (FAB) team have implemented the following measures to better manage and understand our outstanding financial assessments:

- Closer monitoring of the referrals breaking down to both area and individual team members
- Offering not only telephone assessments and physical visits to the client or representative and the development of a digital self-assessment platform to clients and the introduction of a light touch assessments where applicable.

These measures along with a shared team goal, have helped the service reduce its overall waiting list and waiting times; this is especially the case for fairer charging home care visits, although there is some further work to do on reducing the more intensive residential placement assessments.

To further improve performance in this space, we have recruited some additional staff and are implementing a dual training programme for the team to support greater flexibility and capacity to meet demand. We have also taken steps to further promote information sheets via our Customer Contact Centre and across operational social care teams to ensure prompt and effective information-sharing and enhanced our ability to track performance across a range of measures. This is monitored closely and reported as part of our Medium-Term Financial Plan.

We are currently undertaking work to enhance information for the public on 'depleted funds' (capital drops) in response to growing pressures identified in this area.

An event is being organised by Adult Social Care, planned for 25th November 2024, to provide information to the public, our providers, and local councillors to support their understanding of key matters related to financial affairs and Adult Social Care processes. Presentations will take place throughout the day addressing matters such as benefits maximations, developing understanding of Deputyship, Lasting Power of Attorney, Direct Payments, and Continuing Health Care. Several organisations will also be attending to share information and advice to the public to support their understand and knowledge about financial planning for their, or their loved ones, care and support needs.

Provision of independent advocacy

We have a statutory duty to provide advocacy under the Care Act 2014 and involve people in decisions made about them and their care and support. We have a contract with SWAN Advocacy to deliver this service: [Somerset - South West Advocacy Network \(swanadvocacy.org.uk\)](http://Somerset-SouthWestAdvocacyNetwork.org.uk)

The current contract is due to come to an end on March 31st, 2025. We have commenced a full re-commissioning exercise to ensure our advocacy service meets the needs of people eligible for support, is fully compliant with legislation, fit for the future, and delivers best value. We have looked to re-design a new person-centred service specification for the new contract from April 1st, 2025, via an open procurement process, which concluded in September 2024. The successful provider will be announced within the allotted timeline for the procurement exercise.

The service will provide independent advocacy to empower people to express their personal needs and assist them to achieve their rights and entitlements. No matter how complex a person's needs, local authorities are required to assist people to express their wishes and feelings, support them in weighing up their options to make their own decisions. It will assist people to secure relevant information and knowledge thus enabling them to make informed choices for themselves about their care and support needs and promote their health and wellbeing.

Latest 2023/24 Safeguarding Adults Collect data submission demonstrates that 96.7% of adults at risk who lacked capacity to make their own decisions were supported by either family, friends or another advocate, which remains considerably higher than the 2022/23 England average of 73% and regional average of 78%.

1b. Supporting people to live healthier lives

What good looks like: 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.

Our self-assessment score: Evidence shows a good standard

Arrangements to prevent, delay or reduce needs for care and support

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 published 2023-26 [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 work hard 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. This has been recognised through Local Government Association Assurance Peer Challenge in March 2024 as a particular strength for Somerset.



The Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise Sector (VCFSE) sector is recognised as a valued strategic partner with an important contribution to make in shaping, improving and delivering services, and developing and implementing plans to tackle the wider determinants of health.

In September 2023 a [Memorandum of Understanding](#) was signed by Somerset Council, NHS Somerset and voluntary sector representatives. This clearly sets out how we will engage and collaborate with the sector in order to deliver better health and wellbeing outcomes for the people who live here. A Somerset VCSFE Partnership event took place in April 2024 to explore further ways we can support health and wellbeing in Somerset.

We also work closely with [Spark Somerset](#) to facilitate greater join up and support for Somerset's voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise sector. In our new structure, as a unitary authority, Partnerships and Localities will be responsible for the Council's approach to strategic engagement with the VCFSE; community development and engagement; parish development and devolution of assets and services.

A [Somerset Devolution Framework](#) sets out the intentions of the Council to work with city, town and parish councils and builds on our existing relationships with Somerset Association of Local Councils (SALC) and Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC).

[Connect Somerset](#) is about everyone working together to increase early help. This is not a service but a way of working together.

We know families and residents are going through challenging times. Across state funded and community sectors, Somerset services are finding it difficult to meet demand and help those who need support. So Connect Somerset is a big partnership that includes Somerset Council, Somerset NHS, Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprises, and Schools, Colleges and Early Years settings, and more.

Together, we can develop an early help system that works well across all communities that need it.

The [Blueprint for Connect Somerset](#) outlines the culture that we need to adopt to work together across adult and children's services. Ensuring families and residents get more help, personalising care and enabling a new and more efficient way to manage the increased demand and complexity of needs.



This is a collaborative approach between professionals and community groups in Somerset to ensure residents have access to the help they need as soon as possible.

Through the programme we are supporting professionals within Adults and Childrens Services as well as wider into the Council and Integrated Care System to be able to work in this way more easily in the future.

Connect Somerset isn't a service, but there's lots that we add to help the system operate better, both at a local level and county-wide. Much of Connect Somerset is about removing barriers that can stop us from working well together.

Most of the time, we're trying to get out of the way of professionals so they can work well together, for example removing IT or geographic barriers or processes that may prevent them from doing so currently.

Or enabling helpful ways of working, such as by sharing data, identifying local hubs for delivery, connecting to local resources. Our big aim is to increase the help available for families and residents, and how quickly they can access that help. And we're changing lots of small things that will add up to a new way of working across Somerset services for people.



[#Help4All](#) is our universal offer of support to families and residents. We've made it easy to access and navigate, and there's lots here for those who need a bit of extra support, e.g.

- Money
- Food
- Home
- Mental health
- Domestic abuse
- Drugs or alcohol
- Parenting

But if we just sign-post residents, then some will access and some won't, and that widens inequality. What's important is that everyone can access help, so through the Connect Somerset ethos we are enabling the key principles to support relational practice, so that we are being more proactive and compassionate in providing support. Meaning that we can address inequality, increase take up of early help, build resilience and reduce more acute demand to services.

#Help4All

Everyone is impacted by the cost-of-living rising which can put extra pressure on families. Somerset voluntary, community and public services are here to help. We've listed some of the most popular services and support that may be useful for you to know about.
www.connectsomerset.org.uk

Money - Contact Citizens Advice via email or use the daytime/evening AdviceLine on 0800 278 7842 for advice on debt, energy costs, benefits. If you need immediate money for food or heating, you can access the Somerset Household Support Fund, professionals can help you with this, if required. You can find a nearby warm welcome space, or food and activities for eligible children at weekends. You can also seek help with housing benefit, council tax reduction, claiming a discretionary award and public and community transport. As well as support with life long learning, activities and keeping a job.

Food - Find your local food bank (not a professional). Children and young people under 4, you may be eligible for a free school meal.

Home - If you are worried about your home, as you offer help, we offer help. In an emergency you can call 0800 278 7842.

Mental health - Open Access Mental Health Support is available through the Telmi app. For more information, guides and counseling, call 01223 276 892 or visit www.telmi.org.uk. SASP: You can also see a counsellor for free.

Domestic abuse - If you or your family are affected by domestic abuse, you can get help from Somerset Domestic Abuse Service or call 0800 69 49 999 and choose option 2.

Drugs or alcohol - There is advice and support for young people, adults, and their family members if substance misuse is a problem. Contact Somerset Drug & Alcohol Service or phone 0300 303 8788 any time.

Parenting - Parents, carers and grandparents can #LearnForLove (access code: dragon) to support children from bump to teenager. Young Somerset also offer parent workshops and wider parent led work with mental health and early years.

Get free support and advice on:

£, Apple, Home, Brain, #, Hand, Dragon

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 an Intermediate Care Community SPOC (Single Point of Contact) 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 has 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 retained our social care presence in local hospitals throughout the pandemic and continue to have dedicated workers in the acute sites, working alongside allied professionals on the wards, in emergency departments and in the Transfer of care hubs. We know that people who have no medical need for an admission have better outcomes when they are not admitted to hospital and outcomes are further improved when they can return home. The diversion work within our ASC Health Interface Service, is an exciting part of the streamlined HIS service, and social care has become an integrated part of the team of people working together to turn people, who do not need an admission, around at the front door of the acute hospital and get them back home as quickly as possible. This ensures that acute hospital beds are available for those people who require treatment. We are now part of the High Intensity Use Group (HIUG) who identify people presenting differently or more frequently than expected to our Emergency Departments at Yeovil District Hospital (YDH) and Musgrove Park Hospital (MPH) creating high intensity use.

The primary focus of the HIUG is the care of patients with complex health and care needs, with all members committing to the opportunity for shared learning, service development and flexibility from the conversations within the group.

Additionally, our adult social care triage teams are working to develop and enhance the current data intelligence available for contacts received by the service, with an objective to improve the categorisation of the 'type' of demands coming into the service to be able to understand the trends and flow within the respective neighbourhood teams. This will enable a deeper understanding of need at neighbourhood or Primary Care Network (PCN) level and help shape and inform the preventative approach required to manage demand more effectively and ultimately provide information and support the Somerset population earlier in their health and social care journey. Teams are also 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).

[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.

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 will launch a £5m NIHR (National Institute of Health Research) funded collaboration with University of West of England, University College London and Spark Somerset to build the capacity of the Council to do research spanning all functions that have an influence on the building blocks of health.

Provision and impact of intermediate care and reablement services

Somerset's [Intermediate Care](#) services are run jointly by local NHS Trusts and Somerset Council, and bring together other providers including Care Homes, domiciliary care agencies and voluntary services. In partnership, we support acute hospital discharges and prevent admissions. Intermediate Care provides support to help people:

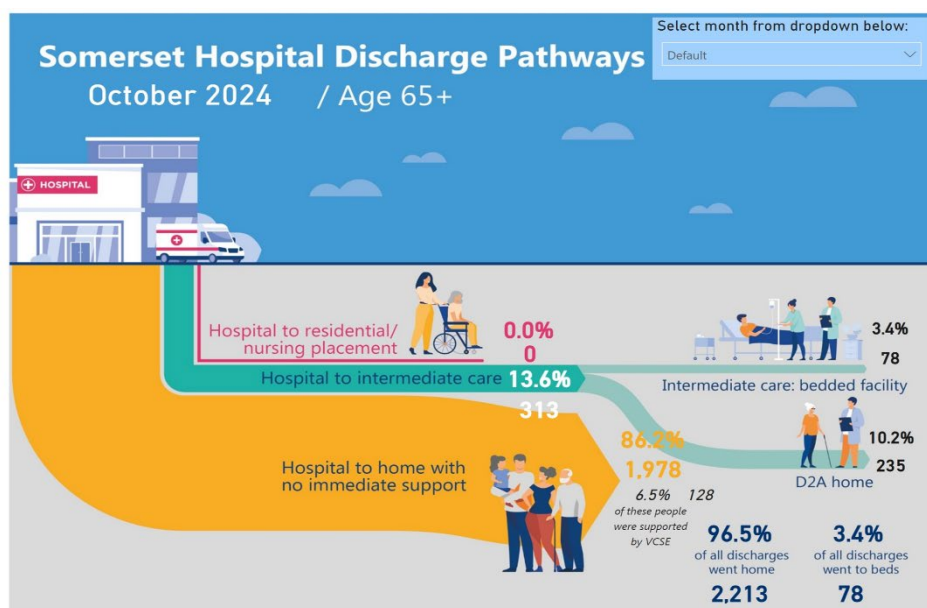
- Remain at home when they start to find things more difficult;
- Recover after a fall, acute illness, or an operation;
- Avoid going into hospital unnecessarily;
- Return home more quickly following a hospital stay.

Centred on a 'home is best' ethos, our 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 focused 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. 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.

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 results are already evident; in June 2024 over 30% more people were successfully reabled consequent to work we are progressing.

During 2023/24, we supported 83% of individuals aged 65 and over to be discharged back home from hospital each month - over 24,100 people.

Latest monthly performance for October 2024 provides further evidence of our discharge pathway performance and activity: **CASE STUDY EXAMPLES**



Pathway	National Target	Actual Performance November
0	90%	86.2%
1	5%	10.2%
2	4%	3.4%
3	1%	

Our performance against national targets (John Bolton's model) in October 2024 95% of people should return to their normal place of residence and we have achieved 96.5%. 5% of people should be supported on a bedded pathway (less is best) and we have achieved 3.4%.

We have collaboratively developed a Transfer of Care hub in Somerset, with teams working very hard since its introduction in December 2023. We are continuing to use a test, learn and change process to improve performance and achieve greater consistency across the county. Work is also now progressing on piloting a new community reablement route/offer as part of our transformation programme.

Access to equipment and home adaptations

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. There are ongoing plans to open a SILC facility as part of the Somerset Academy for Health & Social Care Training, based at the refurbished Bridgwater Hospital. This will support the Somerset Coast area which has a significant elderly demographic population. Our SILCs help people find equipment / technology 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 continue to grow, increasing by 50% during 2023/24. We average 161 appointment requests per month, and customer feedback is very positive.

