



SSCP
SUNDERLAND
SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN
PARTNERSHIP

Annual Report

April 2021 to March 2022

Introduction

The Sunderland Safeguarding Children Partnership (SSCP) ensures that the coordination of effective arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of children, is equally shared by Chief Executive of Sunderland Council, the Chief Clinical Officer and Accountable Officer of Sunderland Clinical Commissioning Group and the Chief Constable of Northumbria Police.

The SSCP's Multi Agency Safeguarding Arrangements (MASA) provide a streamlined structure for the Partnership with a stronger focus on learning and improvement. The Practitioner Forum is now an embedded function of the partnership and provides a clear line of sight for our senior leaders to frontline practice and the impact this is having on children, young people and families. The Forum provides a clear methodology to 'deep dive' into an area of concern and to develop new ways of working and improve outcomes for children, young people and families.

As part of our Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements and in line with Working Together 2018, we must publish an annual report. This is our second Annual Report under the revised arrangements and it sets out:

- The work that we have undertaken throughout the year from 1 April 2021–31 March 2022, in line with our Business Plan including impact where this can be demonstrated
- The Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews that have been completed in the year together with an overview of how learning has been embedded into practice
- How we have sought and used the views of children, young people and families

- The training offer we have provided to ensure the Sunderland workforce is better equipped to support the children, young people and families who need it.

There are six priority areas identified for the SSCP through our Business Plan:

1. Covid-19 Recovery
2. Domestic Abuse
3. Contextual Safeguarding
4. Vulnerable Babies
5. Mental health of children and young people
6. Strategic safeguarding approaches.

This report provides an update on these priorities, including performance data, progress made against the actions, identified impacts and any other activities that have contributed to the priority throughout the year.



Partners' Foreword

As social restrictions have been lifted and we are finding a new post-pandemic norm, the SSCP has worked hard to adapt and continue to improve outcomes for children, young people and families. We have had some great achievements in 2021–22 that we truly believe will make a difference for children, young people and families.

First and foremost, great credit and congratulations must go to Together for Children, who, following inspection in June and July 2021 were graded as Outstanding by Ofsted. The transformation of children's social care over the last five years is remarkable. TfC is the first in the country to make the leap from Inadequate to Outstanding and at that time were one of only 18 local authorities in England and one of only four local authorities in the North of England to be rated Outstanding.

The SSCP is delighted for TfC and also for children, young people and families in Sunderland. It provides solid assurance that those who need help receive high quality support at the right time and that this is achieved in partnership with safeguarding services across this city.

Through Covid Recovery funding from Sunderland's Clinical Commissioning Group, the SSCP has ensured that young people have access to direct support for relationship and sexual health advice. With this funding we were also able to make a contribution to the prevention bus, Wear Here 4 You, which has been invaluable in connecting with young people, providing them with a safe space and delivering prevention services, information, advice and guidance.

Our Practitioner Forum has gone from strength to strength. The sessions are valued by practitioners from across the partnership and have developed over the course of the year. As a direct result of these sessions we have made some really innovative changes to practice.

Following the Complex Adolescents forum, Together for Children implemented a Young Person's Team to work directly with vulnerable teenagers who are experiencing harm outside the home. This is already having a positive impact for families: the team works with smaller numbers of families so can spend more time building positive relationships with young people, and parents and carers are engaged as they feel supported rather than judged. In 2022–23 this will be complemented by a multi-agency Young Person's Plan - an alternative to a child protection plan which focuses on working directly with young people themselves, rather than changes to parental behaviours.

A number of new practices were also put in place following the Vulnerable Babies Practitioner Forum which has enabled us to share information about families more effectively. Child Concern Notifications for pre-school aged children are now shared with health services which has led to midwives, health visitors and GPs being able to better support families at an earlier stage.

Our work with other partnerships has strengthened - we have worked closely with the Sunderland Safeguarding Adults Board, agreeing to convene a citywide, all-age Strategic Exploitation Group. Our third Practitioner Forum, on domestic abuse, was undertaken jointly with the Domestic Abuse & Violence Against Women and Girls Board. We also continue to lead the Tyne, Wear and Northumberland Safeguarding Partnership.

We have achieved so much in 2021–22 and there is no room for complacency; there are still so many challenges. Relationships within the partnership have strengthened over the last five years; as Clinical Commissioning Groups move to become Integrated Commissioning Services it is essential these relationships are maintained so we continue

to deliver excellent health services to children.

We are beginning to see the impact of Covid lockdowns on young people's mental health and wellbeing. Referrals to mental health services have risen higher than pre-pandemic levels and there are concerns about the growing numbers of children and young people experiencing complex mental health difficulties. With extreme pressure in the system both regionally and nationally and high demand on Tier 4 beds, we need to ensure we are delivering high class services for our young people to prevent crisis situations and the need for the highest level of interventions.

Our next Practitioner Forum will focus on Children Missing Education. Whilst we have excellent systems in place to locate children missing from education, we are extremely concerned about those children missing out on education - those on part time timetables or not attending school. We look forward to the exciting developments our practitioners come up with.

All of this is set in the backdrop of the worst cost of living crises this country has seen for around 40 years. We know the pressure that this puts on families, particularly those that are already vulnerable. We have not seen a let up in the numbers of families requiring support since Covid restrictions were lifted and we need to be prepared for further increases in demand.

By delivering on our mission of

“High Support, High Challenge - Working together; making a difference; safeguarding children”

we will improve the lives of the most vulnerable children and young people in Sunderland.

