

DRAFT Initial Budget Equality Impact Assessment

1. The Project

Directorate: Children's Services

Theme or area: Children's Transformation

Lead Officer: Rupa Parmar

Date: 3 December 2025

		Budget reduction (£)		
Budget Reference	Budget Proposal	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29
CHS01	Children's Services transformation programme based on the Valuing Care workstream which has seen the introduction of a step-down programme for children in care and the children's homes project to increase local provision within the area and improve outcomes for our young people. The programme also includes activities to reduce the numbers of children in care through including through reunifications and improving the local commissioning strategy to reduce the average cost of residential care and increase funding from all relevant stakeholders.	£2,976,000	£2,304,000	

Description of the project:

Children's Services launched a comprehensive Transformation Programme in 2024 to address both national and local challenges in children's social care and education. The programme responds to increased needs, complex needs, financial pressures, workforce shortages, and regulatory expectations, and aligns with anticipated government reforms such as the Families First Partnership and SEND reforms. The programme seeks to improve outcomes for children and families and to deliver short term and long-term cashable savings and long-term cost avoidance.

Nationally, children's services are under significant financial and operational pressure, with rising demand and complexity post-pandemic. Locally, North Somerset Council has seen an increase in the number of children and young people in or on the edge of care since April 2022 with a 6% increase in costly residential placements since 2019. This mirrors the national landscape with the number of children and young people in care increasing year on year since 2009.

Local care placements have not kept pace with this increase in demand resulting in care experienced children and young people having to wait too long for an appropriate care placement and too often the placements is at distance thus taking the young person away from their local community and education setting.

Within the overarching Children's Transformation Programme, there are a number of key transformation programmes underway to address the local challenges faced in recent years that also have a direct link to the MTFP and associated efficiencies. These include the following:

- Sufficiency Strategy – increasing fostering capacity, developing local in-house residential and edge of care provision; and reducing unlawful placements.
- Commissioning Strategy – improving provider relationships and quality assurance.
- Children's Futures (New for 2025) – reducing reliance on high-cost placements.
- Valuing Care – reducing care numbers and increasing family-based placements (£1.5M savings achieved – Project Closedown agreed and new project commenced for 2025).

Summary of changes:

The council recognises that all children and young people in care have a right to family life which means that residential settings may not be an appropriate solution for most children to stay in until they are 18. Therefore, in line with their care plan the council will look to step down children who are currently in residential or unregistered care placements to alternative forms of provision and / or potentially reunification with their families.

Each of the projects is at differing stages of development / delivery therefore further and more detailed equalities assessments will need to be undertaken at a later stage. It is anticipated that this EIA will be reviewed again in late Spring 2026.

Areas that are likely to change that could have an impact include:

- Increase in locally recruited in-house foster carers as well as locally available independent foster carers.
- The introduction of 2 in-house residential care provisions with one of these also providing a hub for edge of care service delivery and also training flats to support young people to gain independent living skills to support their transition out of care. The project will consider options for a service delivery model and the possible staffing structures required at each setting. It is unlikely that this will have a detrimental impact to existing children's services staff as there will be a need to create new qualified roles to meet Ofsted requirements that staff will all have the opportunity to apply for. Where there may be the opportunity for staff assimilation, the necessary staff consultation and engagement will be

undertaken. It is anticipated that both homes will deliver a positive impact for children who are being supported.

- More collaborative commissioning arrangements through strategic market management at a local level through both Children's Commissioning and Brokerage as well as at regional level through SWCA. This should have a positive impact to staff and children in our care as the anticipated benefit would be for there to be more local choice of family-based care and where necessary residential care homes.
- Regular review of a proportion of children in care packages to ensure plans seek to achieve reunification, kinship or family-based care arrangements from residential placements wherever this is in the child's best interest and is safely achievable.