SILC intervention was projected to have delayed 77,750 projected home care at a cost of £1.59m 2023/24. **CASE STUDY EXAMPLE**

An 87-year-old lady with severe inflammatory osteoarthritis, a tumour on her right hip, kidney and bladder trouble, leg ulcers, asthma, and fibromyalgia, is struggling with mobility and transfers. Her daughter Karen visits daily to provide support. At SILC Shepton, a right Fischer handle walking stick, a 2-in-1 bed rail, an adjustable toilet surround, a 2-inch raised toilet seat, a commode, a standard shower seat, and a vertical grab rail were issued to help her manage daily activities independently. She is advised to keep her legs moving and to stand from her armchair whenever possible to maintain muscle strength. Equipment provided: Bed lever, grab rail, parking stool, toilet frame, commode, raised toilet seat, shower stool

Cost of equipment - £164.11

Cost prevention - 7hrs care per week prevented (potentially with personal care, bed transfers and toileting) £155.12 per week. To date this has avoided 88.6 weeks of commissioned care costing £13,960.80

SILC BI Report Oct 2024

Between April and September 2024:

- 212 customer feedback survey responses were received (33 relating to Shepton SILC; 42 Wellington SILC, and 136 for Yeovil SILC).
- 100% of people advised that SILC staff understood what was important to them about their day to day living.
- 99% of people felt that SILC staff were able to make suggestions that would make their daily living easier.
- 99% felt that the information they had received before their SILC appointment was easy to understand.
- 100% would recommend the service to friends and family members.
- The average overall visit rating was 4.93 out of 5.

Over the coming year our focus is on growing the offer further dovetailing the neighbourhood model plus increasing the pull to bring in our community partners.

“The informative meeting opened up a new world of help and advice I didn't know existed. Kate was friendly and made me feel listened to. Also, we know the SILC is there if we need support or advice again. The outcome was more successful than we could have imagined”

Adult Social Care Stakeholder Feedback, Feb 2024

Technology Enabled Care

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 a dedicated Advanced Practitioner Occupational Therapist lead for the development of TEC in Somerset. User led design is always at the heart of our intentions and we applied this when scoping and planning our new TEC service, engaging with residents of Somerset to explore their opinions and needs, utilising their feedback on how TEC could help them live safely and independently [Technology Enabled Care Workshops August 2023 \(youtube.com\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...).

We have a comprehensive training programme for frontline staff to undertake on TEC, and awareness has been raised further by providing a suite of resources such as a dedicated SharePoint site just for TEC and online and in person TEC awareness sessions. We are about to develop a shared e-learning module with NHS Somerset which will help to align practice development and skills and knowledge across the two organisations, and this will also be available when the Somerset Health and Care Academy is built and up and running in Bridgwater.

We have recruited members of staff with an interest in TEC to become 'TEC Influencers' who play a key role in the strategic and ongoing engagement of TEC operationally.

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.

We have commissioned two TEC providers to deliver and install technology in the homes of the people we support following the identification of an assessed 'Care Act' need: Somerset Lifeline – provider for monitored / linked devices. Medequip – provider for standalone devices which are NOT linked to a monitoring centre. We have created bespoke catalogues showcasing the range of devices available from both providers with the details and guidance on how these devices can be used. Our target for our first year (end of March 2025) is that we will have supported 200 individuals in the community whose care has been maintained or delayed due to TEC. We are on target to achieve this.

*Raymond, who has a history of asthma, atrial fibrillation, hypertension, lymphoma, and recurrent falls, initially received a comprehensive care package. After a hospital stay and a temporary placement, he returned home with a care package that support four times a day. To ensure his safety and facilitate access for his carers, a lifeline and key safe were installed. Despite these health challenges, Raymond, with the unwavering support of his social worker, focused on maintaining his independence. Recently he has decided he would like to try a Somerset Lifeline instead of the daily visits, he wanted to feel secure and know someone would be able to help him if he fell. As a consequence, he no longer needs the daily visits. Since having it installed, he has told us he felt secure and reassured by having the lifeline, knowing it was there for any emergencies. **TEC User Story – Raymond***

Following the unitary reorganisation, Somerset's three 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.

We have aligned 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.

2024 [regional analysis](#) across the Southwest region revealed Somerset to be progressing well in this space, with a 'strong foundation on digital leadership', 'safe practice' and 'healthy foundations'. This has helped us identify our strengths as well as our ongoing priorities for development. We are soon to repeat this exercise in February 2025 to review our progress and help us further plan our digital aims and ambitions.

Our Independent Living Centre offer has TEC incorporated into it (see below SILC Story of Betty); this supports our strategic focus on prevention and health promotion.

Betty is aged 87 years and has Dementia. She lives with daughter and was attending one of the SILCs for advice on bathing equipment. She was very anxious and found car journeys stressful to the point where she could not participate in the assessment when she arrived at the SILC.

"The OT undertaking the appointment decided to see how Betty would react to the Robopet Cat to see if it would help her. As soon as the cat was placed on her lap Betty started to relax, stroke the cat, and talk to him. With the help of the cat Betty was able to start answering some questions and interacting with her daughter and the OT about the bath equipment.

Betty's daughter had never seen her mother react like that before and so went on to purchase one for Betty. The Robocat is bringing her a lot of comfort, companionship, and fun. It delivers a soothing, joyful experience that inspires her to smile, laugh and think of fond memories. Her daughter reports that it can often help when Betty is anxious and they always take it now on car trips as it makes the whole journey less stressful for her and during the day at home, it helps to occupy her while her daughter prepares meals and other daily tasks, supporting her carers role".

SILC User Feedback April 2024

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.

They take 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.

They train and mentor 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.

We recognise housing as being a fundamental building block of health and care ('every decision about care is a decision about housing'). 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 Better Futures/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 and are consulting on plans to bring housing within the adults structure to further support close alignment.

Provision of accessible information and advice

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.

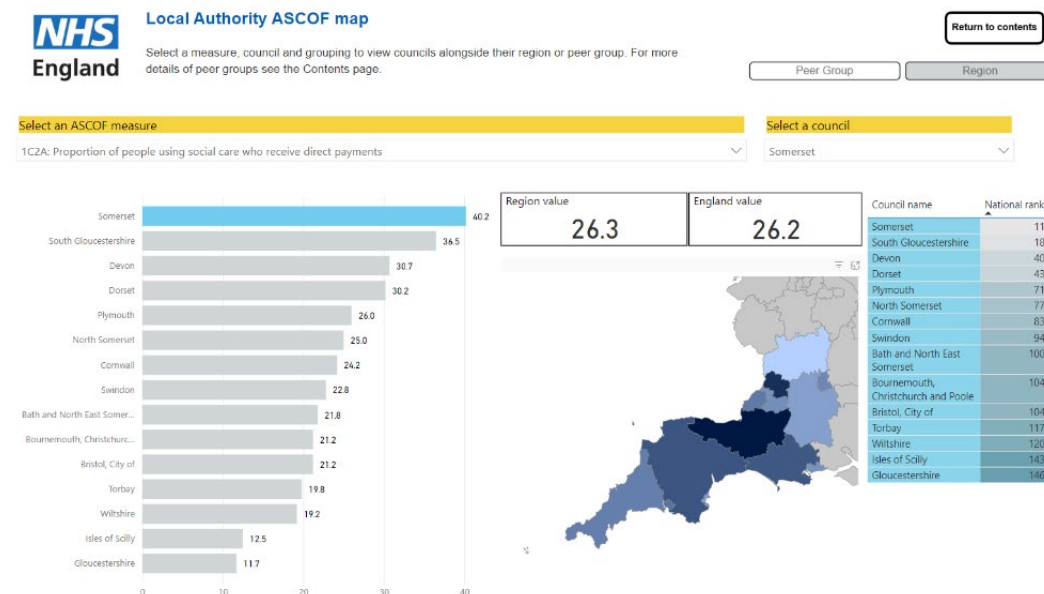
This includes [Connect Somerset](#), and our self-assessment website for equipment and technology to make life easier and keep people independent: [Medequip - Manage At Home - AskSARA \(livingmadeeasy.org.uk\)](#)

An annual [Care Choices Directory](#) is maintained to provide essential and specific guidance to support people with arranging care, and the Council's website also includes information relating to care and support for adults, including some easy read documents (e.g. Direct Payments).

However, we recognise there are further opportunities to improve the accessibility of information and advice, awareness of our prevention offer, and further promoting and celebrating our adult social care in Somerset and acknowledge that the proportion of people who use services and carers who report finding it easy to find information about support is below national and regional averages. Work has commenced with the Council's Digital Services team to support this activity, which will be informed by the views of people with lived experience through our Working Together Board throughout 2024.

Direct payments

Somerset has a much higher than average take-up of direct payments and is currently ranked 11th nationally. This is a good indicator of how the Local Authority is helping people exercise independence through autonomy, choice and control, and research shows people who use direct payments generally achieve better outcomes. Much of this success is directly associated with the development and success of Somerset's thriving micro-provider offer which supports the rurality of our county.



On 31 March 2024, there were 660,460 people receiving long-term local authority provided or organised adult social care across England - 483,255 people were receiving support in the community.

Below shows community care within the Southwest from January to March 2024:

Support Setting	Age Group	31/01/2024 [p]	29/02/2024 [p]	31/03/2024 [p]	% Increase (Jan-Mar)
Community	All	44,045	44,235	44,385	0.8%
Community	18 to 24	3,065	3,100	3,145	2.6%
Community	25 to 44	9,505	9,525	9,535	0.3%
Community	45 to 64	10,625	10,630	10,665	0.4%
Community	65 to 74	5,260	5,290	5,290	0.6%
Community	75 to 84	7,440	7,520	7,580	1.9%
Community	85 to 94	6,885	6,915	6,920	0.5%
Community	95 and above	1,285	1,270	1,265	-1.6%

The table below evidences the growth of our Direct Payment scheme over recent years:

Period	Number of clients	New clients <i>Not appearing in previous year</i>
2018/19	1,597	361
2019/20	1,814	536
2020/21	1,937	481
2021/22	2,033	523
2022/23	2,135	621
2023/24	2,153	418

Since 1st April 2023, Somerset has run a [Direct Payment Plus Project provided by Enham Trust](#), providing options for people who want to exercise strong influence over their support but who cannot manage the responsibilities that comes with a Direct Payment themselves and have no one available to support them.

We have 25 people benefitting from this pilot, with better outcomes being achieved due to the bespoke nature of the support found for these people. One person has already achieved independence within 12 months and no longer has support from Somerset Council [Direct Payment Plus pilot](#).

Previously housebound for over 2 years, due to high anxiety caused by Covid this person now attends regular art classes and is looking for a maths course to enable them to return to work. They described the pilot as ‘life changing’. The benefit for us as a Council is that we are saving approx. £1,650 per week with Direct Payment Plus compared to traditionally commissioned services which are less able to offer the same degree of flexibility and choice for individuals. [DP-Plus-Case-Studies Nov 24 without video links.docx](#)

Monthly ‘Direct Payment Drop-ins’ take place for our adult social care staff to help support confidence in being able to recommend direct payments, explain what they are and what services can be procured through a direct payment as well those that can’t, and help reinforce the process for setting up a direct payment.

1c. Equity in experience and outcomes

What good looks like: 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.

Our self-assessment score: Evidence shows a good standard

Understanding and reducing barriers to care and support, and reducing inequalities

Our Adult Social Care service undertakes and commissions a wide range of activity that seeks to understand and reduce barriers or inequalities local residents may experience. Some prime examples include:

[Open Mental Health](#) -

In 2019, the NHS produced its long-term plan committing to parity of esteem between physical health and mental health services.

Somerset was one of the places being offered the opportunity to transform the community mental health services offer by adopting a partnership approach between statutory and the voluntary sector creating the Open Mental Health.

The Open Mental Health is a collaboration of local voluntary organisations, the NHS, social care, Somerset Council, and individuals with lived experience of mental health illness. By working together in partnership, the Alliance promotes a ‘**no wrong door**’ for anyone who needs help.

The shared ambition is to ensure that people living with mental health problems get the right support at the right time. The Alliance supports people to live a full life, by enabling access to specialist mental health services, housing support, debt and employment advice, volunteering opportunities, peer support, community activities and physical exercise, to help support and improve their wellbeing and quality of life.

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 the county's mental health system.

The collaboration has already helped remove many of the barriers to support and thresholds for treatment, reducing waiting times and giving early access to primary care assessments and interventions.

Headway Somerset -

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.

Following a commissioning exercise in 2024 and in collaboration with Headway Somerset, it was agreed that the organisation would join the Somerset Specialist Framework as a non- CQC provider. The commissioning move aims to support Headway Somerset to gradually increase its presence in Somerset and crucially make its expertise more accessible to people and their families.

Somerset Council has also agreed a one -off grant to support the organisation to develop their local community offer and the support for people who do not meet the Care Act eligibility criteria but need still some guidance and advice.

These offers (community based or via the specialist framework) complement the Hospital Liaison service provided also by Headway Somerset and funded by the Integrated Care Board (ICB). The hospital Liaison service provides support on 2 acute hospital wards (Musgrove and the Yeovil) and in the Somerset Neurological Rehabilitation Centre (SNRC) in Dene Barton.

As a result of the ongoing support provided to the development of Headway Somerset, they are in a good position to offer training opportunities to health and social care practitioners and respond to the learnings that emerged from a 2016 Safeguarding Adults review which placed an importance in raising awareness about Acquired Brain Injury but also the importance of a partnership approach. Headway have developed strong links with the Somerset Council Learning and Development team and have provided regular interventions (via the Carnival of Practice and Lunch Time Drop-in sessions) to support the understanding of what it means to live with an Acquired Brain Injury and the impact this can have not only on the individuals but also their families.