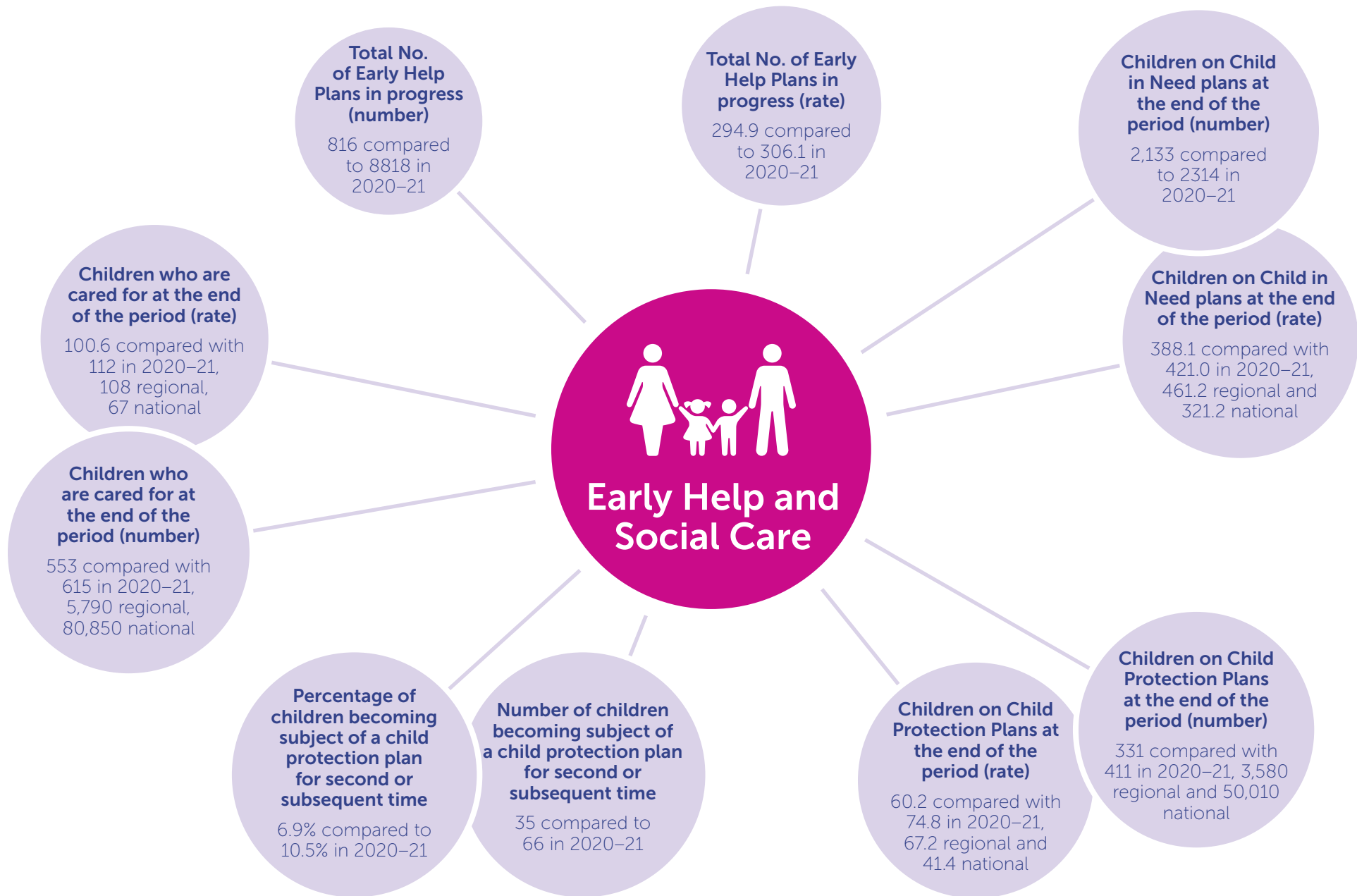
Delivery of our business plan

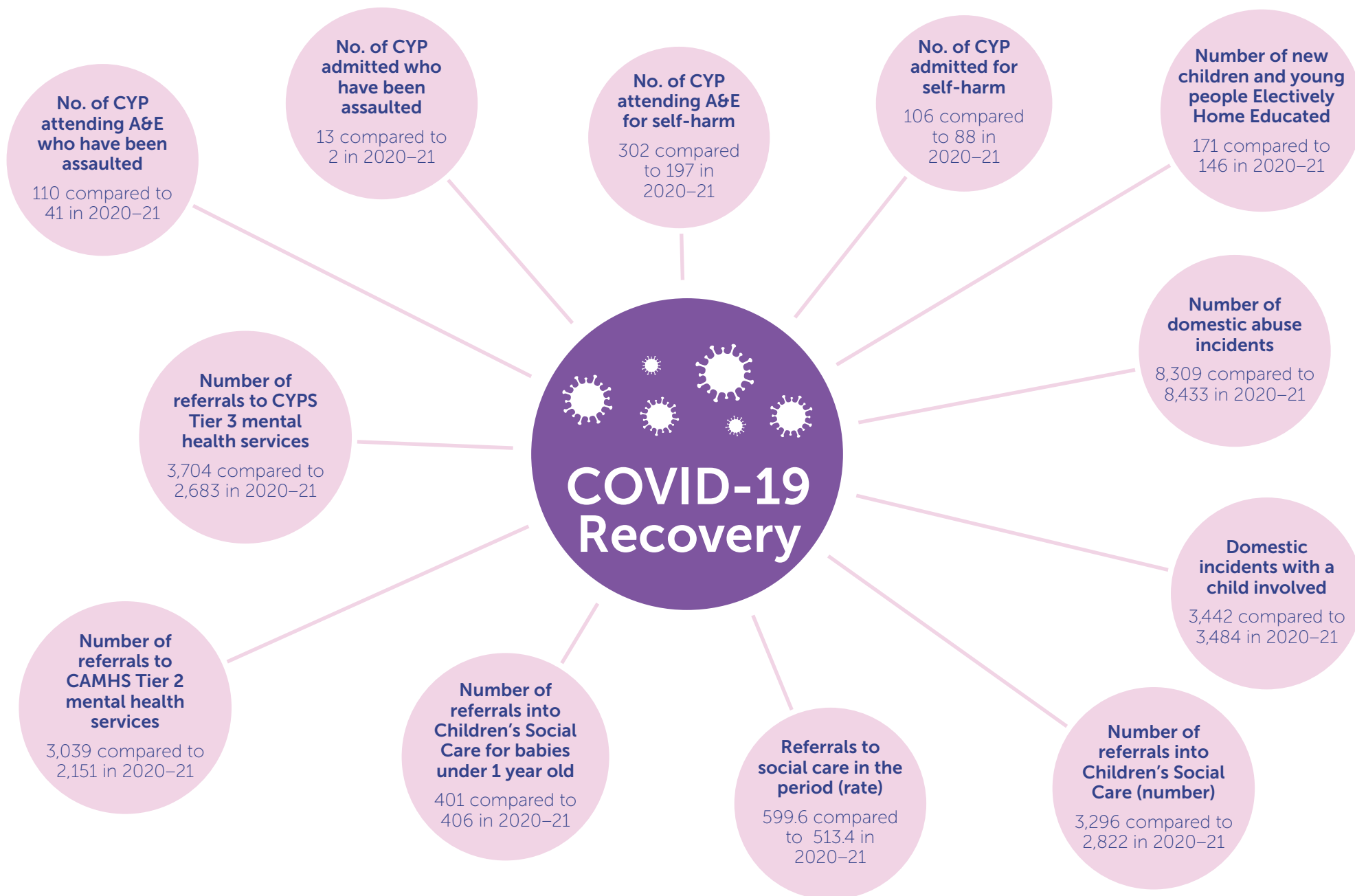
The following pages set out:

Performance information in relation to children, young people and families who are receiving multi-agency help and support

Performance information and progress made against the priorities in the SSCP Business Plan which are:

- Covid-19 Recovery
- Domestic abuse
- Complex safeguarding
- Vulnerable babies
- Mental health of children and young people
- Strategic safeguarding approaches.





COVID-19 Recovery

As restrictions on our liberties were lifted in 2021 and we learned to live with Covid, we began to see the impacts that lockdowns had on children, young people and families, including:

- A continuation of the high numbers of contacts into children’s social care services
- A slight drop in incidents of domestic abuse, however incidents continue to be higher than pre-Covid levels, including those where children and young people are present
- Numbers of young people electively home educated continues to rise
- Concerning reports about child on child sexual abuse, both physical and online, with particular concerns about derogatory language being normalised
- Increasing referrals for children and young people into mental health services, with referrals being higher than pre-Covid levels.

There was no specific action plan for this priority, recognising that the impacts were ever changing and likely to do so for several years. Partners have responded to the presenting situations in several ways.

In April 2021, the CCG provided an additional £100,000 to the SSCP to manage in relation to Covid Recovery. Following expressions of interest, funding was awarded to the following projects:

2 x sessional Relationship & Sex Education Workers	£32,000
Child & Family Workers x 6 (June-August 2021)	£42,349
Prevention Bus - Wear Here 4 U	£10,000
	£84,349

The remaining funding has carried over to the 2022–23 financial year.

The impacts of the funding for children, young people and families are detailed below.

Relationship and Sex Education (RSE) Workers

In the first quarter of 2021, referrals for young people requiring RSE support were rising and there were 39 young people on waiting lists, which provided the rationale for awarding £16,000 to employ two workers for a period of six months. Together for Children agreed to host the workers, who came into post in October 2021.

From April to September 2021 there were 87 referrals for RSE support; for the same period in 2020, there were 14 referrals. This is approximately a 600% increase and led to a decision by the SSCP to fund the workers for a further 6 months, providing an additional £16,000.

Between October 2021 and March 2022, the RSE workers provided direct work to 205 young people and supported many more on the Wear Here 4 U bus.

Child & Family Workers

Responding to increasing contacts into children’s social care, funding was awarded to allow six social work students to take up roles of child and family workers from 1 June to 31 August 2021, after which time they would move into different roles in TfC.

The students worked in the Assessment and Locality safeguarding teams, supporting social workers with tasks that would contribute to children’s

plans. This ensured families were effectively supported in a timely way and eased some of the pressures within those teams. This time also allowed students to gain knowledge of the functioning of the teams and the children and families that they were working with, meaning they were well prepared for their Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (AYSE) commencing September 2021.