A proportion of children and young people will be stepped down from their current care provision the aim is to ensure that support provided by the council continues to meet the assessed need but reduces the support in some areas. Examples of change in this area could see a step down from a residential based setting into a foster care placement, or perhaps a step down from foster care to family-based care, where this may be considered appropriate. The care plans for individual children will continue to be monitored by their social workers and their independent reviewing officers to ensure that their needs are being met.

Are any of the proposals within this theme a continuation of a previous medium-term financial plan saving?

Yes **No**

If yes, please insert reference number and year of assessment? N/A

Budget Proposal	Year of assessment	Budget Reference
N/a		

If yes, please describe what steps you have taken to review the equality impacts from previous years?

N/a

2. Customer equality impact summary

Will the changes proposed in this project have a disproportionate impact (or bias) for any of these groups?

Insert X into one box per row, for impact level and type.

H = High, M = Medium, L = Low, N = None

+ = Positive, - = Negative

Protected or significant group	Impact Level				Impact type	
	H	M	L	N	+	-
Disabled people (Including the consideration of neurodiversity)		x			x	
People from different ethnic groups		X			x	
Men or women (including those who are pregnant or on maternity leave)			x		x	
People who are LGBTQ+		X			X	
People on a low income		x			X	
People in particular age groups	X				X	
People in particular faith groups			X		X	
People who are married or in a civil partnership				X		
People who are undergoing gender reassignment				X		
Other significant groups, for example: Armed Forces Community, care experienced young people, carers, parents. Please specify:		X			X	

3. Explanation of customer impact

Children who are looked after are defined in part by their age and so are within a protected equalities group. A lot of children who are looked after also come from families who may

have lower levels of income which means that money can often be an issue within the family.

It is assessed that these proposals will be positive for the children and young people and their families as changes mean that their needs would be met within a family environment that is closer or within North Somerset. This would enable children and young people to be closer to the significant people within their lives and local services who will assist in our ability to support young people and plan for their transition to leaving care services more effectively. Given that a lot of residential placements are out of county, the distance between these and North Somerset can be a barrier when we are trying to support young people and provide them with the services they need. Stepping down young people into family-based placements within or closer to North Somerset will assist in removing these barriers. These measures would also allow the council to better support young people during their transition to leaving care.

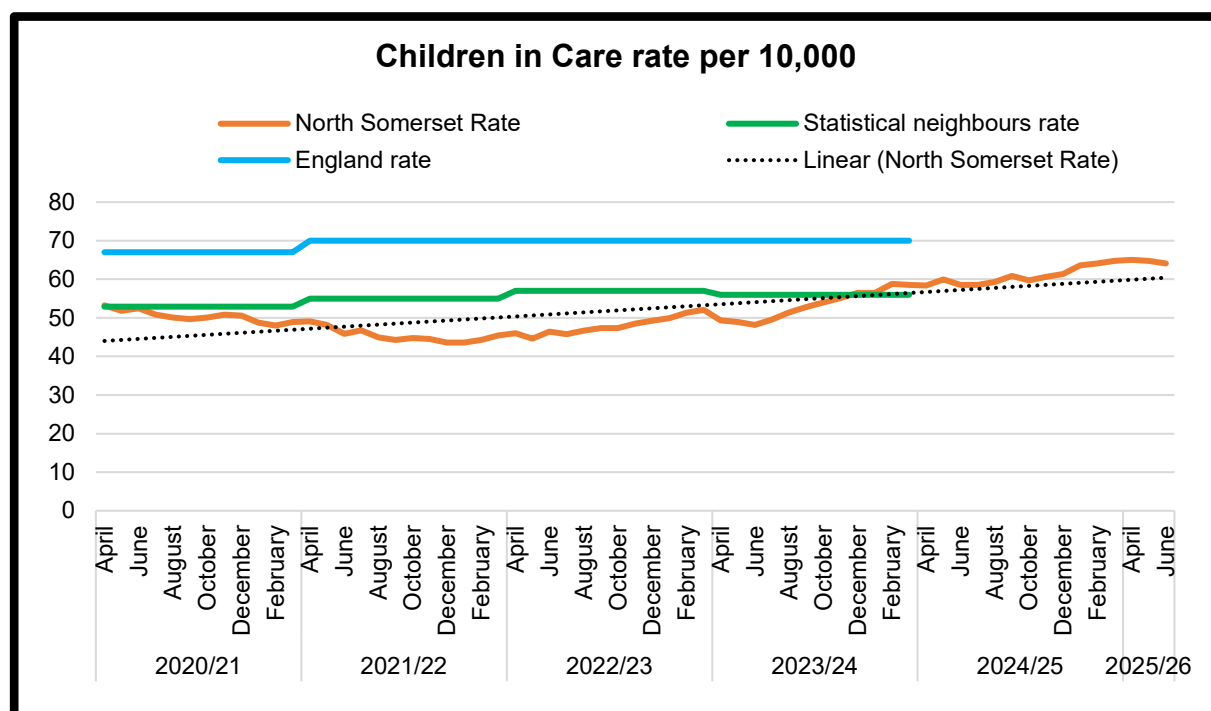
For context our current children in care demographic overview is as follows:

Children in Care rate per 10,000

In North Somerset at the end of Q1 2025/26, there were 278 children in care which gives a rate of 64 per 10,000 children. After a gradual increase in the number of CIC during 2024/25, the rate has stabilised during the first quarter of 2025/26.

This rate remains below the national rate at 70, but above our statistical neighbours' rate at 56.

The table below shows the rate per 10,000 of Children in Care in North Somerset, for statistical neighbours and nationally, and a linear trend line



Demographic analysis of the Children in Care cohort throughout Q1 2025/26 showed that:

- There were slightly more males than females.
- The percentage of black and ethnic minority children in care was 16% (50 children) which is higher to what would be expected as a comparison against the population

(School Census January 2025 – 9.6%). If we exclude unaccompanied asylum-seeking children from the cohort, the figure is 9% (27 children).

- Around 10% of Children in Care (30 children) were disabled.

The categories of need that Children in Care are mostly likely to experience (in descending order) are:

Category of Need for CIC at 30/06/2025	Number of CIC	Percentage
N1 - Abuse or Neglect	127	46%
N5 - Family Dysfunction	63	23%
N4 - Family in Acute Stress	57	21%
N8 - Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Child/Young Person	20	7%
N2 - Child/Young Person's Disability	7	2%
N3 - Parental Illness or Disability	4	1%

Please describe how you will communicate these changes to those impacted.

Young people, their families and their independent reviewing officers would be fully consulted on any proposals, so their views are heard and understood and incorporated into the care planning process.

Are there any staffing implications for this proposal?

Yes

No

Explanation of staff impact

If yes, please describe the nature of the impact, including how many posts could be affected, please state whether they are vacant, or filled permanently or temporarily.

As noted above it is anticipated that there will be changes to the staffing structures however the work to review and complete this activity has not yet been finalised. It is estimated that the planned changes in terms of overall numbers of staff will be positive as the new in-house residential homes are new for North Somerset Council; and there will also be positive opportunities for training, development and career progression as the council seeks to build a workforce that not only supports our young people, but also one that delivers best practice.

Is this project linked to or likely to have an impact on any other service areas?

For example are you moving the location of a service that may also be impacted upon by a change to public transport provision.

The 2 in-house residential homes being developed are within Weston and in close proximity to one another and the Town Hall, however, for staff wishing to move into this new service this could result in a change in location of their office base. All staff would need to express their interest in any new roles created.

6. Action Plan

Are there any further actions that should be taken because of this Equality Impact Assessment?

Issue Identified	Planned Action	Lead Officer	Time for review

7. Review and Sign Off

Service Manager Review

Insert any service manager comments here.

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Is a further detailed equality impact assessment needed? Yes No

Please note that if this assessment indicates a potential 'medium' or 'high' impact on any protected or significant group a further, more detailed assessment will be required.

If 'yes', when will the further assessment be completed? TBC

Service Manager: Rupa Parmar

Date: 2 December 2025