Mental Health Step Down Provision -

The Step Up and Step-Down services (which were jointly known as the Spring Project) were introduced at pace during the Covid pandemic. Both services, one to prevent admission on psychiatric wards (Step Up) and the other to support timely discharge from hospitals proved to be successful models of support.

It was agreed in 2022 with our colleagues from Somerset Foundation Trust that they would continue to fund and support the provision of a Step-Up provision, and that Somerset Council would take on the commissioning responsibility for the Step-Down service.

The Mental Health Step-Down service has become an integral part of the mental health pathway in Somerset and has reduced the number of individuals considered as having No Criteria to Reside (NCTR) in psychiatric hospitals.

The service not only supports a better system flow it also promotes better outcomes for individuals who require a recovery period away from an acute setting and who also require support with Housing. The service demonstrates access to universal services with no additional requirement placed on adult social care services.

The provision further demonstrates a commitment to parity of esteem with an 'intermediate' care offer and an alignment to the Adult Social Care strategy and priorities with mental health clients getting the right support, in the right place at the right time.

A contract extension was agreed this year with the view to start a recommissioning exercise early 2025.

During the assessment and before admission, it was identified that if some of XX's forensic and drug using patterns came to the fore, he could potentially be high risk for the service. Our risk assessment identified some changes that could be made to his methadone prescribing allowing daily supervised pickups, mitigating the risk of having large quantities of methadone on the premises. We also assisted in the transfer of XX from Bridgewater SDAS to Yeovil SDAS allowing him simple access to drug and alcohol services if required.

Upon admission, XX expressed an interest in going into residential drug and alcohol treatment. He was introduced to the Mind building where he could have access to a range of social prescribing activities, which he appeared to enjoy and engage actively with. During this period, it was identified that XX was engaging with some of the local street drinking community and potentially was slipping into old patterns of behaviour, which given his history was concerning. The service was at this point newly engaged with Yeovil's Crime Reduction Team who were instrumental in providing us with information about the people the client was engaged with; this along with a positive relationship with XX and his own willingness to change meant he was able to turn this around and foster some healthier relationships in the community. During this time XX was engaged in a community project during which he built some garden furniture for communal area of the shared courtyard within the project. He has

also asked about peer support opportunities within the Mind project for when he leaves the Step-Down service.

XX's housing pathway was straightforward and once emergency- banded, he was successfully housed in a property in Yeovil. As the client had a history of rough sleeping, he has been put forward for the Centre for Homelessness Impact Personalised Budgets study where he could receive a grant to help with his move on and recovery.

Since moving on, XX continues to engage with the services in Mind and has made with our service regularly as part of our transitional contact work. He appears to be fully engaged in the settling in process in his new home.

(Step-Down- Peer Recovery worker Oct 24)

Step Together Service -

Somerset Council commissions The Creative Solutions for Complex Adults service. The service is known in Somerset as the Step-Together service.

The service supports a cohort of people with multiple disadvantages and exclusions who find themselves as a result homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.

Actions deriving from the Somerset Council's financial emergency impacted significantly the service budget. Commissioners are actively supporting the provider with the remodelling of their service and exploring all options to mitigate the impact on existing clients.

The very nature of the service and its specialism calls for a system partnership contract. Discussion is on the way with relevant partners to ensure that Somerset continues to have a meaningful service delivery in the future.

XX was in his early 30s at the time and had a long history of being street homeless due to past trauma and addiction issues since the age of 18. He found being in supported accommodation challenging and he had a history of non-engagement with services across Somerset. XX also had a history of using crack and cocaine and wasn't engaging with services like SDAS, struggled with his mental health and had previously attempted to end his life on two occasions.

When I first met XX, his lifestyle was very chaotic. He was rough sleeping between Bridgwater and Taunton. Due to his social anxiety and fears of being judged, it took some time to build a relationship. XX attempted to end his life in 2023 and was admitted to Musgrove Park hospital, where he spent some time in intensive care. Following discharge from hospital, XX continued to struggle to engage with services and find himself back in a cycle of being accommodated, and then back on the streets. XX faced many blocks and barriers when it came to engaging with other services. Due to being street homeless and having no phone, he would often miss appointments, he would miss things like script reviews. He was often closed by services due to non-engagement. In October 2023, XX started to rough sleep in the Minehead area as he wanted to try and break the cycle he had been in since the age of 18, move away from

unhealthy relationships and felt he had the right support from Step Together to start making changes for himself.

From here, the amazing work started with XX, and we created a set of achievable goals to work towards. XX was referred into Creative Solutions, which is a monthly strategic meeting held by Step Together. XX attended the first meeting and spoke openly about his wishes to have his own accommodation. XX continued to engage weekly with myself, and we started to bring in a range of support networks. We were advised by the RSI team that the private letting team was open to providing XX with an opportunity of being in his own accommodation. Before the move into his new accommodation, we held a meeting to prepare a service level agreement. XX was made aware that part of the terms and conditions of this move would be to continue engaging with all services involved.

Since his move into the bungalow in May 2024, XX continues to thrive and has been engaging very well with all services involved. It's been very rewarding to see the changes he has made and shows with the right support networks in place, anything is possible.

(Step-Together recovery coach- September 24)

Employment Support - We 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. Adult Social Care funding for both services ends in August 2024, and we are working with the market to develop and fund future arrangements for employment opportunities for Somerset residents.

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.

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. We have previously held team days in which we invited people with lived experience for their views on what a good Local Authority Learning Disability service should 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 ideas we are putting into our practice as a result:

- Changing terminology - using “people I support” instead of “cases” in supervision notes and instead of Service Users in conversation or discussion.

- 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.
- 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.

We want to ensure all our information is accessible and in appropriate formats. To this end, we are working with colleagues on the Adult Social Care & Support Digital Website build as part of the councils wider Digital Transformation Strategy. Our mission is to provide strengths-based social work practice, focused on the outcomes people want to achieve to lead a life as fulfilling and independent as possible.

Reviews undertaken by the teams are leading to an increase in care 33% less often than previously (when undertaken by non-specialist social work teams). In addition, we have created specialist strengths-based peer forums (attended also by the Preparing For Adulthood team) to 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/ Preparing For Adulthood 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. The impact of this approach is making a difference to people's lives. Our data consistently shows an increasing number of people benefiting from more independent outcomes as a result.

The creation of specialist, dedicated teams has reinvigorated existing relationships with service user and care networks and care providers. For example, we are currently engaged in a Trusted Assessor pilot project with one of our biggest care providers to roll out a strengths-based approach to provider reviews. Individuals have their care and support reviewed using SMART goals and a progression plan, leading to an increased level of independence. Teams have enjoyed a closer working relationship, making joint decisions to enable the best outcomes for the people we support.

Anonymised Case Study



William is a middle-aged man who lives in a Supported Living Home in Frome.

William is very interested in moving out of Supported Living **and living in his own home**, but his review has been **overdue for over a year**.

He is employed in a shop in Frome for two days per week and is exploring the opportunity to do volunteering with the Park Rangers and a Cafe.

William likes going out with his friends but finds it frustrating how he can't bring his friends over in the evening due to the fact that it would disturb other residents of the supported living accommodation. Although he has some needs that require 1:1 support, William wants to learn how to do things independently.

As part of the Targeted Reviews process, William was identified during one of the desktop review days as having particularly **high potential to progress**, and this was confirmed by a Progression Review carried out by the **Trusted Assessor**.

William is now being supported to learn how to maintain a cleaning schedule and to make an application to Homefinder so that very soon, he can achieve one of the goals that is most important to him – **living in his own home**.

Because we were able to make use of a Trusted Assessor and could target those who had the **greatest potential to benefit from a review**, we have been able to help William achieve a goal that will change his life.



The teams work very closely with system partners. For example, we have a close working relationship with commissioners and health colleagues and are committed to improving outcomes for individuals across the health and social care system.

We attend the Transforming Care Board, Dynamic Risk Meetings and LeDeR meetings to help improve outcomes for individuals. We have a dedicated Practice Development Advanced Practitioner who is engaged in focused LeDer & SARS reviews; thematic learning from these reviews is disseminated across teams and wider service including through 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.

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 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 (GLOs) 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.

Adult social care Sensory Loss teams recently became part of the Somerset Independent Living Centre (SILC), which is overseen by the Principal Occupational Therapist. This has strengthened our preventative and therapy-led services. The SILC is a centre that provides a range of services and equipment for people with disabilities and long-term conditions, including sensory loss. The Sensory Loss teams offer an opportunity to make a real difference by identifying simple but life-changing solutions through signposting, equipment provision, and technology-based solutions for people experiencing sight, hearing and dual sensory loss -described recently as “*opening up the world again!*”. The teams consist of:

- Sensory Loss Social Workers: These are qualified social workers who have specialist knowledge and skills in working with people with sensory loss. They can provide assessments, care and support planning, reviews, safeguarding, and advocacy.
- Rehabilitation Officers for Visual Impairment (ROVIs): These are trained professionals who can provide rehabilitation and mobility training for people with vision loss. They can teach skills such as using a white cane, reading Braille, using magnifiers, and accessing technology.
We have recently introduced an apprenticeship role for another Rehabilitation Officers for Visual Impairment (ROVI)
- Sensory loss adult social care practitioners: work along side the social worker, providing sensory loss assessments within the SILC service. As well as the assessment they can give information and advice, equipment demonstrations, and signpost to other services.

The Team works closely with our customer contact centre to ensure the right information and advice is given at point of contact and that those who are eligible to apply for a certificate of visual impairment (CVI) are supported to do so. The team along with customer services ensure we identify people who are deafblind in our area and maintain a register of their needs.

“I have recently been registered severely sight impaired and Carol’s excellent teaching has enabled me to now get out and about with confidence. She is a clear and compassionate teacher, easy to communicate with and has significantly improved my ability to lead a “normal” life. I am very grateful to her for her service”

Adult Social Care Stakeholder Feedback, March 2024

Inclusion and accessibility arrangements

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. The wider Council also has access to translation and interpretation services through our contract with Word360.

The Council took 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 are supporting the Council's EDI delivery for our residents and staff by progressing and improving areas identified as requiring further development. The Internal Race Audit 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 [Councils 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 1st April 2024 till 31st 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 15th 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'.

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.

The action plan is being overseen by the equality function (which sits within the Council's 'Strategy, Workforce and Localities' service) and the Member Equality Steering Group.

In April 2024 the Council completed an external audit of its Disability Confident Leader evaluation consisting of an independent auditor, representatives from the Department of Work and Pensions, Dimension and our staff network. This audit

confirmed that the Council had met the criteria to accredited as a Disability Confident Leader. Through this audit we have identified several pieces of work that will need to be completed, particularly around our suppliers embracing Disability Confident and the positive impact it can have on their staff.

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 Council benefits from a Business Intelligence Unit with a corresponding website to support its work: 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.

The work we deliver is focused on giving people choice and control; co-production is something we evidence daily through our assessments, reviews, safeguarding activity and quality assurance. We are committed to further enhancing opportunities for meaningful co-production, ensuring that 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. This work is part of our Strategy Delivery Plan and is being supported through our 'Working Together Board' arrangements.

We also recognise that the diversity of our population (and health and social care workforce) is shifting despite the fact that 94% of Somerset's population is white British and 96% of residents speak English as their main language which are much higher proportions than equivalent figures for England and Wales as a whole. We are committed to enhancing and further embedding a commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion throughout our organisation, with learning informing our recently updated [Adult Social Care Workforce Strategy for 2024-26](#), especially given our increased overseas recruitment activity.

2. Providing support in Somerset



This theme explores the following quality statements:

- Care provision, integration and continuity
- Partnerships and communities

Our key strengths

- ✓ A **thriving network of micro-enterprises** offering personalised care within local communities
- ✓ **Low levels of unmet need and care package contract handbacks** consequent to a range of focused and informed commissioning work
- ✓ Many examples of **collaborative partnership working, commissioning arrangements and integration** to meet population needs
- ✓ **Robust and effective multi-agency arrangements to support the quality of commissioned services** and improve local provision, with no CQC-rated inadequate services
- ✓ Evidence of effective **work undertaken to address and support current and future care workforce needs** as a wider health and care system
- ✓ Jointly run **Intermediate Care Services supporting hospital discharge** and preventing admissions
- ✓ People's independence promoted through the assessment and delivery of **housing options and adaptations**

Our key improvement activity

- Mitigating the care market sustainability risks associated with a **challenged financial environment** wherever possible
- **Enhancing our existing reablement response and offer** to help reduce demand for bed-based support and further increase people's independence
- Promoting wider understanding and involvement of our commissioning strategy and intentions to enable a clear direction of travel
- Seizing the opportunities presented by becoming a Unitary Council and the wider ongoing Council structural re-design activity to further enhance integrated care and support services in partnership with other departments, including **housing and planning**
- Further exploring **innovation in technology**

2a. Care Provision, Integration and continuity

What good looks like: 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.