Prevention bus - WEAR HERE 4 YOU

The Wear Here 4 You bus was launched on 16 October 2021, promoting a range of prevention services to children and young people. Together for Children, HDFT's Growing Healthy Service, Northumbria Police, the Youth Consortium and other partners engaged with children and young people on issues that matter to them, giving advice and support in relation to:

- Anti-Bullying
- Relationship, Sex and Health Education (RSHE)
- Youth Drug and Alcohol (YDAP)
- Co-production Opportunities
- Better Mental Health
- Careers Advice and Guidance
- Nutritional Education - Change 4 Life
- Staying Safe Advice and Guidance
- Sexual and Criminal Exploitation and Hate Crime
- Violence against women and girls
- Family Centres
- Detached Youth Work (area dependant).

In the period 16 October 2021–31 March 2022 the following sessions have taken place:

Location	No of Sessions	No of Children and young people	No of Parent/carers
School	17	1,384	0
Community - Day	8	385	47
Community - Evening	21	795	11
Total	46	2,564	59

What young people and families are telling us:

Young people want to go, just chill out and listen to music	Young people want help with their wellbeing	Young people want to know what employment and training opportunities are available	Young people want to feel safe	Young people want help to stay out of trouble
Families want access to information in one place	Young people want information about safe sex	Young people want advice about being in a healthy relationship	Young people want to talk to someone who will listen (a trusted adult)	Some young people aren't attending school
	Young people are telling us they are meeting up and fighting in groups	Young people are mixing in a varied age range from across the city	Young people are aware of 'only fans' and who to contact	

Direct quotes from children and young people are:

- “I was on the bus at Washington Galleries it gives us something to do and was great talking to staff, was helpful”
- “What a night, great staff”
- “The bus is fab, even the staff have fun”
- “Don’t get in trouble”
- “It’s just amazing”
- What we love about the bus - “the staff, the support, the tunes, the free food”

Outcomes

- Sexually Transmitted Screening kits have allowed the identification and treatment of STIs in young people
- Strengthened RSHE and anti-bullying work in individual schools
- Feedback from young people has led to a widening of support within the youth drug and alcohol service and the delivery of targeted intervention to young people
- Identification of appropriate Early Help referrals
- Raised awareness for partners on how to submit intelligence to police
- Over 50 new families signed up to their local Family Centre
- Disclosures from a number of young people, including a disclosure regarding online grooming, has led to direct work with them in relation to harmful sexual behaviour.

Schools Event - Child on child sexual abuse

In line with rising concerns in Sunderland about child on child sexual abuse, and to promote the Ofsted review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges, the SSCP held an awareness raising event specifically for schools in October 2021. The event covered:

- Children and young people’s voice
- Ofsted expectations
- RHSE Curriculum
- Growing Healthy - health services for 5–19 year olds
- Police approach
- A practical activity, looking at a case study to consider responses to support young people who experience peer to peer sexual abuse, including online abuse.

Feedback on the event was positive with those schools responding saying they had increased their knowledge on the subject, that the content of the event was relevant and that they would appreciate an annual event for schools covering relevant safeguarding themes.

Recognising the impact of online exploitation during lockdown, Northumbria Police’s Prevention Through Education Team undertook an awareness raising campaign about the sharing of self-generated indecent images (commonly called ‘nudes’) among children. During the summer term, the team visited 15 schools to deliver this topic to 1206 pupils, with most children who received the input being in year 8. Five of these sessions included a contribution from a member of our Paedophile Online Investigation Team (POLIT) giving an insight into what can happen to these indecent images once they are shared digitally. Feedback from schools was that the inputs were timely, shocking, well-pitched and exactly what the students needed to make them realise the consequences of sharing indecent images.

Elective Home Education

Through the SSCPs Covid-19 Extraordinary meetings, the increasing numbers of children and young people who are electively home educated has been brought to the attention of safeguarding partners.

This function is currently monitored and delivered by Sunderland City Council; many other education services are delivered by TfC. To streamline the offer to parents who choose to home educate their children, the council has transferred the management of this function (and other retained education functions) to TfC. The impact of this and how this improves the offer to families who do home educate can be monitored over the next year.



Domestic abuse

Domestic abuse has long been a concern in Sunderland and the Covid-19 pandemic has shone a spotlight on this. In terms of children's safeguarding, generally two-fifths of all domestic abuse incidents recorded in Sunderland involve children and young people and so this remains a priority for the SSCP.

This Annual Report sets out the key areas of work that have been undertaken by the partnership throughout the year to drive improvements in this area.

Practitioner Forum

Domestic abuse does not just affect children and families; it affects people of all ages and from all communities across the city. Recognising this, it was agreed that the SSCP would facilitate a Domestic Abuse Practitioner Forum, led by Northumbria Police, and undertaken jointly with the Domestic Abuse & Violence Against Women and Girls (DA&VAWG) Board.

The initial forum was held on 1 February 2022, focusing on the voice of survivors and children and young people. The event was well attended from across the two partnerships and initial feedback was extremely positive. The forum is now in the investigation stage, with the outcomes to be delivered to the DA&VAWG Executive in July 2022.

Safe and Together

The Baby Kate Child Safeguarding Practice Review, published in October 2020, made a number of recommendations. This included the requirement for partners to:

Implement robust Child Protection Plans which incorporate how work with perpetrators of domestic abuse is undertaken

To enhance how work is undertaken with perpetrators of domestic abuse, Together for Children has rolled out Safe & Together training for practitioners in that service. The training focuses on the behaviours of perpetrators and moves away from 'victim blaming' language. To ensure this is rolled out across the children's workforce and a consistent message is provided by all professionals and practitioners, the SSCP has agreed to fund the training at a cost of approximately £14,000. The training will be delivered in 2022–23.

Whilst Safe & Together is largely focussed on families with children, it is important that victim blaming language is not used by any practitioner or in any service working with those who experience domestic abuse. There is, therefore, an opportunity to work with the DA&VAWG Board to roll this, or similar training out across all workforces, and that recommendation has been accepted by the DA&VAWG Board.

To understand the impact of Safe & Together, a multi-agency audit was undertaken in August 2021. A series of recommendations were developed and the audit will be repeated in 2022–23 which will monitor the implementation of these recommendations as well as consider the impact the wider roll out of Safe & Together.

Domestic Abuse and Violence Against Women and Girls partnership

The DA&VAWG Board is now well established, representation by SSCP members is good and the partnership has contributed to activity since its development. The focus of activity throughout 2021–22 has been to:

- Establish the Executive and Operational Boards of the DA&VAWG Partnership
- Complete the needs assessment
- Develop the action plan
- Undertake a joint Practitioner Forum.

Looking forward to 2022–23, key activities for the DA&VAWG Partnership are:

- To oversee the implementation of the new commissioned contract for Domestic Abuse from 1 April 2022, delivered by Wearside Women in Need
- To undertake stakeholder insight and engagement through a series of surveys to survivors of domestic abuse including children and young people, services supporting survivors of domestic abuse and the general public
- The completion of three units of move-on accommodation for survivors of domestic abuse
- To undertake a training audit.

With the establishment of the DA&VAWG Partnership, the SSCP has agreed not to extend its own action plan for domestic abuse. Instead it will influence and contribute to the DA&VAWG action plan, providing a life course approach to tackling domestic abuse and its impacts.

Increased awareness raising

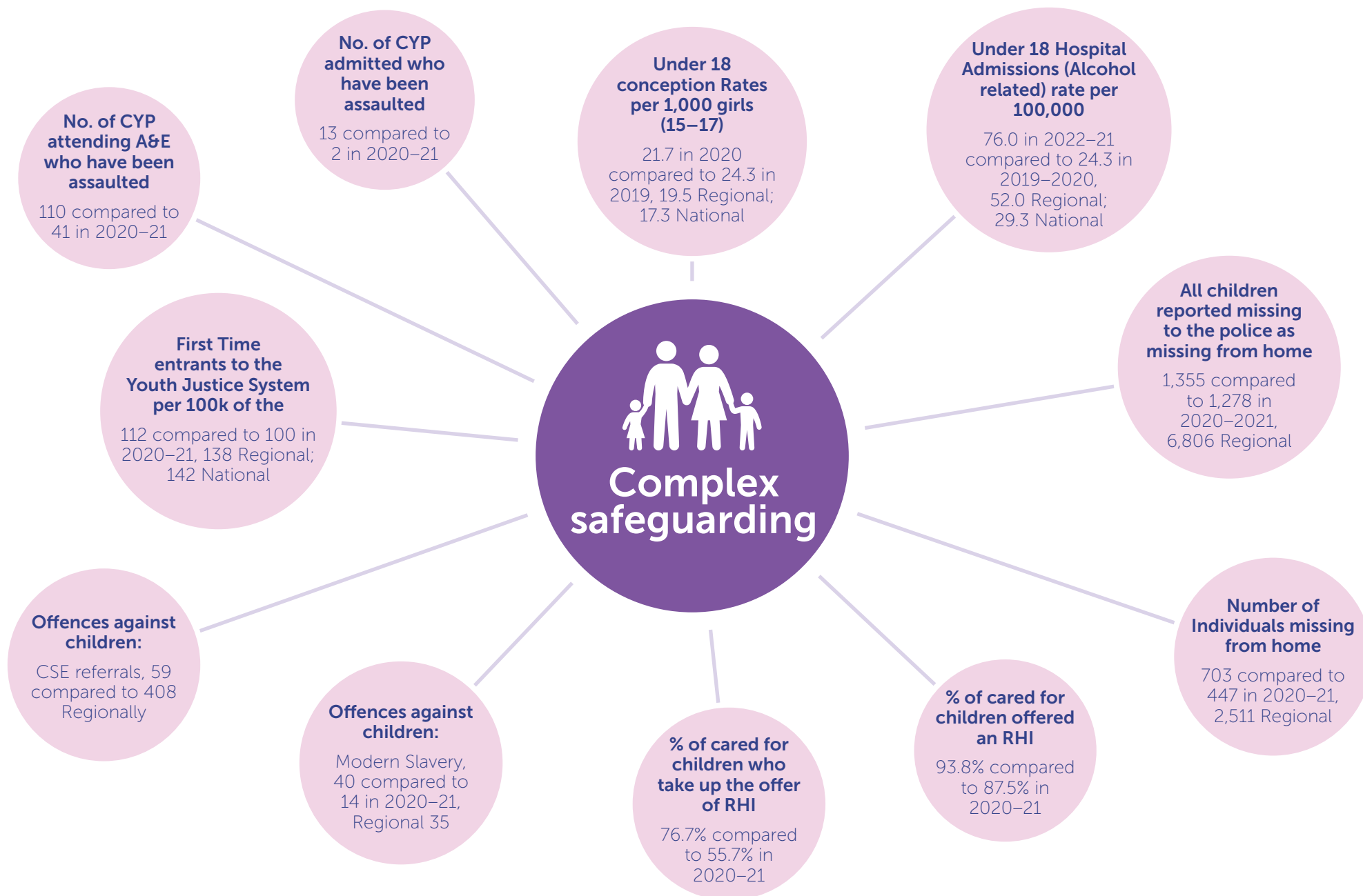
Individual agencies within the SSCP continue to improve their own approach to domestic abuse. In South Tyneside and Sunderland Foundation Trust, the hospital Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDVA) and Domestic Abuse Health Advocate (DAHA) have targeted all directorates across the Trust to support staff to recognise and respond to domestic abuse.

The increased awareness has enabled on site, prompt specialist support for victims from the IDVA or DAHA followed by referrals to local domestic abuse services and where necessary Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) referrals, both of which have increased during the last financial year.

Child to Parent Violence and Abuse (CPVA)

A Northumbria Police Force definition of CPVA has been produced and agreed by all local areas in the Northumbria Region and police are in the process of signing off internal procedures and developing training for front line officers in relation to their response to CPVA. In support of this commitment, officers on the Street Triage Team (STT) are provided with ongoing Continuing Professional Development which includes all areas of safeguarding including DV, CPVA and exploitation. Nurses on the team are highly experienced and will look at a family dynamic as a whole and make the necessary referrals and signposting.

STT will review family situations to identify carer fatigue, children who are exposed to emotional neglect due to adult carers deteriorating mental health and parents who are at risk of DA from children with deteriorating mental health or neurodiverse diagnosis. The Mental Health Sergeant has also developed a training package for investigators so that perpetrators of domestic abuse who also have a mental health diagnosis can be progressed through the criminal justice system with support or alternatively diverted through a mental health treatment pathway. This is to safeguard family members or the public and to help prevent reoffending.



Complex safeguarding

The actions identified through this priority were developed through the Complex Adolescents Practitioner Forum and through the Child Safeguarding Practice Review for Child FC. One thing that was very apparent through both these elements of learning was a need to work differently with young people who experienced harm outside of the home. This has led to the development of a Young Person's Team and a Young Person's Plan.

Young Person's Team

Using learning from other areas, practitioners developed a radical new approach to protecting young people who are experiencing harm outside the home. In November 2021, Together for Children launched the one-year pilot of their Young Person's Team which works with young people, aged 11+, where there are no concerns about parents' behaviour, and who are facing:

- Sexual exploitation
- Criminal exploitation including through county lines and drug dealing
- Peer on peer abuse (outside of the family)
- Gang association
- Violence and knife crime
- Trafficking and modern day slavery
- Anti-social behaviour, including drug and alcohol misuse
- Radicalisation
- Mental health and emotional wellbeing.

The team benefits from having small caseloads and so can work more intensively with young people. Since being established, the MSET Coordinator has been aligned with the team to enhance support, and links have been developed with the Youth Offending Service to strengthen multi-agency working.

There are aspirations to widen the agencies that are involved in the team, either virtually or through colocation, once the evaluation of the pilot is complete.

Early indications are that there are that the team is having some good successes:

- Levels of trust for young people are increasing
- They are engaging with social workers and other services in ways that they never have before
- Parents feel more supported and not judged on their parenting ability, which means they are engaged and work with practitioners and professionals to protect their children.

Young Person's Plan

Closely linked to this is the multi-agency Young Person's Plan (YPP) which will be launched in April 2022. This exciting and new way of working will be put in place to respond to needs of the young person, through positive dialogue directly with the young person.

A feature of the YPP, which derives directly from the CSPR, is that young people will be able to say who they want to be their 'lead professional'. This will be someone the young person trusts or has a connection with,

and will act as a single point of contact, engage the young person in making choices and navigating their way through the process to effect change. The YPP is also a one-year pilot and will be evaluated after 31 March 2023.

For more information about the Young Person's Team and the Young Person's Plan you can access a presentation which has been delivered across the partnership and the format of the Young Person's Child Protection Conference.

Strategic Exploitation Group

In March 2022, the SSCP, Sunderland Safeguarding Adults Board and the Safer Sunderland Partnership held a joint workshop on exploitation. Professionals agreed that exploitation affects all age groups and all communities and requires a multi-agency strategic approach to drive improvements. It was recommended at that workshop to develop a Strategic Exploitation Group, reporting to each of the individual boards. The Strategic Exploitation Group will be in place by April 2022 and will, in the first instance, develop performance information, multi-agency training and will develop an action plan to deliver improvements across the city. This will include the remaining actions identified for the SSCP through its business plan which are:

- Develop key messages to support children and young people to understand safeguarding
- Explore the use of Boys Mentors
- Develop a Data Management Solution for complex adolescents
- Undertake a multi-agency mapping activity to understand what services are available to support adolescents.