Our self-assessment score: Evidence shows a good standard

Understanding local needs for care and support

The Council benefits from a Business Intelligence Unit with a corresponding website to support its work www.somersetintelligence.org.uk

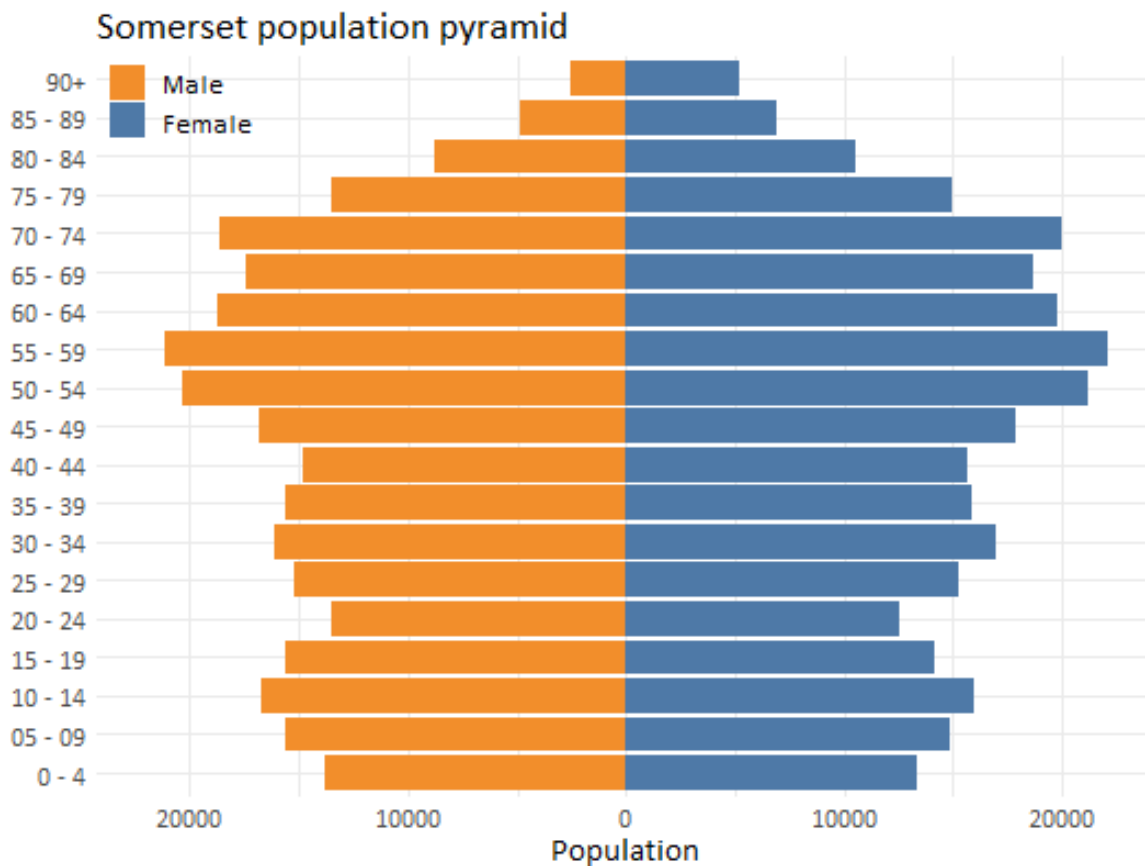
The range of local, regional and national data and demographic profiles supports the development of annual [Joint Strategic Needs Assessments](#) and feeds into a variety of supportive information used to inform our equalities impact assessments, strategic planning and other key documentation and research.



2021 Census data reveals the population of Somerset to be 571,600, an increase of around 41,600 people since 2011. This is a rise of 7.8% since 2011.

Our population profile is older than the England average, with 25% being over 65. Over the next 25 years we expect a significant rise in our older population, with a doubling in the proportion of those over 75, compared with an overall population rise of 15%. As our population changes, the support people need from our local services is also changing.

The population pyramid below shows that for both male and female sexes the largest age groups are among the older age bands. The age bands with the highest population are 50-54 and 55-59.



People are living longer, and more people are living with long-term conditions. As a result, the Local Authority and our partners need to work differently, providing more care and preventative support in people's homes and local communities, and working more effectively in partnership.

Somerset has less deprivation than the England average - approximately 10% of the Somerset population fall into the England Core 20 most deprived group, which are mainly centred in urban areas. There is a lot of rural deprivation which is not as extreme but exacerbated by poor transport and access to services and digital exclusion, especially in West Somerset and coastal areas.

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.

Market shaping and commissioning to meet local needs

Alongside our Market Position Statement, our Adult Social Care Commissioning Strategy (2024-29) brings together our ambitions and approach under three central themes:

- Prevention and early help;
- Care and support;
- Specialist care and support.

This strategy outlines our vision and approach to commissioning Adult Social Care services in Somerset. It aims to meet the care needs of our population and facilitate the co-production of services. Our strategy is built on the principles of collaboration, partnership and a shared and informed understanding of future population needs.

Ensuring sufficient capacity in local services to meet demand

Whilst we have capacity in the care home market in Somerset to support system flow, we had recognised that affordability of that capacity was an issue. To mitigate this, our adult social care commissioners worked with the biggest provider in Somerset to agree a fee rate that was in excess of our published rate but was considered to be affordable. This arrangement worked really successfully to speed up discharges from hospitals and pathway beds. It also had an impact on the rest of the market as many more providers agreed to work within more affordable rates in order to ensure they were not operating with too many vacancies. This impact has continued beyond the winter of 2023/24, and we are now able to secure care home places for people much quicker than at this point last year.

The number of vacancies available to the local authority has more than doubled since reporting last year as a result of the work described.

During 2023/24, we also supported additional long-term bedded capacity working in partnership with Intermediate Care to decommission 1-2-1 short term pathway beds. This was supported by a recovering home care market, and greatly improved capacity to support people home from hospital, therefore reducing reliance on winter discharging bed pathways. The reduction in winter escalation beds opened up opportunities to make better use of our care home market. The activity had neutral impact on system flow, gave assured capacity, and enabled long term delays to convert to long term beds enabling us to make better use of the market for both individuals funded by the Local Authority funded and self-funders.

There is currently an oversupply of capacity in Somerset's home care market meaning that no one is waiting for support that will enable them to remain in their own home. This has been partly supported by overseas sponsorship recruitment of carers. The average time it takes to source a package of care is 2 days from referral to start date and this has been the situation for the past year.

We have recommissioned the contracts for care at home in Somerset from April 2024, and as part of this we are committed to working with local home care companies. This will lead to a stable market of providers who understand Somerset and protect the market from further excess capacity that could impact the financial sustainability of all. We anticipate demand for care at home will grow and need to have a thriving home care market to meet this future demand. 100% of the care commissioned through our contract is at Somerset Councils set fee rate and therefore is affordable.

Somerset is a very rural county, and there will always be certain areas where capacity is a challenge. We are working to improve this via the continuing growth of our community services and Micro Providers.

There is availability of Nursing beds across Somerset to meet expected demand. As at the start of May 2024, 13% of Nursing beds were vacant/admittable, and we estimate that 195 of these would be available for local authority placements. The work we did with our care home market last autumn to bring cost expectations down has led to more vacancies being available to Somerset Council than were reported last year.

There is also availability of Residential beds across Somerset to meet expected demand. As at the start of May 2024, 13% of Residential beds were vacant/admittable and we estimate that 265 of these would be available for local authority placements. As with Nursing Care, we are very confident that the work undertaken means there is sufficient capacity available to meet demand in 2024/25 and beyond.

Extra Care Housing (ECH) currently supports 504 tenancies over 14 schemes. Schemes range from the largest scheme of 66 tenancies to the smallest 24. The average size of an ECH scheme is 36 tenancies. The size of the schemes reflects the population for each area and the rurality of Somerset. Our Market Sustainability and Improvement Fund Capacity Plan return, submitted in June 2024, outlined 38 vacancies across all 14 schemes ECH, with the majority of these in one particular area, and all schemes experiencing increased turnover during winter months.

We are committed to re-designing and recommissioning 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.

Having listened to care provider feedback about our previous procurement framework, we have also introduced a more robust process to support the sourcing and monitoring of specialist services as part of the implantation of a new Dynamic Purchasing System from April 2024. This offers us greater transparency about care delivery locally, supports us with effective contract management, and informs analysis of market gaps or need.

We have also been working with landlords to remove voids and decommission services that we have agreed with care providers and landlords are unsuitable for the delivery of modern care and support services, primarily within supported living services operated by the provider that our former in-house services for adults with learning disabilities transferred to in 2017. This will result in our numerical capacity dropping in the short term during 2024/25, although the capacity in real terms will remain stable as these voids were no longer suitable for use. A new scheme that was due to open during 2023/24 is yet to be completed due to planning delays linked to nutrient mitigation and other issues.

Ensuring quality of local services

Very clear and robust arrangements are in place to monitor the quality of local services, take effective action where concerns are identified, and support improvement activity. There is a joined-up and unified approach with the NHS, and a mutually-supportive approach in place which allows effective sharing and acting on information and the avoiding of duplication. This was recognised by the Local Government Association's Assurance Peer Challenge team as being an important contributory factor in the comparatively high levels of good or better CQC-rated active social care services locally, with local performance exceeding national averages. There is currently no inadequate-rated provision, and arrangements are in place to ensure placements are managed or temporarily ceased pending quality or safety improvements being progressed.

Somerset Council's Care Provider Quality Assurance team is very passionate about what they do and, whilst the team is small, receives excellent stakeholder feedback about its work and impact.

In 2023/24, stakeholder feedback analysis revealed that 15% of *all* feedback received by the Council's Adult Social Care service was associated with this team's activity, and 97.5% of all responses relating to the team rated the team's support as either Good or Excellent. Since April 2024 100% of feedback for the Quality Assurance team is rated as good or excellent.

"We would like to take the opportunity to record how calmly and professionally Christine has been throughout this process. It has been quite a journey for the whole team and with the great support of Christine and her guidance to help us through to where we are now. We would like to thank her for all the support and belief in us"

Care Provider feedback, September 2024

Together with NHS Somerset ICB, we have invested in PAMMS (Provider Assessment and Market Management Solutions) technology as a mechanism to support a consistent approach to quality monitoring. Quarterly returns are also gathered from across the different provider registration types to help us monitor performance trends and risks and provide a partnership response to mitigate or address these.

Our multi-agency Commissioning and Quality Board, which includes membership from the Care Quality Commission, meets on a quarterly basis to monitor the state of the Somerset care market through latest data and intelligence, and to make evidence-based decisions where we have any providers of concern.

We also regularly monitor the feedback we receive from our communities to drive continuous improvement across all our services. [The experience of people using our services 2023 24](#) . [Experience of people using our services Q2 2024-25](#)

Ensuring local services are sustainable

In addition to the work described above about how we ensure quality of local services, which contributes to monitoring their sustainability, there continues to be a strong appreciation of, and commitment to, addressing both current and future workforce needs as a wider health and care system in Somerset.

Whilst we are very proud of our care sector, which benefits from higher-than-average CQC-rated provision, we equally recognise the considerable pressures it faces in terms of recruitment, retention and financial sustainability.

Our NHS ICB People Board is committed to supporting the wider health and care workforce, and includes representation from [Skills for Care](#) and the Registered Care Providers Association to help inform understanding of the sector. The People Board is progressing plans for a [Somerset Training Academy](#) which has three primary aims:

- To create the care workforce for the future by enhancing skill levels and professionalise the care sector, with clear career progression pathways aligned to local education planning and provision;

- To align service delivery to Skills & Business innovation and digital connectivity – stimulating a strong learning culture and network;
- To tackle health inequalities for our population and workforce through improved capacity in the care sector and through education and learning.

Additionally, our [Proud to Care Somerset](#) investment has helped raise the profile and celebrate jobs in care to help address recruitment challenges. In 2023, we launched a bold new recruitment campaign, '[My Time to Care](#)', which was filmed 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 different age groups that may be interested in a care career.

In February 2024, we delivered a communications campaign to recognise national 'You Can Care Week' and help shine a spotlight on the importance of social care roles and the positive impact they have on individuals and communities. For Good Care Month in July 2024, we put out one piece of content per week, each piece of content focussed on different areas of care. These posts accumulated a total of 14,500 views, with 245 engagements.

Support for our external care workforce is also demonstrated through the enhanced communication channels and forums established since the Covid-19 pandemic – this includes monthly care provider briefings (newsletters) containing updates and developments from the health and care system both locally and nationally. Care providers had told us how much they valued the improved engagement with us during the pandemic and we have subsequently worked hard to sustain and improve this, creating a dedicated care provider webpage and launching monthly [Learning Engagement Meetings \(LEMs\)](#) which have a broad and dynamic agenda and focus on informing and supporting the care sector on topics as diverse as dysphagia to fire safety, presented by leads and experts. These meetings are recorded and widely promoted.

More recently, we have taken robust action to mitigate the growing risk emerging nationally related to the sharp rise in the number of care provider visa sponsor licenses being suspended or withdrawn by the Home Office. We recognised how overseas recruitment has supported workforce capacity across the country, and wanted to ensure our local care market was supported adequately in this space, as well as to reduce risks associated with business failure impacting people, provision and hospital flow. In January 2024 we launched a survey across our care sector to better understand reliance on overseas staff and confidence in understanding of their sponsorship duties as employers. Whilst confidence levels in Somerset were reported to be fairly high overall (with 39% of those currently employing overseas staff rating themselves as 'extremely confident'), the survey did offer us some sense of where further guidance and support would be beneficial. In response to the feedback and risk, we created a [new webpage](#) which launched in April 2024 to serve as a helpful information resource for our care sector in understanding requirements and best practice.

This includes information on recognising [labour exploitation and modern slavery](#), and we also arranged for a special briefing from Unseen on Modern Slavery at our May 2024 Learning Engagement Meeting. At the time of writing, we have no locally commissioned care providers with a revoked or suspended licence and have not been impacted to the same degree some other Local Authorities have.