In addition to the SSCP's action plan, Northumbria Police's have strengthened their approach to vulnerability, through the "Vulnerability Matters" training programme, which has been launched and rolled out to all front line police officers and staff. The training provides officers with an

awareness of trauma and adverse childhood experiences and has a focus on early intervention and use of the three C's (Communication, Clues and Curiosity) to identify vulnerability. Currently over 2700 police officers and staff have undertaken this training.

In line with the Force's overarching strategic priority "Protection of the Vulnerable", an Early Intervention Strategy and delivery plan has also been launched, based on four pillars: Working together; Preventative Intervention; Community Resilience; and Our People. The ultimate aim is to achieve a safe environment for people, their families and the wider communities to thrive without fear of harm and to ensure perpetrators are identified and targeted and that the opportunity for them to cause further harm is removed or minimised.

In support of community safety plans Northumbria Police has developed a Vulnerability Assessment Tracker (VAT) within the Multi-Agency Exploitation Hub. While in its early stages of development with the performance data at this time being primarily police-centric, the aim is to host relevant multi agency data which will be a big step forward in supporting safety plans.

Work has progressed on Information Sharing Agreements (ISA) with the future aim for all hub partners to drive a more connected intelligence picture to allow for effective contextual safeguarding. Also, developed is an Internal Threat Reduction Group meeting at a senior management level which is linked to the Force tasking and coordination process driving the 4P policing activities (Prevent, Protect, Prepare & Pursue) in response to exploitation. This is supplemented with analytical support desk within the Force Intelligence Department dedicated to Modern Slavery, Human Trafficking as well as Child Sexual Exploitation and County Lines identifying any current or emerging trends and hotspots.

A weekly meeting between all partners to discuss individuals raised as being at potential risk or is at current risk of exploitation takes place there are no geographic boundaries allowing a region wide approach to ensure bespoke safety plans are put in place.



Vulnerable Babies

The actions identified for improvement through this priority were developed at the Practitioner Forum on Vulnerable Babies, led by the Clinical Commissioning Group. Practitioners scrutinised:

- Injuries in immobile babies
- Parental responsibility - the role of men
- Domestic Abuse
- Substance Misuse
- Mental Health
- Vulnerable Parents - parents with disabilities, teenage parents, cared experienced.

As a result of the Practitioner Forum, the partnership:

- Has developed Vulnerable Babies training which will be launched in April 2022
- Has developed Parental Problematic Drug Use training which will be rolled out from June 2022
- Has agreed a process for sharing Child Concern Notifications with health services
- Is exploring the implementation of a new process “Notification of parent to be”, recognising the importance of involving partners from conception and understanding more about their health and social needs in order to protect newborn babies.

Multi-agency training

Professionals from agencies across the partnership and the voluntary and community sector came together to develop training packages relating to Vulnerable Babies and Parental Problematic Drug Use. Both packages will be implemented in the 2022–23 financial year and evaluations will be monitored to understand impact and make any identified changes.

Child Concern Notifications (CCNs)

A pathway for sharing CCNs has been developed and now midwives, health visitors and GPs receive CCNs for pregnant women and incidents where pre-school aged children are in the household. Implementation of this approach has been positive, enabling health visitors to provide early contact with a pregnant woman, ensuring they can provide the appropriate support and advice, which has led to improved practice and communication. GPs have implemented a flagging system so anyone seeing the child’s record is aware of, and can consider, current or potential risk to them.

Operation Encompass facilitates the sharing of CCNs for children over 5 and provides the opportunity for support in school, as well as support from early help and children’s social care where thresholds are met. Further discussions will be had in 2022–23 about sharing CCNs with health for school aged children to widen potential support available.

Notification of parent to be

Notification of parent to be, is a process that enables midwives to request information from GPs about health or social issues that may impact on the ability of a partner of an expectant mother to parent

adequately, such as mental health, substance misuse, domestic abuse and learning disabilities/difficulties. This enables midwives to provide early intervention or to refer to partner agencies to help safeguard the baby from harm and abuse.

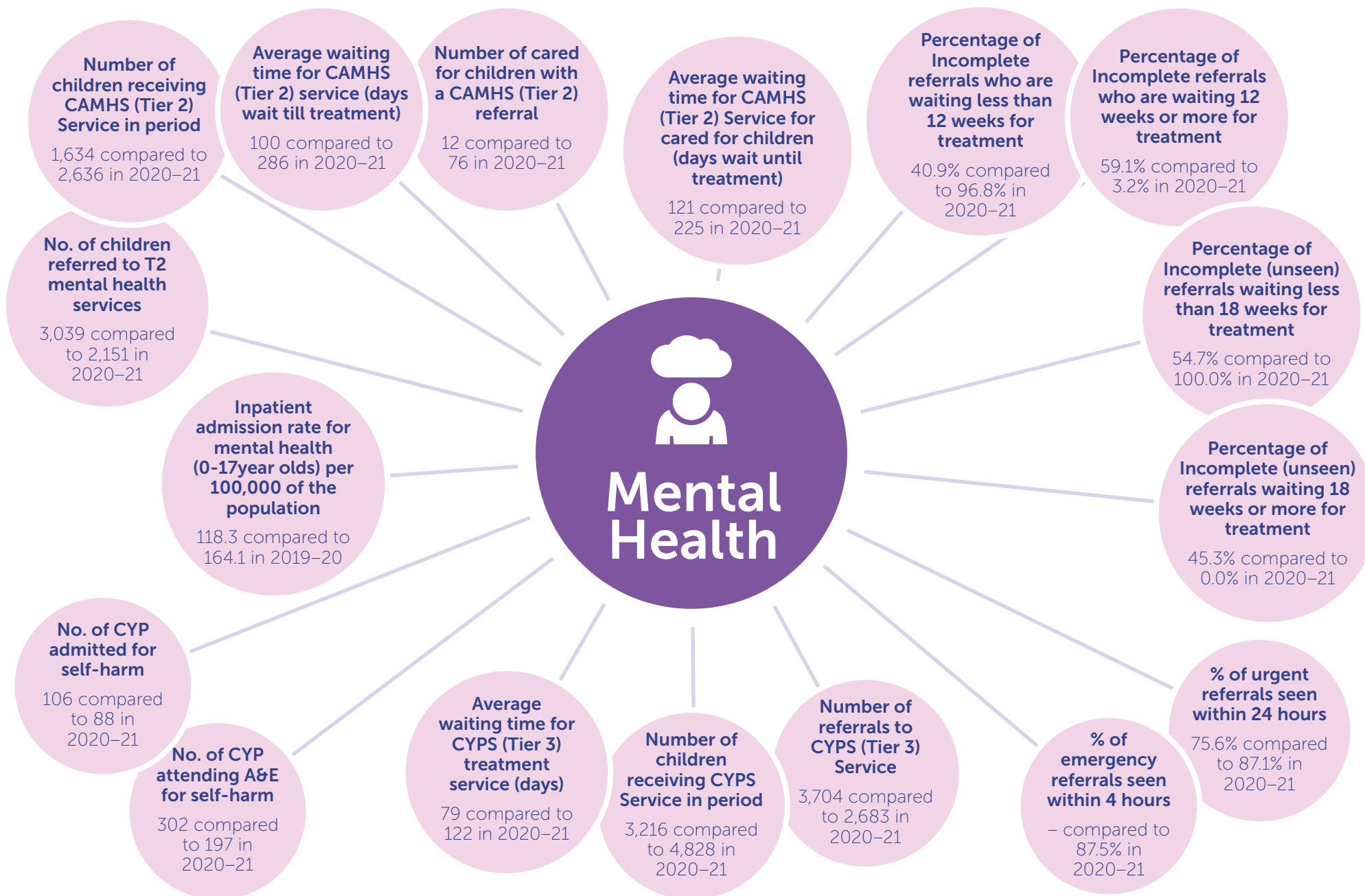
To implement this action, a multi-agency task and finish was convened to facilitate an integrated approach to the development of the process, including providing training delivered by South Tyneside Clinical Commissioning Group and South Tyneside and Sunderland Foundation Trust Named Midwife. There are ongoing discussions regarding information governance and it is hoped to implement this programme in 2022–23.