Additionally, Somerset is contributing to regional international recruitment work to benefit from the Department of Health & Social Care's International Recruitment Fund for the adult social care sector. This will involve working to establish and make available specialist and local support to overseas workers who have been displaced and / or affected by unethical recruitment practice. This work will be done in partnership with the South West Care Association Alliance, which incorporates all care provider associations under one umbrella organisation.

We routinely monitor and report on [Skills for Care data](#) for Somerset. Latest 2022/23 evidence shows that, in common with the national picture, we have seen vacancy trends and turnover rates start to decrease when looking specifically at the independent adult social care sector:

Independent Care Sector: Turnover rate (2022/23)

England – 30.4% (59% recruitment within ASC)

Somerset – 31.9% (73% recruitment within ASC)

Independent Care Sector: Vacancy rate (2022/23)

England – 9.9%

Somerset – 7.3%

We work closely with the [Registered Care Providers Association](#) (RCPA)– a Somerset-wide member association for providers of health and social care and support. Care providers are involved in the Market Sustainability and Fair Cost of Care exercise. Adult Social Care [fees and charges for 2024/25](#) were published in March 2024.

We have effective multi-agency working aligned to a [robust and well-tested business failure/closure process](#) led by our Care Provider Quality Assurance team. Two potential closures were successfully averted in April 2024 through an alternative provided being found for the homes and staff within them. This work was actively supported by our Commissioning Director and Director of Adult Social Services. We are currently supporting the closure of a small Residential Care Home where the provider has chosen to re-purpose the building into self-contained flats.

Elected Members receive updates on the social care workforce locally to support effective oversight and challenge, with [latest report presented to the Adults and Health Scrutiny Committee in July 2024](#)

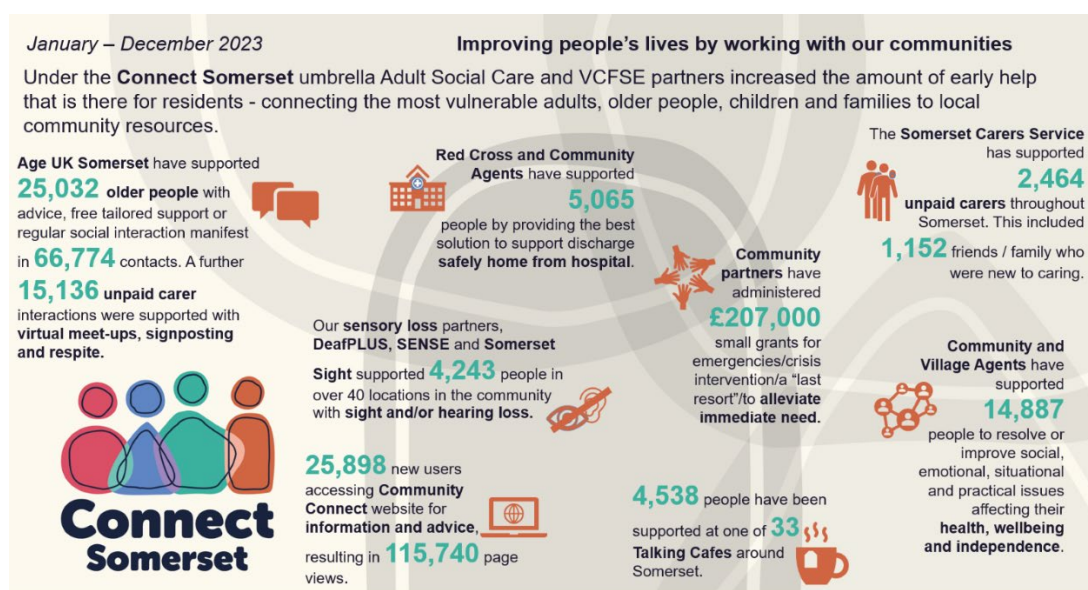
2b. Partnerships and communities

What good looks like: 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.

Our self-assessment score: Evidence shows a good standard

Partnership working to deliver shared local and national objectives

Somerset has a commitment to and culture of collaboration with numerous examples of how we work effectively in partnership across Somerset to deliver shared objectives or commission effective models of care and support that meet the needs of our population, with some examples already outlined within Section 1 of this self-assessment, and reinforced within the 2023 infographic below:



The [Connect Somerset Blueprint](#) shows how we want to evolve public sector early help for Somerset families and residents. Improving the early help system in the right way will significantly reduce costs to acute services across care, health, education and justice sectors, as well as having a big impact on the lives of Somerset residents. Because the system of services is so complex, this is not a target operating model, but a blueprint describing our direction of travel. Early help is the total support that improves a family or resident's resilience and outcomes or reduces the chance of a problem getting worse. So early help is an approach that can include informal support and a range of services that help families and residents to thrive.

A further 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 integrated service 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.

This 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 also supported the development of over 1,250 new micro-providers with numbers continuing to rise. The enterprise support team offers support and advice to over 1000 new enquiries a year for people looking to set up a service or support in Somerset.

Micro-providers registered with Somerset Council are collectively delivering over 30,000 hours of support a week to just under 6,000 people in Somerset. Surveys indicate that around 74% of direct payment users use Micro-providers with their budgets. This increased menu has supported an 119% increase in the use of direct payments in Somerset, moving from 82nd to 11th nationally in self-directed support.

The development of Micro-providers has increased the number and variety of flexible, personalised options to keep people well at home in their community or out of hospital. The community development to market shaping has strengthened communities and supported the development of local care collectives including [Wivey Cares](#), [Wincanton Cares](#) and made Somerset a national leader around self-directed support. **CASE STUDY EXAMPLE**

Optimal Handed Care (OHC) (previously referred to as Single-Handed Care) is being implemented across the Somerset Health and Social Care system, and has recently been recognised nationally for this work as part of the [RCOT Conference in June 2024](#). OHC 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.

Somerset Council has also been leading the way regionally, setting up a Southwest Optimal Care (OC) Network, supported by at least 8 regions who are now in the process of delivering an OC Conference in Bristol on the 15th of October.

Involving lead and national representatives from the AHP colleges, the National Back Exchange plus Nursing to promote the Somerset adopted approach as part of an integrated system-wide approach to deliver better outcomes.

Somerset Council and NHS Somerset have also worked together 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 into its third year and has accelerated implementation with now over 61 care providers in the county adopting a [digital record system \(DSCR\)](#). The link shows the most recent quarterly update presented to NHS England by both organisations [DISC DFT Somerset ICS Quarterly Report Q2 Oct 24 DRAFT.xlsm](#), highlighting progress made, plus project and resource risk management. In addition, profiling the expected target of 80% DISC compliance with Somerset Providers by March 2025, has now reached 76%; not including the 29 providers who are interested in signing up to adopt the DSCR by the end of December 2024. The recorded benefits from all providers has been to help reduce the time care staff need to spend on traditional admin tasks and increased 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.

Our **COVID-19 pandemic response** is a further 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.

Arrangements to support effective partnership working

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 taking a collaborative approach to the utilisation of the Adult Social Care Discharge Fund and Better Care Fund. We know that bringing health and care together in a way that is sustainable, while also making improvements to how we deliver services is a priority, and we will do this to help build stronger communities and services which support people to live happy, healthy lives. We want to support people to live independently in their own homes for longer and take a joined-up approach to improving outcomes across health, social care, and housing.

The Better Care Fund is designed to enable systems to deliver against the following two objectives:

1. Enable people to stay well, safe and independent at home for longer.
2. Provide the right care in the right place at the right time.

Our schemes deliver this through our investment in intermediate care and additional capacity which ensures people receive the right care at the right time. Schemes are monitored to understand activity against projected outputs, and variation responded to. Schemes in Somerset include:

- Disabled Facilities Grant
- Contribution to Community Equipment
- Intermediate Care
- Social prescribing and related support
- Market support, including nursing homes and home care
- Carers support
- Additional social care capacity
- Maintaining Learning Disability services

Work informs our quarterly Somerset Joint Commissioning Steering Group, which holds oversight of the BCF plans and monitors assurance. This monthly meeting brings together leadership from Somerset Council, Public Health and NHS Somerset ICB to ensure that decision making is collaborative and impacts whole system performance.

Impact of partnership working

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.

Adult Social Care Commissioners have been collaborating with local charities and our care home provider market to ensure a supported, skilled, and flexible workforce which is able to meet the needs of people living with dementia in Somerset.

Due to many innovative approaches led by third sector partners and our thriving micro provider market and home care offer, many people living with dementia are now able to receive tailored support in their own homes for longer. While this is a positive move in the right direction, it does have an inevitable knock-on effect for our care home market, presenting a key challenge:

- People who *do* require a residential or nursing bed will often have more advanced needs when they come to the care home, and sometimes present with significant behaviours of distress, leading to delays in finding appropriate placements with the required specialism.
- People with advanced dementia often struggle to articulate their likes and dislikes and cannot share their life stories, impacting on providers ability to practice person centred care.

In order to address these challenges, in early 2023 Commissioners made a concerted effort to research best practice interventions to address behaviours of distress and then invested £50,000 into the funding of a comprehensive training package written by local Dementia Training Specialist, 'Reminiscence Learning'. This was delivered free of charge to five care homes in Somerset who support people with very complex needs associated with their dementia.

The training was in:

- The 'Newcastle Model' which equips practitioners with the skills to effectively address behaviours that challenge.
- 'Life Story Work' which supports practitioners to find creative ways to support people with dementia to share their life history.

The training also included a year of mentorship to support each carer to fully imbed their new practice and inform their organisational culture.

This initiative was tremendously successful. From March 2023 to March 2024 Reminiscence Learning trained 97 members of care staff across 5 Older People's Mental Health Nursing Homes, yielding many excellent examples of fantastic care, including this: **CASE STUDY EXAMPLE (BRIAN'S STORY)**

Dementia awareness may 2024

28,600
total views
323
engagements



"So Important" "Beautiful story" "Thank you" "This is wonderful"
"Having to wipe away the tears"

This year, Somerset Council will begin a re-procurement exercise for our Block Bed Contracts with care homes across the county, providing residential, nursing, and mental health support to people living with dementia. As part of our recommissioning efforts, we have written new specifications which have been coproduced through online workshops with somerset social workers, and wider system colleagues including local charities, the Integrated Care Board (ICB) and Somerset NHS Foundation Trust.

Within these specifications we have imbedded the learning from our training pilot with Reminiscence Learning and have emphasised the importance of developing specialism around behaviours of distress and Life Stories to improve practice and support retention of our valued workforce.

During Dementia Awareness Week in May 2024, Commissioners in Adult Social Care and our training partner Reminiscence Learning held presentations for care homes in Somerset to invite them to purchase and participate in training to continue to improve our care home market and make further positive impacts to people's lives.

Additionally, our Older People's Mental Health + model was 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**

Working with voluntary and charity sector groups

We recognise the unique contribution of our community and voluntary sector in the provision of care and support.

We 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. Further evidence of this can be seen within Theme 1 of our self-assessment (Supporting People to Live Healthier Lives).

3. Ensuring Safety within the system in Somerset



This theme explores the following quality statements:

- Safe pathways, systems and transitions
- Safeguarding

Our key strengths

- ✓ Robust and well-tested arrangements to respond to and support **business failures/home closures**
- ✓ A **centralised Adult Safeguarding service** with a strong focus on 'making safeguarding personal'
- ✓ An **effective and ambitious Safeguarding Adults Board**, led by an experienced Independent Chair and providing a range of communication channels and approaches to promote awareness of abuse and neglect
- ✓ Safeguarding practice centred on '**making safeguarding personal**' principles, with low levels of complaints
- ✓ **Robust mechanisms in place to ensure the appropriate prioritisation of DoLS applications** from care homes and hospitals by experienced assessors, despite the fact that Somerset – in common with most other areas – is unable to fully comply with its statutory duties under the Mental Capacity Act
- ✓ **An AMHP Hub and out of hours service** working collaboratively with health partners

Our key improvement activity

- Mitigating **workforce/capacity risks** within our Safeguarding Team
- A key 'transformation focus' on **Preparing for Adulthood** and increasing independence for young people as they transition to adulthood
- Ensuring fair decision making in Continuing Healthcare process and compliance with National Guidance
- The ongoing development of a Somerset **Transfer of Care Hub** to ensure we achieve greater consistency in outcomes for people
- Improving understanding, identification and multi-agency risk management and practice in relation to **self-neglect** and **exploitation**
- Embedding and evidencing learning arising from **Safeguarding Adults Reviews** and enhancing opportunities to learn from the **lived experiences of those supported through safeguarding processes**

3a. Safe pathways, systems and transitions

What good looks like: 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.

Our self-assessment score: Evidence shows a good standard

Safety Management

Community safety is any activity that is designed to prevent and reduce crime, disorder and anti-social behaviour and reassure communities, so they feel safer. In Somerset, work is often broken down into pieces of work that have themes. These include:

- *Domestic abuse*
- *Anti-social behaviour*
- *Exploitation*
- *Preventing radicalisation and terrorism*
- *Serious violence*
- *Hate crime*
- *Modern slavery*
- *Community engagement.*

In Somerset, we take a public health approach to our community safety work. This is because the risk of being involved in crime, and the impacts crime can have, is a population wide concern. Crime and the fear of crime impacts on people's physical and mental health. Criminal behaviour and violence can spread like a disease. Therefore, it is preventable. Taking this approach looks at the root causes, focussing on prevention. Preventing crime or risk of victimisation or perpetration should be seen in the wider context of tackling health inequalities. The wider factors of health can impact the risk of victimisation and perpetration of crime. The way that the council discharges a lot of its community safety functions is by working in partnership with other local organisations. In Somerset, this is through the Safer Somerset Partnership.