Born into Care project

Sunderland is one of 8 local areas selected to be part of the national research into babies who becomes cared for at birth. The work of Sunderland’s multi-agency pre-birth team is recognised by Ofsted as exemplary and other areas across the region are working on developing similar models.

Sunderland children’s social care and midwifery services are working closely with Newcastle and South Tyneside in the development of the national practice guidelines .

Together for Children is leading on development work with the North and South of the region to assist in the implementation of these guidelines to create some consistency of practice in pre-birth work. Work is also being undertaken with the Judiciary in relation to issuing proceedings on new born babies and pre-birth work.



Mental health of children and young people

It was agreed through the development of the SSCP Business Plan that there would not be a bespoke action plan; instead the SSCP would work with the CAMHS Partnership to ensure that outcomes for children and young people with emotional and mental health difficulties.

The role and remit of the CAMHS Partnership is currently being revised with a proposed new structure and a number of working groups being established.

Work continues to identify areas for improvement. In 2021–22 the first phase of implementation of Mental Health Support Teams (MHST) began and were fully rolled out in 19 schools by Spring 2022, supporting up to 6,351 pupils.

MHSTs are school based prevention and early intervention service delivering:

- Evidence-based interventions for mild to moderate mental health and emotional wellbeing needs on a 1:1 and small group basis
- Support to schools' senior mental health leads to develop and introduce their whole-school approach to mental health and emotional wellbeing
- Timely advice to staff and liaising with external specialist services so that children and young people can get the right support and remain in education.

Schools are identified based on levels of deprivation in the local area, number of children receiving free school meals and number of children with English as a second language.

In addition, in preparation for the forthcoming Liberty Protection Safeguards (LPS), STSFT have been actively involved in attending LPS regional meetings and have devised a business case to ensure the Trust has the right skill set to robustly implement LPS. There has been emphasis placed upon the impact LPS will have on our 16–17 year olds with relevant departments.

Northumbria Police also have an all age Street Triage Service which is open to children across region. In the last 12 months officers in the service have undertaken training in Adverse Childhood Experiences, learning disabilities and child exploitation to ensure they have a more holistic understanding of children's presenting behaviours.

The Street Triage service also ensure they are sighted on the impact of parental mental ill health on children and young people's mental health and make safeguarding referrals for children impacted by a parent or carers mental health crisis.

Kooth has been promoted within Southern area command for front line officers in Response Policing and Neighbourhood Teams to use as a signposting tool for young people with mental health concerns.

In 2022–23 the following activity will progress:

- The second phase of MHSTs is planned for roll out in 10 schools from November 2022 and a further 10 schools in September 2023
- The i-Thrive Framework will be implemented in Sunderland, beginning with a series of events and workshops delivered by the i-Thrive Academy
- A social marketing campaign on 'what is normal' for children and young people with regards to mental health will be developed, with a focus on anxiety. Work will be undertaken with young people to produce a series of videos and materials for parents. This will be launched in October 2022 for World Mental Health Day and will be the first of a rolling programme of campaigns to build resilience in children and young people with regards to their mental health
- A Single Point of Access will be explored including the development of a triage system to monitor and refer into other systems to manage workflow
- A social prescribing pathway will be implemented
- Implement the requirements of the Liberty Protection Safeguards.

Strategic safeguarding approaches

This priority relates to those areas that provide strategic direction to the children's safeguarding workforce and will enable them to better support vulnerable children, young people and their families. It builds upon the already strong foundations that have been laid across the partnership, by innovative and committed partners and a highly skilled and dedicated workforce.

The areas identified for the SSCP to develop are ones that will help give practitioners the competencies, skills and knowledge to improve outcomes for children and families.

Good progress has been made in implementing a programme of joint working with the Sunderland Safeguarding Adults Board. Three workshops have been held, resulting in programmes of work that will provide solid foundations for driving improvements across the city.

Joint work with Sunderland Safeguarding Adults Board

Domestic Abuse - April 2021

The proposed actions that came from this workshop were to establish a Domestic Abuse Board, with governance arrangements, a strategy and action plan. This workshop coincided with the publication of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 and as a result the local authority has established a Domestic Abuse & Violence Against Women and Girls Executive Board and Operational Group. This is chaired by the Chief Executive of Sunderland City Council, who is also the chair of the SSCP

Executive, so this provides read across and consistency between the two partnerships. Members of the SSCP are also represented on both the DA&VAWG Executive and Operational Groups and are active participants.

Self harm and suicide - October 2021

From a children's perspective, the outcomes of this workshop were a recognition that whilst statutory services were not dealing with high numbers of young people who self-harm, this is a hidden issue and numbers were likely to be far higher than those reported. Governance arrangements for self-harm sit with the Child & Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) Partnership and the following recommendations were made to that group:

- Undertake an exercise to better understand the prevalence of hidden self-harm
- Raise awareness with professionals/practitioners of the referral pathways for young people who self-harm
- Influence at a national level the standardisation of consistent coding in hospital Emergency Departments to get the correct level of information

Exploitation - March 2022

Recognising that exploitation occurs within all age groups and all communities, the SSCP and SSAB asked the Safer Sunderland Partnership to join them in this joint workshop. The outcomes of the workshop were to establish a citywide Strategic Exploitation Group responsible for developing performance information, multi-agency training and an action plan to deliver improvements across the city. The first meeting of the group will be in April 2022.

Signs of Safety roll out

The SSCP agreed to adopt Signs of Safety as an operating model in 2018 and TfC's children's social care service has been implementing this in earnest for four years now. Partners have been involved in that roll out and have done lots of work to align their processes with Signs of Safety, such as revising the format of child protection reporting templates to fit with the model.

The model is now well established in children's social care and the partnership agreed it was timely to provide further training and support to other partners to improve their understanding and confidence in working in a Signs of Safety way, ensuring the support families in Sunderland receive is consistent, whichever agency they work with.

The SSCP therefore provided £30,000 to fund a part-time post to develop a programme of training. A multi-agency Signs of Safety group was convened to establish a training offer that was relevant to individual agencies and schools and the roll out of this begins in April 2022.

Change the Language

The Change Council has developed their Change the Language campaign which provides alternative language to that traditionally used by professionals, i.e. cared for instead of looked after; home rather than placement. The booklet describing these changes can be found here.

However we need to be aware of other language that we use; we need to move towards a system where we eradicate victim blaming terminology, particularly in relation to victims of domestic abuse and exploitation. As a Partnership we will continue to develop the language we use to be more respectful and aware of the traumas that people face. Specific work will be undertaken in 2022–23 by the DA&VAWG Partnership and the Strategic Exploitation Group.

Trauma Informed Approach

Having a trauma informed workforce across the SSCP is essential to understanding the needs of children, young people and families and delivering services that are appropriate for them.

In 2021–22 the SSCP undertook a training audit in relation to trauma informed approaches. We found that all partners on the Board had commissioned and delivered trauma training programmes to upskill their workforce and so there was little benefit in the SSCP commissioning or developing bespoke training. However, in order to embed messages about trauma informed practices, all SSCP training will be revised to include:

- Additional slides reminding professionals to be aware of the impact of trauma
- Case studies which consider the impact of trauma on children, young people and families.

This will be completed by January 2023.

Other strategic safeguarding improvements

0-19 Service

In order to develop capacity within the 5-19 service, ensuring school aged children could be sufficiently safeguarded, HDFT developed a Transformation Model which went live in June 2021. This included the appointment of three additional Band 6 Safeguarding Strategy Nurses, line managed by the service's Safeguarding Team. The Transformation Model has had a positive impact enabling the school nursing service to undertake their public health work.

A footprint wide audit looking at impact of these changes was completed in 2022 highlighting that the Safeguarding Strategy Nurses had had the greatest impact when visiting children in their homes and where they attended ICPC conferences. The results were particularly positive in Sunderland which evidenced that cumulative risk was being considered as well as the voice of the child being captured.

Northumbria Police

Northumbria Police have undertaken a restructure of their safeguarding services with a Detective Chief Superintendent appointed as Head of Safeguarding who is responsible for the strategic leadership and performance of the Safeguarding Department. The DCS has completed a Public Protection and Safeguarding Leadership programme ran by the College of Policing to support management and oversight.

The restructure allows the Safeguarding Department to provide clear and consistent support to all safeguarding partnerships in the Northumbria region, with clear roles and specialities for officers within the service.

There is a commitment from Northumbria Police to invest in safeguarding leadership, and the Safeguarding Detective Chief Inspectors and Superintendents will all complete the Public Protection and Safeguarding Leadership programme ran by the College of Policing.

Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews (CSPRs)

In October 2021, Child FC Child Safeguarding Practice Review was published. This related to a 16 year old boy who died as a result of a drug overdose. He was a cared for child and had a long history with services in relation to extra familial harm. The review focused on:

- The extent to which agencies shared a collective understanding of Child FC's vulnerabilities and needs and the risks to which he was exposed
- The quality of multi-agency assessments and effectiveness of plans
- Professional judgments and decision-making
- How well agencies communicated and collaborated to keep Child FC safe
- Working in partnership with parents
- Engaging with Child FC

There were a number of recommendations which can be found in the report. The major practice change, which delivers on a number of the recommendations, is the implementation of the Young Person's Team and the Young Person's Plan.

Having a dedicated team for young people who are experiencing extra familial harm, builds professional expertise in supporting these young people and their families. The way this team works also encourages engagement with parents as it removes blame from them, by

acknowledging that their parenting abilities are appropriate, but that support is still required. The team has also created and implemented a range of tools, such as multi-agency chronologies and risk assessments that support decision making and planning.

The Young Person's Plan complements and builds on the work of the Young Person's Team. The review found that Child FC had a good relationship with his drug and alcohol worker. It considered that most young people will have at least one trusted professional in their lives, and because of this, built in to the Young Person's Plan is the condition that the young person can choose a lead person - a professional who they know and trust and who can engage them in making choices, navigating their way through the process and effecting change.

Young people's views

Shout

In early autumn 2021, the SSCP commissioned Shout, which is Mind of My Own's surveying service, to capture of the child's voice at scale. Shout offers three surveys a year which are created in a child/young person-friendly format, utilising a bank of questions designed with young people, as well as bespoke questions specific to the topic of choice.

Following the schools event into sexual abuse in schools in October 2021, the SSCP developed its first survey regarding child on child sexual abuse.

The survey was open between October and December 2021 for young people aged 11-19. Over 600 young people took part from five schools. There was an almost 50/50 split between males and females with over 8% identifying as non-binary/something else. Most who completed were age 11-12 but we received responses from young people throughout the age range.

The full survey results can be found [here](#). In summary, the survey results suggest most of our children and young people have a positive experience and feel sexually safe. They recognise that education supports this and having opportunities to talk about sex and relationships openly with staff is key, along with schools challenging sexualised or derogatory language and noises with clear consequences.

Young people largely feel they have adults to talk to in school. This is good practice and schools should ensure this continues.

This information was provided to schools with the recommendation that sex and relationship education is regularly reviewed to ensure its appropriateness, frequency and that it includes LGBTQ+ experiences.

RSHE is a statutory requirement for schools and many schools in Sunderland are supported by TfC's RSHE service to deliver this education. There is also a LGBTQ+ group, Cosmic Epiphany, that can be accessed through TfC.

A second recommendation was that schools' links with the community are developed to ensure we can support our children to feel safe, especially at night.

The results and recommendations in this survey are not intended to replace those given by Ofsted but to complement them. The SSCP fully supports the recommendations given by Ofsted and will continue to work with schools in Sunderland to ensure these are achievable.

Relationships and Sexual Health Education

TfC analyses information received from children, young people and parent/carers through surveys and focus groups along with information gathered from schools, other consultations for example Health Related Behaviour Survey (HRBS) and referrals into TfC's Relationship and Sexual Health Service. They have identified:

- Schools report feeling confident delivering RSHE in both primary and secondary school, however they still requesting additional training to support their delivery
- Children and young people are happy that RSHE is now statutory, though they want to have their voice heard more with regards to what is taught and how the subject is delivered

- In relation to LGBTQ+ Education, schools in all sectors expressed concerns around their knowledge of LGBTQ+ and what they should be teaching
- Young LGBTQ+ people say they don't feel listened to and are unable to freely express their views
- Many referrals to the RSHE service related to unhealthy relationships, including controlling behaviour
- Parents are happy that RSHE is being taught and would appreciate the opportunity to be able to have input into what is being taught and talk about concerns they might have
- There appears to be a high number of young people sending nude images of themselves to their peers. When explored, young people said, 'everyone does it', 'it's just a laugh'. This links in with the HRBS that was produced around self-esteem, it showed that males had higher self-esteem (41%) compared to 20% of girls in the same year group.

Cared for children

The cared for children team within STSFT have implemented the Signs of Success/Strengthening Families model of practice into health assessments, using tools which will also enable the views of pre and non-verbal children to be captured.

Training

Since last year significant progress has been made in relation to delivering and developing the SSCP training offer. Training is designed to engage, upskill and raise the confidence of professionals in Sunderland who work with children, young people and their families.

Key principles embedded within all SSCP training are:

- To listen to and reflect the voice of the child and encourage opportunities for practitioners to embed this in practice
- To promote working with children, young people and their families through a trauma-informed lens
- Promote a culture of continuous learning and improvement ensuring learning from local and national reviews is embedded in practice

These principles are underpinned by the Signs of Safety method of working with children, young people and their families in Sunderland. The aim is to help workers build positive relationships and work in partnership with children and their important grown-ups, by using a strengths-based, solution-focused questioning approach that is grounded in everyday lives of children.

Training offered by the SSCP includes:

- Guide to our Thresholds of Need
- Neglect Training
- Domestic Abuse Practitioner Standard Levels 1 & 2
- Signs of Safety Briefings

Between 1st April 2021 and 31st March 2022, 71 sessions took place. A total of 799 professionals booked on to training from 11 agency types with the highest representations from TfC, Health and Education. Only 375 attended - less than half of those booked. This needs to be tackled going forward, to ensure that the SSCPs resources are maximised.

In terms of evaluations, professionals rate their knowledge as 6.1 out of 10 on average before the sessions and move to 8.6 out of 10 after. Quality of the sessions are rated as 9.2 out of 10 on average and 100% responses agree the facilitators have good knowledge of the subject. Feedback on what worked well includes:

“Trainers were excellent, they really knew the topic and shared their knowledge well. All questions were welcomed and answered. Group activities were good to put what we had learnt into practice”

“This was an interactive session that kept me engaged and was very informative.”

“Fantastic training and facilitator was knowledgeable on topic delivery. Good Case study ”

“Having the training on an evening worked well because I knew there wasn't going to be any interruptions from work and I could concentrate on the training. I enjoyed the session and learnt a lot, thank you.”

Moving forward the training lead will focus on:

- Work with partners to improve attendance on sessions
- Ensure there no gaps in topics for sessions
- Ensure quality and content of all sessions is of an excellent standard.

Next steps

The SSCPs priorities are still relevant. There has already been lots of activity implemented in the first year, with more still to do. Our priorities are relatively broad, requiring input from more than children's safeguarding services. We will, therefore, continue to work strategically, with other partnerships across the system, to maximise the positive outcomes for children and families in the city.

It will also be important for us to review the activity already implemented to understand the impact for our children, young people and families who are at the heart of the support offered.