Our **Approved Mental Health Professional (AMHP) Hub and Out of Hours**

Service work closely together and are overseen by the 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. We also work collaboratively and co-operatively with health colleagues to achieve optimal outcomes for service users; relationships are respectful, and AMHPs maintain their independence in decision-making with respect to the Mental Health Act' An AMHP report is shared at the Mental Health, Autism and Learning Disability ICS Programme Board on a quarterly basis.

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.

87.8% of people who use services in Somerset feel that their care and support has contributed to making them feel safe and secure, slightly above the England average of 87.1%. A higher proportion of males (nationally, regionally and locally) say that their care and support services help them to feel safe, compared to females (88.3% males compared to 87.4% females in Somerset). Somerset contrasts with national and regional performance in the fact that people who use services aged 65+ are more likely to report that their services help them to feel safe than those aged under 65: 88.2% over 65s compared with 87.2% under 65s in Somerset. We are fortunate to benefit from an effective safeguarding and care provider quality assurance offer locally that helps to monitor and support good quality, safe services and seeks the feedback of residents or clients as part of this approach. Both of these were recognised as areas of positive practice in the Local Government Association Assurance Peer Challenge of March 2024. A higher proportion of active social care settings regulated by the Care Quality Commission in Somerset are good or better than is the case nationally.

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.

Safety during transitions

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 Triannual 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 in partnership with Children's Social Care and Commissioning colleagues, to specifically discuss young people who are turning 18yrs within 3 months and ensure appropriate provision is in place. Young people with complex needs who will require bespoke provision when they turn 18 are also discussed at these meetings.

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 activities 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. The position we are in now is unrecognisable from what it was this time last year; we have managed to address a referral backlog and reduce the average age of assessment from 23 to just over 17.5; all 17yr olds and some 16yr olds are now being allocated and we now have a good knowledge and understanding of the young people coming through.

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. During October a presentation was delivered at the Voice of the child Subgroup (for children looked after) and there are now plans to do some further work with them around understanding the experiences of young people transitioning into Adult Social Care and ensure that their experiences feed into how we shape our work going forward.

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.

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.

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 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 for quality assurance measures and acts as the local authority representative at senior-level MDT collaborations locally and regionally.

The CHC Service Manager provides 1:1 support to operational staff on an as-required basis and uses emerging themes to target wider learning at dedicated sessions provided as a rolling monthly programme.

We have regular meetings with system colleagues at operational and strategic levels to support collaborative system-wide service development, monitor progress and performance, and set actions in place to improve in this area at all levels. Joint policy arrangements are being reviewed to ensure fair decision-making and an escalation process is in place.

In Somerset, we are working together with ICB colleagues to further develop and embed collaborative approaches to care solutions, ensuring referrals for CHC are appropriate and timely, while individuals continue to have their needs met until a well-informed CHC assessment can be undertaken.

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 practices. This helps develop the CHC Lead leadership role and contributes to the development of national policy and expectations about high-quality practice.

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.

Contingency Planning

Somerset Council has an [Emergency Planning, Response and Recovery team](#) as part of its structure, which delivers and coordinates emergency planning and business continuity support, strategic, tactical and operational advice regarding incident impacts and local authority requirements, and the facilitation of joint corporate emergency response and recovery arrangements. This includes 24/7 emergency response and coordination cover.

A detailed corporate framework is in place with specific arrangements for hazards relating to the characteristics of Somerset (e.g. flooding, radiation). Single and multi-agency capabilities are developed to support planning arrangements and the affected population including evacuation and shelter, and specialist transport. Service-level business continuity plans are also developed and reviewed to support effective contingency planning arrangements. The EPRR officers participate in multi-agency emergency planning through the Avon and Somerset Local Resilience Forum.

Somerset Prepared is a multi-agency partnership working closely with communities to deliver advice, support and training to help enhance local resilience to emergencies: [Somerset Prepared – Helping Somerset prepare, respond and recover from emergencies](#)

Adult Social Care has strong evidence of our ability to effectively respond to unplanned events or emergencies in the care market to minimise potential risks to people's safety or wellbeing – this was recognised as a strength within our LGA

Assurance Peer Challenge in March 2024. Our process includes very effective multi-agency working aligned to our robust and well-tested **business failure/closure policy** which is led by our Care Provider Quality Assurance team. Effective communication is maintained with all affected stakeholders during these difficult situations, including local Councillors, health colleagues as well as residents, families and staff, with the team receiving positive feedback about our support and intervention. We have recently enhanced our policy and approach to strengthen effective practice when there are care provider transfers locally. **CASE STUDY EXAMPLE**

Following the review of our practice a local service 'TOR' notified us they wanted to close at the end of August 2024. This was led by QAO NB and following the review of our process we were able to close the service effectively getting the best outcomes for the people who were living in the service. We received stakeholder feedback following the closure which rated the overall service as excellent overall – August 2024

We commission a crisis service with a single person residential care element, that we will use the most appropriate provider for an individual's circumstances to staff, 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.

Feedback from stakeholders

We regularly gather feedback from the organisations we work with to monitor the effectiveness of our pathways and processes to ensure that our communities are safe and are achieving their desired outcomes. [ASC Stakeholder Feedback \(PowerBI\)](#)

Feedback from staff

We also regularly gather feedback through our staff using a variety of methods to understand their views with regard to the safe delivery of services. [ASC Staff Q&A Feedback April 2024](#)

3b. Safeguarding

What good looks like: 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.

Our self-assessment score: Evidence shows a good standard

Safeguarding systems, processes and practices

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'.

Our Safeguarding Adults service comes under the remit and responsibility of our Principal Social Worker. 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. The Council applies relevant guidelines/criteria of what constitutes a safeguarding concern. Audits and analysis of decision making and recording help reinforce and test this.

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 includes details of a stakeholder survey that shows how effective its work has been each year, this is shared with the Council's Adults and Health Scrutiny Committee each autumn. The Board holds regular 'development days' to inform its ongoing learning and focus.

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 1,165 followers on social media ('X') and a current newsletter distribution list of over 700 recipients.

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	

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.

Responding to local safeguarding risks and issues

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.

Safeguarding key performance indicators and trends are routinely monitored within the Local Authority and inform the corporate performance scorecard.

Our ASC Assurance Board in June 2024 explored risks associated with resource capacity within the Safeguarding Team following the departure of some locum staff, which has started to impact on our safeguarding triage waitlist and some KPIs.

Our Safeguarding Adults Board ensures it maintains 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 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. Somerset's results have informed the Board, and we are working with our partner SABs to explore how themes compare and contrast and what wider learning might be taken as a sub-region.

Since February 2024 the Somerset Safeguarding Adults Board have hosted Safeguarding Adults Practice Updates on the first Thursday of each month exploring different topics and themes emerging from wider learning and analysis. These are open to all interested professionals across Somerset and are widely promoted across our health and care system. The SSAB has also worked in partnership with its children's equivalent to host an online VCFSE Safeguarding Network Event to promote awareness and best practice across our wider community sector; this is scheduled for early July 2024.

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 and our internal October 2024 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. Whilst we have not concluded any SARs during 2023/24, we have a large number actively in train at varying stages of conclusion. Self-neglect has been a common feature in 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, with the Safeguarding Adults Board Business Manager routinely attending to support effective information sharing.

Whilst our policies and processes promote awareness of modern slavery, sexual exploitation, criminal exploitation and other forms of exploitation, we have recognised there are further opportunities for us to promote understanding and awareness of exploitation and exploitation risks. 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 via the development of a 'through-life exploitation strategy'. 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 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.

Responding to concerns and undertaking Section 42 enquiries

The Safeguarding Adults Collection (SAC) national return was published by NHS Digital in August 2024, providing findings for the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024. 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 (39% of concerns become enquiries in Somerset, compared to 31% nationally and 26% 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.

Complaints relating to Somerset Council's Adult Social Care Safeguarding Service have improved over recent years and remain low, particularly when compared to the total number of complaints received by the wider service. There were four complaints received by ASC Safeguarding 2023/24 of which 3 were partly upheld and 1 was upheld. However, latest data for the 2024/25 financial year to date suggests a rise that will need to be monitored.

Six adult social care safeguarding complaints/enquiries were received by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman for Somerset in 2023/24; the average of all English single tier and county councils for the same time period was 2. This is an increase when compared to previous years. In 2022/23, no complaints or enquiries were received for Somerset.

The Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) have been in operation since April 2009, with the functioning of the safeguards the sole responsibility of local authorities since April 2013. The Council 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 and signed by the team leads 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.

Each year all Local Authorities make a statutory return about DoLS activity to the Department of Health and Social Care; at a national level statistics continue to evidence that the system is not working as it should because large numbers of requests for assessment cannot be addressed. Somerset's position in its administration of the DoLS scheme is broadly in line with comparable local authorities regionally and nationally.

Summary of key activity data for 2023/24 with 2022/23 data for comparison. *For validation reasons these figures may not be identical to those in the statutory return*

	2022/23	2023/24	+/-
Applications received	3280	3393	+113
- from care homes	2111	2012	-99
- from hospitals	1169	1381	+212
Authorisations granted	685	704	+19
- in care homes	630	645	+15
- in hospitals	55	59	+4
Hospital applications ended prior to assessment	1093	1262	+169
Waiting list at year end	2215	2327	+112
Applications waiting > 6m	1436	1603	+167

In common with most other local authorities nationally, Somerset Council is unable to fully comply with its statutory duties under the DoLS. The current level of resourcing in the DoLS (Deprivation of Liberty) team – primarily for assessment and administration – only allows for completion of about 700-750 assessments per year. A considerable part of the team's senior worker capacity is taken up with prioritising the large number of applications. In general, the only applications which receive full consideration – progressing via assessment to authorisation – are those where there is evidence of an 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 under s.21A of the MCA (at October 2024 = 46 cases). This is a positive indicator that people who lack capacity are being well supported to access their rights, primarily by their advocate representatives. Usually, people are challenging being kept in a location they have not chosen – often a care home.

The DoLS process used appropriately protects their Article 5 human rights by giving them the formal mechanism with which to challenge.

The Somerset DoLS team has a good working relationship with the advocacy service provider SWAN Advocacy. The current advocacy contract incorporates the DoLS representative role. Independent advocates are appointed as representatives in about 75% of Standard Authorisations. Somerset Council also has a policy of spot purchasing additional advocacy time for representatives to act as Litigation Friends in cases which are taken to the Court of Protection. Although this is not a statutory obligation upon the local authority, we believe this approach has the effect of shortening court proceedings and reducing costs overall. This position is kept under review by the Service Manager for DoLS and MCA.

Following the government announcement in April 2023 that the implementation of the Liberty Protection Safeguards was to be postponed indefinitely, the Somerset DoLS team, in common with its counterparts across the country, has looked for ways to revise current practice and processes in order to provide the safeguards to more people within the same staffing resources. Primarily this has involved reviewing the format of the standardised documentation used by assessors in order to reduce assessment times and increase throughput.

The authorisation process has also been reviewed. Previously, this process had two stages with a thorough QA process undertaken by the senior members of the DoLS team (experienced BIAs) followed by a review of this by a senior manager in ASC who has received training for this function. As the first of these stages is regarded as being legally robust, we have removed the senior manager sign off function, and authorisations are now signed off by the DoLS Leads while ensuring there is an appropriate mechanism for escalating some critical cases, or practice/ care quality concerns.

Community Deprivation of Liberty

This area of work remains a challenge for the Council. In the preparation for the LPS scheme the Council started developing a process for identifying those service users likely to require an application to the Court of Protection to authorise any DoL occurring. The Council has so far identified approximately 350 people in receipt of 24h care outside care homes who probably meet the criteria. A large majority of these (approx. 320) are people with learning disabilities or autism. The electronic client record system is being adapted to provide accurate reporting on the progress of Community DoL work. This is in its early stages.

Mental capacity work across ASC

Our MCA (Mental Capacity Act) and DOLS Service Manager has until recently been chair of the south west regional DoLS Leads Group and has contributed to the development of practice nationally, regionally and here in Somerset. Somerset's DoLS team will continue to be an active member of the regional MCA and DoLS forum.

Since January 2022 the Service Manager has provided a monthly mental capacity drop-in session online which is open to all ASC staff. The sessions are well attended and provide a good opportunity for sharing learning resources and for unpicking practice matters and for consolidating learning from formal MCA training. The sessions are well attended and are recorded and made available across ASC via The Loop.

In recent months the drop-in sessions have focussed on sharing some learning from a detailed audit of mental capacity assessments carried out early in 2024. The national interest in the issue of executive dysfunction and its relation to mental capacity has been addressed in several of the drop-in sessions, most recently in June 2024.

The Service Manager is closely involved in the commissioning and planning of formal MCA and DoLS training, working closely with the Learning and Development team in ASC and with the current commissioned MCA training provider, Spectrum Training. The learning from the MCA audits has been incorporated into the formal training and will be live from July 2024.

The recently created (2023) role of Practice Development Advanced Practitioner is intended in part to act a champion for MCA matters. The PDAPs have received specific training on this and have been active participants in the auditing of mental capacity assessments and in the development of actions flowing from the audit. In particular they have worked on a new version of the formal mental capacity assessment document used in ASC and this is to be launched later in summer 2024

Making Safeguarding personal

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

CASE STUDY EXAMPLES

The Safeguarding Adults Collection (SAC) national return was published by NHS Digital on 29 August 2024

The data reveals that risks were identified in Somerset in 86% of cases, compared to 75% nationally, and 71% in our peer group. In Somerset there were only 4 cases where risk was identified, and no action taken.