Independent scrutineer report

As Independent Scrutineer, my role is to provide critical challenge and appraisal of the multi-agency arrangements. Taking a 'hands on' approach, my work involves meeting with children, young people, parents and carers as well as practitioners in a variety of settings to observe practice and hear directly about their experiences, in addition to attending more formal SSCP meetings and Practitioner Forums.

2021–22 has been another exceptional year for safeguarding children in Sunderland. Keeping children and young people safe throughout the Covid pandemic has continued to put pressure on individual, families, communities and services, however I am proud to report that the work of the Partnership and the agencies represented have operated very much "Business as Usual".

The work of the Partnership has been focussed on its priorities:-

- Covid-19 Recovery
- Domestic Abuse
- Contextual Safeguarding
- Vulnerable Babies
- Mental health of children and young people
- Strategic safeguarding approaches.

The data set on page 7 clearly demonstrates the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic across a number of areas: a rise in children and young people attending and being admitted to hospital as a result of assault or self-harm; a significant increase in mental illness and referrals to CAHMS, as well as increases in referrals to both Early Help and Children's Social Care;

we also continue to see increases in children being Electively Home Educated. On a more positive note the number of children involved on Domestic Abuse has slightly reduced over the last 12 months, following increases during the earlier part of the pandemic last year.

The Partnership responded well to the emerging threats during the pandemic, both in terms of flexing existing resources to manage demand, but also in developing new initiatives and finding the resources to implement them within a short time-frame. Whilst all three initiatives were well received and have had a positive impact, I would like to highlight the 'Wear Here 4 U' Prevention Bus. It is clear from the services accessed and the feedback from children and young people that this outreach service has been a lifeline for many during the pandemic. Reflecting upon the increases in assaults, self-harm and mental health issues, continuing to fund an outreach service, to provide early help and support, signposting to specialist services as well as diversionary activity in a safe space should be a priority as we 'recover' from the impact of the pandemic.

In relation to the increase in children being Electively Home Educated (EHE), I welcome the transfer of responsibility for the oversight of EHE to Together for Children, where there can be a more coordinated approach across all Children's Services (including Early Help, Education and Children's Social Care), ensuring children are kept safe and parents and carers are supported to provide a suitable and effective education for their children.

Whilst this annual report is concerned with the Sunderland Safeguarding Children Partnership, rather than a single agency; the "Outstanding" grading of Children's Social Care by Ofsted this year demonstrates the marked improvements made within Together for Children. These improvements (the successful introduction of the Signs of Safety Model,

a permanent and stable workforce, strong and effective leadership) provide the bedrock on which the Partnership can continue to strengthen multi agency collaboration and drive forward new and innovative ways of working which will lead to improved outcomes for Sunderland's children and young people.

This report highlights how the SSCP played a significant part in raising concerns about the impact of Domestic Abuse, not only on victims but specifically on children living with Domestic Abuse. The SSCP collaborated with the Domestic Abuse & Violence Against Women and Girls (DA&VAWG) Board to deliver a Practitioner Forum to examine the issue in fine detail and identify a number of recommendations to tackle Domestic Abuse. Whilst this work is now being driven through the DA&VAWG Board, the SSCP will remain very much engaged in delivering improvements to ensure that children living with Domestic Abuse are safeguarded and supported.

Complex Safeguarding has been a clear focus of the SSCP, building on the recommendations from the first Practitioner Forum last year. The data on page 7 highlights a mixed picture with some areas significantly above the national and regional averages, and conversely some positive performance too, (i.e. First Time Entrants to the Youth Justice system remains significantly below both the regional and national average, Children Missing from Home again is significantly lower than the regional average). Working with young people whose safeguarding risks come from outside the home is always complex and more traditional responses often fail. This is an international issue, not just a Sunderland one.

I have been particularly impressed with the establishment of TfC's Young Person's Team who are working in a more flexible way to build trusting relationships with young people and develop strategies with them and their families to keep them safe. I have already heard really positive accounts of the difference this team are making to young people. The team are working well with other partners in managing individual cases and I look forward to this developing into a Multi Agency Team in the coming months. The 'flexible' approach taken by the team and wider

partners ensures that the team are able to pick up on emerging risks as they arise rather than having to start again with a new initiative.

The development of a Young People's Plan was an innovative and excellent piece of partnership work, delivered at pace. The Plan ensures that those young people requiring statutory child protection intervention are placed firmly at the centre of the plan, which takes a strength based approach, working wherever possible with their families and support networks to determine how best they can be safeguarded.

Finally, in response to further strengthening how we safeguard children, young people and adults from Criminal Exploitation in all its forms, I was delighted to see the SSCP work collaboratively with the Sunderland Safeguarding Adults Board (SSAB) and the Safer Sunderland Partnership (SSP) to throw a spotlight on the issue. A key recommendation to come from this piece of work was the development of a Strategic Exploitation Group to steer and support the work of our very successful MSET Operational Group. I am convinced the strategic group will be key in driving forward improvements and strengthening our approach to tackle this insidious crime.

Sunderland has some outstanding and award winning initiatives to support mothers ante and postnatally and to ensure that we keep our most vulnerable babies safe (Bumps 2 Babies, Multi Agency Pre-Birth Team). It is concerning that whilst the number of listening visits offered has increased, the uptake has declined, over the last 12 months. This issue has been discussed at Board level and further work is being undertaken to understand and address this. Whilst the increase in referrals to mental health and counselling services from maternity services may indicate a real increase in mental illness, hardly surprising given the impact of the pandemic, it may also indicate an increase in professional curiosity and recognition of the symptoms of mental illness. The sharing of Child Concern Notifications for pregnant women and pre-school aged children is invaluable in supporting health visitors, midwives, and General Practitioners to provide advice and support to mothers and to ensure children are safeguarded.

Mental Health of children and young people remains a significant concern. CAMHS referrals are up on last year's high levels, with the exception of cared for children. CAHMS waiting times are down, but 100 days still feels too long. Similarly, CYPS referrals are up but waiting times have reduced. Inpatient admission has reduced, which seems at odds with increasing referrals and an increase in the number of children and young people attending A&E with self harm injuries; perhaps this reduction reflects the national shortage of hospital beds rather than a reduced demand?

The SSCP is working closely with the CAHMS Partnership to explore these concerns and ensure that children and young people's emotional and mental health needs are met and their outcomes are improved.

Throughout my visits I continue to be impressed by the passion to safeguard children and young people and the commitment to working together to improve outcomes across the Partnership. I have observed a very positive culture, not only within Together for Children but across the Partnership. There is a willingness to try new ways of working, to take measured risks and to learn from mistakes.

I have commented previously on the excellent mechanisms to hear the voice of children and young people and use their experiences to develop and improve services. The Shout Survey, the learning from Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews and work with the Change Council illustrate this perfectly. I was particularly impressed with the tools and approaches the 0-19 Service Transformation Team were using to really capture the voice of children they were working with to inform their work.

Over the last year the SSCP has developed strong and effective relationships with other strategic partnerships both in Sunderland and across the region. Rather than working in silo, the SSCP has influenced other partnerships and encouraged a more joined up approach to tackle some challenging cross cutting themes.

Strategically and operationally over the next 12 months the focus will remain on addressing the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on children,

young people and their families, during a time of austerity. It is imperative that services continue to work together to meet these unique challenges. I have highlighted below some of the areas where the Partnership needs to focus its efforts to strengthen both individual agency and multi-agency responses in order to continue to effectively safeguard children and young people across Sunderland:-

- Ensuring those children being Electively Home Educated are safeguarded and parents and carers supported to provide an effective education
- Further strengthening the multi-agency approach to complex safeguarding both at a strategic and operational level
- Further strengthening links with schools
- Ensuring timely and effective services for children and young people with emotional and mental health needs, particularly those in crisis
- Developing Youth Outreach Provision
- Tackling alcohol abuse amongst children and young people
- Continuing to provide high quality supervision, support, training and development for all safeguarding practitioners.