Where a risk was identified in Somerset, this was reduced or removed in 97% of cases, compared to 91% nationally and 89% in our peer group.

The 'proportion of section 42 safeguarding enquiries where a risk was identified, and the reported outcome was that this risk was reduced or removed' will be an indicator within the adult social care outcomes framework (ASCOF) for 2023/24.

Somerset are the best performing authority in the South West and amongst the highest nationally.

Individuals were asked about their desired outcomes in 96% of cases in Somerset, compared to 83% Nationally and 79% in our Peer Group.

95% of individuals who expressed a desired outcome of the enquiry had these fully or partially achieved.

- Neglect and Acts of Omission was most common type of abuse across England (43%) and our peer group (35%) – Somerset reported 31% of its enquiries this way.
This was followed by Physical Abuse where the England average was 24% and our peer group was also 24% – Somerset reported 30% of its enquiries this way.
- As has long been the case nationally, the most common location of risk is the person's own home where 57% incidents took place.
- The highest source of risk continues to be an individual the person at risk knew – this accounts for 57% of enquiries.
- 94% of adults at risk who lacked capacity to make their own decisions were supported by either family, friends or another advocate.

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.

As part of our ASC Practice Quality Framework approach, 125 audits focused on 'Safeguarding People' standards were undertaken across our service during January 2024 and May 2024 with results presented and discussed through our Practice Quality Board. The audit summary identified strong practice in adopting a proportionate, person-centred approach that captured the views of involved individuals and demonstrated professional curiosity. Of *applicable* cases, these audits identified that:

- 94.8% of case records evidenced recognition of our responsibility to recognise, respond and report any safeguarding concerns
- 92.3% of records evidenced we had sought to understand what would make the person feel safe by using a strengths-based, person-centred approach ensuring the person's wishes and desired outcomes are heard and captured
- 86.8% of records evidenced we had supported the person's involvement by facilitating advocacy where and when required – *recognising there is more we could do to strengthen this area, we have re-promoted advocacy materials presented at our Carnival of Practice with our workforce*
- 95.9% of records demonstrated we had ensured professional involvement in a person's life is proportionate and ensures the least intrusive response to the risks presented
- 94.6% demonstrated the person's desired outcomes were identified early, and that people had been encouraged to make their own decisions.

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.

4. Leadership



This theme explores the following quality statements:

- Governance, management and sustainability
- Learning, improvement and innovation

Our key strengths

- ✓ **Strong, visible and well-engaged political leadership**, with Councillors well-informed about adult social care risks and a positive culture of challenge and support
- ✓ Active **participation and leadership in and across sector-led improvement activity** regionally and beyond
- ✓ Routine **opportunities for staff engagement and communications** with the Council and Service Leadership Teams, including briefings, Q&As and monthly highlight reports
- ✓ A **varied and extensive learning and development offer** to support staff enhance their practice, and active support of national research projects and programmes
- ✓ A long-standing approach to seek out and invite external expertise and guidance to support local improvement efforts, with **an ambitious Transformation programme** in place to improve outcomes for people using our services
- ✓ A **significantly enhanced practice quality governance framework** in place, supported by a Board, monthly auditing, and learning from serious incidents

Our key improvement activity

- Mitigating the impact of difficult decisions having to be taken across the Council on the back of **significant financial challenges** on staff morale, capacity and performance, transformation and improvement processes and delivery
- **Managing our adult social care budget and spend**, and enhancing our ability to track live performance to support this
- Ensuring **sustainability of our 'My Life, My Future' transformation** activity
- Embedding further **learning emerging from audits and reviews** across teams and in practice
- **Enhancing existing mechanisms to hear from and respond to the needs and wants of our workforce** through the development of a 'Future Focussed Group'
- **Progressing proposals for Housing to be brought in under 'Adult Services'** as part of wider Council re-design and re-structuring consultation and activity

4a. Governance, management and sustainability

What good looks like: 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.

Our self-assessment score: Evidence shows a good standard

Governance, accountability and risk management

Somerset is a new unitary council, formed in April 2023 through the re-organisation of five councils (an upper-tier authority with responsibilities for services such as Adult Social Care, and four district councils with responsibilities for services such as housing and planning) into a new single organisation.

Our Adult Social Care 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, and the delivery of our statutory duties. 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 priorities.

Our understanding of our performance and key risks helps to drive and inform our strategic plans and response activity. Our adult social care risk register is reviewed and updated routinely as part of senior management team meetings and reflects our priority activity. Examples of how risk identification informs our response activity can be demonstrated through the operational restructuring activity we implemented, our transformation programme, our commissioning focus and activities to reduce levels of unmet need, our investment and support of international recruitment, and more.

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 reporting and statutory national returns and maintain a detailed suite of performance reports designed to support our workforce. 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 has centred on 'Data Visibility and Control', with work focused on enhancing proactive performance management and establishing clearer links between operational teams, their decisions and finance data. It has also concentrated on fostering a culture of performance and improvement through data-driven behaviours and evidence-based decision-making.

We are fortunate to have strong and well-engaged political leadership, with Councillors well-informed about potential risks facing adult social care and engaged in service improvement activity.

As noted within the LGA Peer Challenge, the Leader and Lead Member of the Council are visible with officers and there is a positive culture of challenge and support between executive councillors and senior officers. 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 very sadly passed away unexpectedly with the Leader of the Council stepping in to offer support and oversight whilst we confirmed the formal re-appointment of our new and current Lead Member to this important position. She has taken a very active and engaged stance in learning about our service, shadowing teams and meeting with key stakeholder groups as part of her wider induction.

We benefit from a stable adult social care leadership team, who have worked within and through the service for many years and have taken steps to secure the permanency of our Service Directors over recent months. The LGA Peer Challenge Team noted that the Director of Adult Social Services “provides strong, positive, visible leadership for the service” and that “more widely, the challenge team found passionate, experienced and committed staff and senior leadership”.

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, the service has also 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 communicates news and key updates.

Feedback from staff is sought and gathered on a regular basis and is used to inform strategic planning and response activity. Examples include that captured within our [ASC Workforce Strategy 2024-26](#), and more recently the learning emerging from the national 2023/24 LGA Employer Standards Health Check which is informing an action plan response from our Principal Social Worker and Principal Occupational Therapist. A wider Council-wide Staff Survey was recently administered with Adult Social Care staff results pleasingly exceeding Council-averages in all but 2 areas. This is in recognition that – in the current challenging financial climate for the Council – the need to monitor and measure feedback and progress over time is especially important.

Our ASC Strategy recognises the vital importance of having a supported, skilled and flexible workforce, with the service publishing a revised Workforce Strategy for 2024-26. In common with many local authorities, we face ongoing challenges in recruiting social workers and occupational therapists so remain very focused on recruiting and retaining, and developing and training our staff.

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.

The LGA Assurance Peer Challenge of March 2024 identified the importance of all Councillors understanding the pressures, drivers and change priorities for Adult Social Care and how they can be supported to play an active and effective role in holding the service to account – at core of this is the legal responsibility to ensure that vulnerable people can be protected and supported. They recommended an engagement plan be developed to give Councillors further opportunity to learn more about the service.

Consequently, we have implemented an initial programme of recorded workshops to help inform our Elected Members and offer greater opportunity for questions and answers. To date we have held two sessions in May 2024 – one titled ‘Adult Social Care – where does all the money go?’ and another focused on the learning and findings to emerge from the Peer Challenge itself. A further session took place in July 2024 exploring our ‘My Life, My Future’ adults transformation programme. Recordings of the sessions and supporting information are made available within a Members Resources Sharepoint folder.

Strategic Planning

The Local Authority uses information about risks, performance, inequality and outcomes to inform our Strategies and to allocate resources. There is a clear ‘golden’ thread across key strategies and approaches in Somerset which demonstrate a shared commitment to:

- improving people’s health and wellbeing;
- focusing on prevention and early intervention;
- investing in communities and neighbourhoods;
- promoting people’s independence whilst ensuring access to high quality support when required;
- reducing inequalities and improving outcomes for those with more complex needs; and
- supporting the wider health and care workforce.

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 2023-26 [Adult Social Care Strategy](#) was published in the summer of 2023, and was informed by feedback from staff and the public. It sets out how the service will work to deliver the right kind of care and support for our communities, and the best possible outcomes within the resources available to us. Delivery of our Strategic commitments is tracked and monitored via the ASC Assurance Board.

Information Security

Somerset Council has clear policies and procedures in place in relation to the security of information, with all Local Authority staff are required to undertake mandatory annual refresher training that covers data sharing and data protection in line with GDPR.

The Information Governance Team ensures the Council complies with its obligations under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), the Data Protection Act 2018 and a range of other legislation and codes of practice designed to protect the rights and freedoms of individuals with regards to their personal data.

We work to Caldicott principles, with the Director of Adult Social Services acting as Caldicott Guardian for the organisation.

All documentation issued by the Council must be marked in accordance with the [Central Government Security Classifications scheme](#), including our emails. As of September 2021, Somerset Council use Microsoft's [Outlook Message Encryption \(OME\)](#) for sending sensitive information by email.

Robust data sharing agreements are in place, alongside an overarching Tier 1 protocol covering data sharing with health, and the Local Authority is signed up to a data protection toolkit that evidences we meet standards to share data with health.

4b. Learning, improvement and innovation

What good looks like: 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.

Our self-assessment score: Evidence shows an exceptional standard

Continuous learning, improvement and professional development

Our 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) group, and co-chairs the national ADASS Policy and Use of Resources Group. Our Service Director for Operations is co-chair of the SW ADASS Operations and Practice Group, and our Service Director for Commissioning is co-chair of the SW ADASS Commissioning Group. Other senior managers contribute to SW ADASS sub-groups including on adult social performance, assurance, learning disabilities and safeguarding.

Our Principal Social Worker is the co-chair of the South West Principal Social Worker network, and our Principal Occupational Therapist is a founding member of the Somerset Occupational Therapy Leads network which was set up to provide a collaborative, system-wide forum to develop pathways and ways of working for all Occupational Therapists (OTs) in Somerset. It has a strong focus on workforce and career development through the Somerset OT Strategy. Recent innovations include opportunities for secondments for OTs working in acute hospitals to spend 1 day per week working in Somerset's Independent Living Centres.

As a Council, we actively seek, invite and welcome guidance, expertise and support as part of our efforts to continually drive forward continuous local improvement and challenge our performance and approaches, including our budget monitoring.

Examples include the various Local Government Association Peer Challenge events commissioned and hosted by the Council (including an Equality Framework Peer Challenge held in October 2023, and the [Adult Social Care Preparation for Assurance Peer Challenge held in March 2024](#)); we are also currently contributing to an LGA Peer Support offer around 'Transformation and Improvement' (July 2024), and planning for a Corporate Peer Challenge event in November 2024. Senior leaders within our adult social care service, as well as our Chief Executive and Corporate Leadership Team, also contribute to peer challenge events in other Local Authority areas to support sector-led improvement and wider system learning.

Our **Adult Social Care Transformation Programme, 'My Life, My Future'**, is further evidence of how we invest and prioritise continuous improvement in order to improve outcomes for people, enhance staff and resident experience, and manage our finances. Having undertaken an evidence-based review ('diagnostic') of our services to first identify opportunities for change and how that change might be delivered successfully, we are now implementing a change programme focused on five key workstreams, that is already generating positive results and impacts. As of end of June 2024, and based on current performance, we have seen the following outcomes:

- Our adult social care teams are now completing 20-25% more work, meaning we can assess and work with people more quickly and prevent crises:
- Around a 20% decrease in the average change of community-based support packages, meaning more people are maintaining or increasing their independence
- Over 30% more people being successfully reabled
- Young people transitioning from children's to adults' are now on average assessed before they are 18 for the first time since at least 2021, leading to better planning and a £500/wk approximate reduction in required support
- Since forming our specialist Learning Disability teams, peer forums and increased focus on review quality and outcomes, our average cost change at each review is almost half of what it was previously

- When taking productivity into account, the quality of decisions the operational teams are making is improving. Proportionately, fewer people are being assessed as requiring longer-term bedded support – compared to the baseline period, over the past 6 weeks approximately 9 more people have stayed at home instead of going into residential care.

Progress on the delivery of ‘My Life, My Future’ is routinely reported and monitored through the Council’s Transformation Board, Audit Committee, and Adults and Health Scrutiny Committee, and will be subject to a SWAP Independent Audit later this year.

Local Authority staff benefit from a range of mandatory and bespoke training through ‘The Learning Centre’. Within Adult Social Care specifically, there is a strong commitment to supporting staff to grow their skills and progress their careers. We benefit from a large and varied training and development offer that helps staff develop their knowledge and confidence and encourage staff to undertake specialist training and professional qualifications.

Our **Learning and Development team** has recently undertaken a Learning Needs Analysis, informed by staff feedback and insights, which is also informing a review of in-service mandatory training requirements – the L&D training offer was only formally signed off by the Commercial and Procurement Board on 3rd October.

New Learning Plans with a tiered approach to prioritising training was launched the following week. This approach has been taken in response to workforce training attendance and completion rates, which have been shown to be impacted by workforce demand and capacity pressures – a trend evident in our wider health and care system.

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 October/November, which prove very popular with staff – we have in the past opened up attendance to system colleagues, including those from health as part of our OT Strategy to share learning. From 7th to 11th October 2024, we ran a series of very engaging and well-received events around the theme of ‘Communication’. The programme included a session from Headway Somerset, recording skills, shifting the narrative in social care, and trauma-informed practice. Recordings and resources from the sessions and those from previous years are available to our staff on our SharePoint site.

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 was in part informed by learning to emerge from the 2022 LGA Health Check results which identified some further opportunity to improve employer standards in relation to supervision and continuing professional development for staff. This activity has been led by our Principal Social Worker and Principal Occupational Therapist and includes:

- the launch of a refreshed and co-produced Practice Quality Framework (PQF) which is supported by an aligned monthly auditing schedule and helps inform our learning and development offer. The PQF sets out clear practice standards and expectations for our workforce, and forms an important part of our governance and assurance approach;
- Clear competency frameworks to support the continued professional development of our operational social care workforce;
- A revised supervision and appraisal approach (informed by staff feedback and audit findings), and post-qualifying standards for supervisors.

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 confirmed that all their recommendations had been implemented and specifically noted that *'there has been a large level of work completed by the Adult 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...from the evidence reviewed by audit, the (practice quality) framework has been key in implementing a range of quality assurance controls that satisfy the original actions and more'*.

As part of our wider work to enhance our ability to, and improve confidence in, reviewing, disseminating and implementing learning outcomes from all reviews (statutory and non-statutory) and incidents, we have commissioned bespoke 'incident review training' from an experienced independent lead reviewer and SAR Author. Two cohorts of staff, including senior managers and our Practice Development Advanced Practitioners, have now attended initial training, and in March 2024 we formally launched across our workforce our new 'Learning from Serious Incidents' policy and approach. Whilst robust arrangements exist in the NHS to learn from such events, similar approaches in local authority adult social care are in short supply nationally so we have been pleased to see this work progress. Our Policy sets out the approach we take to reporting, reviewing and learning from serious incidents in Adult Social Care. Since launch, a number of reviews have taken place that have subsequently been presented to the Practice Quality Board, chaired by the Principal Social Worker and Principal Occupational Therapist. Whilst many of the reviews undertaken so far will progress to enhanced internal or formal statutory reviews (e.g. Safeguarding Adults Reviews), we have been very keen to ensure any immediate opportunities for internal learning and reflection can take place promptly, and be widely shared across our service to support knowledge and awareness. Practice Development Advanced Practitioners have a key role in bringing learning into all areas of Adult Social Care via team and service meetings, reflective practice and CPD sessions, and also supporting teams to embed the learning. We have started circulating '7 Minute Learning Briefings' across our workforce'; these seek to simply summarise the initial key findings and recommendations following consideration of the case and chronology, and promote any resources of relevance to support effective practice. Teams are encouraged to set aside time within team meetings and/or supervision to discuss and reflect on the learning from these reviews.

A recent [annual review of our Practice Quality Framework](#) has taken place, to consider the learning and feedback received since September 2023; a revised framework that builds on the strengths and successes, and addresses opportunities for further improvement was launched in September 2024.

As a service, we also actively contribute to practice and research opportunities. Recent examples include:

- Two of our adult social care operational teams participated in The Social Work with Older People (SWOP) Research Project led by the University of Birmingham and the University of Bristol. Starting in November 2021 and running for two years, the study was funded by the NIHR School for Social Care Research. Researchers followed 10 social workers over a period of six months (between the summer of 2022 and the summer of 2023), covering a time of acute pressure in health and social care services. The [initial findings report](#) was published in November 2023 and was included as an agenda item in our most recent 'Carnival of Practice' programme of learning.
- Our work with 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 Somerset, Torbay and Cornwall, and the University of Plymouth. It brings together adult social care, experts by experience, and research to learn from each other, and identify areas of research that are relevant and important to practice. We have offered two of our adult social care staff (a social worker and an occupational therapist) the exciting opportunity to undertake a research secondment as 'Research Practitioners' up to the end of October 2024 on a part-time basis; both started in March 2024. The aim of the project is to develop research capacity and capability in our adult social care service with the intention of further improving the design and delivery of services over the medium to long term, and improve the experiences of, and outcomes for, people. Our focus is on the use of Talking Cafes and community-based hubs as part of the prevention agenda.

Learning from feedback

We launched a new stakeholder feedback approach in January 2022 to generate more frequent opportunities to log and learn from the experience of those using our services for our teams beyond the more formal compliments/complaints approach in place corporately. We have been delighted to see this approach embed and increasingly add value since its implementation, with staff actively promoting the link within email signatures, in documents and through discussion.

During 2023/24, a total of 273 responses were submitted from a wide range of those we support (up from 216 in 2022/23). Half of these stemmed directly from people receiving care and support (20%) or their relatives/carers (30%). Registered care provider feedback accounted for an additional 23% of responses, with the remainder of feedback coming from Local Authority or NHS colleagues/staff, or voluntary/community sector representatives.

210 (77%) rated the overall service received from our staff as either 'Good' or 'Excellent' during 2023/254 (our target is 75%+). *Latest performance for 2024/25 (through to end of May 2024) is 85%*. Given the demand, workforce and financial pressures on our Council and the wider health and care sector, it is testament to them hard work and commitment of our staff teams that more than three quarters of feedback we receive is overwhelmingly positive. Latest data for Quarter 1 2024/25 is showing that 60 of 68 pieces of stakeholder feedback submitted is rating the service we've provided as Good or Excellent (88.2%).

The feedback we receive continues to offer us valuable insights into the experience of people who use services and carers, our partner colleagues and other key stakeholders, providing opportunities for learning or improvement, reducing risks of complaints escalating, and enabling celebratory monthly 'staff shoutouts' and greater recognition based on independent feedback. We ensure it informs our monthly Practice Quality Board, and produce a quarterly report examining the latest experience and feedback from people using our services, including complaints.

Analysis shows that the single biggest element and influencer of both positive and negative feedback is communication – how clear, responsive, professional and compassionate we are in our respective job roles makes a fundamental difference to the experience of those we engage with and support.

Examples of 'You Said, We Did' work being progressed on the back of both positive and negative 2023/24 feedback includes:

- ***"It is very difficult to get information or reach anyone" – During 2024/25 we have committed to undertake work to improve our public-facing information and accessibility on our Council website, and better clarify the 'customer journey' for those seeking support from adult social care in Somerset.***
- ***"I am told a full review is required and that the wait for such a review was 9/10 weeks. This deadline has been and gone - still nothing" – As part of our ongoing work to address waiting lists and reduce the time people are taking for an assessment or a review, we have introduced robust assurance oversight with a focus on improving productivity and maintaining effective data validation, and allocation and communication expectations to improve timely engagement. We are also doing some targeted work across teams, including our South Somerset locality function, to improve productivity, performance and capacity.***

- *“SILC appointment came quickly, we were seen on time, we were treated professionally and with care. Communication since the appointment has been brilliant via email and phone. The service is 10/10 and a gold star should be awarded” – We have continued to invest in our Independent Living Centres with a new SILC opened in Yeovil in 2023 to complement the existing services in Wellington and Shepton Mallet ensuring people have good access to services to help promote people’s independence. Plans for a SILC in Bridgwater and a pop up in Minehead are progressing.*

In addition to the large amount of stakeholder feedback the service gathers, Local Authority ‘Customer Experience’ data for 2023/24 highlights that there has been a rise in the number of accepted complaints during the year (268 received); a similar rise has been seen in the Council’s children’s social care service. The most common cause for complaints relates to assessments and reviews. However, 94% of complaints were resolved at Stage 1 and just under 1 in 5 Stage 1 complaints (19% or 51) were ‘upheld’ during the year. Of the 11 cases escalated internally to Stage 2 investigation, 6 were resolved in year and not upheld following further investigation; the remaining 5 remained open as of 31st March 2024. Just 3% of all accepted adult social care complaints received in 2023/24 (8 cases) were escalated externally to the independent Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman the same year. Of these 8, 6 were resolved in-year with 1 case upheld and all 5 others closed with no further action following initial enquiries. 2 remained open to the LGSCO as of 31st March 2024.

Following the revision of our [Practice Quality Framework \(PQF\)](#) we have amended our audit process with the focus being on reflective peer group sessions following practice standard topics: In addition our Service Managers audit random cases to ensure the quality of individual practice.

- Oct 2024: Working with people
- Nov 2024: Case recording
- Jan2024 Strengths-based assessments
- Feb 2025: Working with risk
- Mar 2025: Personalised Care and Support planning
- Apr2025: Reviewing care and support plans
- May 2025: Decision-making
- June 2025: Safeguarding people
- July 2025: Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion.

Information gathered from last years audits has proved invaluable in helping us better track, monitor and identify our practice strengths and areas for further focus. We encourage managers to continue to role model and champion the process, and practitioners to use their audits to inform reflective practice conversations in supervision.

Themes and feedback from audits, which includes any feedback gathered from the person or a suitable representative, are shared at the monthly Practice Quality Board, with our Scrutiny Committee and are also promoted in our monthly Staff Highlight Reports.

A separate audit of supervision took place in Sep 2024 and the results have shown a clear improvement compared to the results from 2023.

Our Practice Development Advanced Practitioners help take a key role in monitoring and disseminating information including via team meetings and CPD sessions, and progressing any recommendations, actions or learning arising from the audits. Having now established robust frameworks and governance processes over the past year, our focus now turns to ensuring this learning is widely shared and, crucially, well embedded into practice and process.

Adult Social Care, and the Council as a whole, is committed to improving opportunities for effective and meaningful co-production. Co-production means working with people who use services and carers as equal partners in the design, development, commissioning, delivery and review of the Council's services. It is central to achieving the personalisation of services and increasing choice and control for people who use services and carers.

The Council has established 18 [Local Community Networks](#) (LCNs) to act as the 'voice' of our communities. They are about engagement and improving outcomes for residents through establishing strong connections between Somerset Council, our communities, businesses, and our partners. It has also established a '[Customer Panel](#)' made up of volunteers to provide feedback about the Council and its services.

In November 2023, Adult Social Care established a new '**Working Together Board**' following a series of workshops; this is a partnership arrangement with people with lived expertise and carers. Our next Board meeting is scheduled for July 2024 and will include a focus on work to improve our adult social care public-facing website information.

Healthwatch Somerset is a statutory service and countywide independent health and care champion. It exists to ensure that people are at the heart of care. Healthwatch Somerset is hosted by The Advocacy People. Dedicated teams of staff and volunteers listen to what people like about local health services, and what could be improved. These views are then shared with the decision-making organisations informing improvement and commissioning plans. Healthwatch Somerset additional duty is to support people to find the information they need about health and care services in their area.

Healthwatch in Somerset is a jointly commissioned service between Somerset Council and NHS Somerset. Such funding arrangement is unique in England and has creating much interest from Healthwatch England and other local authorities.

In July 2024, Healthwatch Somerset published its [2023/24 Annual Report](#) ('[The value of listening](#)') outlining its activity and celebrating its impact. Healthwatch Somerset plays a key role in a variety of local partnership forums (including the Safeguarding Adults Board, ICB System Assurance Group, the Carers Partnership Board) and contributes to supporting the Local Authority in a variety of ways, including through 'enter and view' visits within care settings.

Healthwatch Somerset has most recently become involved in the new Working Together Board which looks to drive improvement or new initiatives in partnership with expert by experience and carers

Examples of co-production informing our commissioning activity includes:

- **Technology Enabled Care (TEC) service co-design:** Adult Social Care and Somerset Lifeline Services have been working together to develop a TEC Service. This aims to offer choice, maximise independence, and help people to stay safe and live well in their own homes, as well as remaining connected within their communities. The service has been co-designed to meet the needs of likely customers by giving those people a voice during the design and development of the service. This has taken place through a number of co-design sessions at our Somerset Independent Living Centres where participants were shown and could try examples of TEC. 25 people joined the sessions and others joined an online session; 94% of participants thought that their views and ideas would help the development of the service. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bry7afRYW3c>
- **Learning Disability Open Framework re-commission:** This re-commission presented an opportunity to involve and co-produce with experts by experience. This focussed on developing the quality standards which enable service design by making expectations and ethos explicit. More than 50 people engaged with developing the quality standards. This included a range of experts by experience who receive services, carers and family of those using services, as well as those involved in delivering care and support. In order to make the engagement meaningful and accessible, the conversations and discussion groups focused on what good care and support looks like to them. The key themes from the draft quality standards were collated in to an '[Adults in Somerset Charter](#)'. This is an accessible presentation of what people can expect from their service provider and outlines some of their rights. The participants agreed with all aspects articulated within the Charter. They also felt that the things that were important to them in the care and support they receive, were covered by the Charter.
- **Carers' Strategy:** Somerset's latest [Commitment to Carers 2024](#) acknowledges the invaluable contribution and challenges faced by unpaid carers and outlines the values, principles and actions that health and social care services should adopt to ensure effective support. The commitment reflects priorities identified through consultation and co-production with carers, and those who work with and support carers.

In March 2024, the Local Government Association Assurance Peer Challenge team identified that Somerset has opportunities for people to feedback and a good foundation for co-production: *‘Overall, whilst there is work to do in this area, the Challenge Team heard and saw strong commitment and energy to push forwards on this journey, and the values, culture and approach in key elements of delivery (e.g. direct payments and care planning) that evidence an openness to the expertise gained from lived experience’.*

END