

## **QUARTER TWO PERFORMANCE REPORT: CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE**

### **Report of the Head of Children's Social Care.**

Performance information provides an overview of activity levels within the service, trends and emerging patterns of need that helps identify where performance is improving and where further investigation or targeted improvement action is required with an emphasis on sustained improvement in performance to become more aligned with that of "good" Local Authorities.

The Children's Services management information team work with managers to provide data on key areas of activity in order to support their management oversight of priority areas through the Performance Workbook (Appendix 1).

### **MASH Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)**

In Devon, the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) facilitates multi-agency screening to enable decisions to be made about all information shared by professionals about children where there are safeguarding concerns. This enables concerns to be responded to by the most appropriate service, including Early Help or Children's Social Care where needed.

Just over a third of contacts with the MASH (35% in 2016/17) resulted in a Children's Social Care assessment and met the threshold for statutory safeguarding services. Improving services to this group is a main theme in the proposals to improve the "front door" to Children's Social Care.

Performance within the MASH shows a positive trend of sustained reduction in the number of referrals and enquiries. This reflects strengthening professional judgement in relation to risk and need and helps ensure that referrals are made at the appropriate time and ensure that those who need it, are referred and get the right help at the right time.

Operation of the MASH as the Service's front door continues to be a priority ensuring a high quality, timely initial assessment and access to appropriate services when needed. Just over 40% of contacts with the MASH (35% in 2016/17) resulted in a referral for Children's Social Care assessment. This increase suggests that understanding of thresholds and eligibility continues to increase. Work is progressing to ensure the early help offer is well understood and that families are offered support at the earliest possible time to prevent issues or concerns escalating wherever possible.

### **Children in Need**

Children in Need are those identified by assessment to require advice and support. This includes those subject to a child protection plan, children in care and disabled children.

The overall number of Child in Need cases at 31 March 2017 has shown a positive reduction of 18.2 % from 31 March 2016. The 31 March 2017 rate of Children in Need is 267.6 per 10,000 (327.4 for 2016), this is below the reported 2016 figures of 332.8 for our Statistical Neighbours. However it is well-aligned to the rates reported by authorities similar to Devon and judged 'Good' by Ofsted (235.7).

The rate of children in need has remained relatively stable over the past two quarters (5,238 at the end of September 2017)

The Child in Need cases include 1,503 disabled children and young people receiving short break support, finance only packages of care or a social work service. A service modernisation programme is underway in the Disabled Children's Service

### **Referrals into statutory children's service**

In 16/17 the overall volume referrals into the MASH reduced by 27% as a result of improved triaging work, partner agency working and increasing professional's awareness through MASH seminars along with developments within Early Help. There is month on month variability in the volume of referrals, attributable to a whole range of factors.

Low re-referral rates, (the percentage of children re-referred to social care with 12 months of their original referral) are an indicator of effective need identification and decision-making. At the end of Quarter 2, Devon's performance (20.7%) is below statistical neighbours (22.4%) and national average performance (23.3%) and is just above local authorities deemed 'good' by Ofsted (19.8%).

### **Single Assessments**

The vast majority of accepted referrals lead to an assessment to determine needs and risks, clarify the desired outcomes and, where required, allocate resources to achieve them. These assessments must be timely. The maximum timeframe for the single assessment to reach a decision on next steps should be 45 working days from the point of referral.

At the end of the second quarter, on average, 90% of referrals resulted in a single assessment. Numbers of referrals and assessments varies month by month, the average number of assessments is 440 per month.

The proportion of assessments leading to a case closed outcome is an indicator of the service's effectiveness in identifying those families that need to be brought into the statutory service. A high rate of assessments not leading to service is inefficient, costly to the Council, potentially damaging to families while diverting social care resources from the higher priority areas. This area has shown significant improvement over the year; reducing from 57.8% of assessments leading to case closed in June 2016 to 38.1 in September 2017. The average at the end of quarter 2 is 41.1%, compared to

52.4% at the same time in 2016. This is indicative of improved initial assessment and decision making in the MASH. It is important to note that some assessments should conclude with a case closed outcome. The assessment process in itself can prompt necessary change in families and social workers are intervening purposefully and therapeutically when they undertake assessments. Similarly while assessments may not lead to further involvement from the statutory social work service, families may have been connected to appropriate support from early help.

'Good' Local Authorities have a rate of single assessments that is higher than Devon's forecast rate; 368.8 per 10,000 population compared to 336 (Devon forecast). We know that the rate of Children in Need in Good Local Authorities is lower than ours, which might indicate a conversion rate (of assessments to case closed outcome) in the region of 40%. This can be tested further.

The timeliness of completion of single assessments is below target at 80.5%. Performance dipped in August and September (summer leave followed by a spike in demand). This is an area of practice now under close review. The improvement in the availability of this data supports managers to closely monitor this performance in their teams and improvement is required across the service.

### **Child Protection Enquiries**

Section 47 of the Children Act 1989, places a duty on a local authority, to undertake enquiries where they have reasonable cause to suspect that a child in their area is suffering or is likely to suffer significant harm, in order to decide whether they should take any action to safeguard or promote the child's welfare. The decision to undertake enquiries under S47 is made after multi-agency consideration of the issues and risks in a strategy discussion

On average 134 child protection enquiries are initiated per month in this reporting year to date. However this area of activity is volatile; in April there were 97 enquiries and in May 186.

In 27% of the enquiries undertaken this year, the concerns are not substantiated. Scrutiny is aware that, following the Service Review, one of our top three priorities is to strengthen children in need practice. A robust child in need practice should lead to a lower rate of S47 enquiries where concerns are not substantiated.

### **Child Protection Conferences**

The Initial Child Protection Conference (ICPC) brings together family members, the child, where appropriate, and those professionals most involved with the child and family. The purpose of the ICPC is to decide what future action is required to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child, how that action will be taken forward, and with what intended outcomes. Where the conference outcome determines that a child is at continuing risk of significant harm, a multi-agency child protection plan is formulated to protect the child.

Following the implementation of a new conference model in March 2017, which temporarily affected performance; the percentage of ICPC leading to child protection

plan has begun to stabilise at 86%. This is broadly in line with good practice in other parts of the country

The rate of Child Protection Plans has fluctuated too dramatically over the past 2 years. We are beginning to see the rate settle within expected parameters which is welcome. In April 2017, 425 children were subject to a plan and in September this number rose to 479. Comparing rates per 10,000 of children subject to CP plans our September rate of 33.4 per 10000 compares well with 33.7 for good Local Authorities and very favourably with our statistical neighbours at 52.3.

A more robust child in need practice would usually lead to a decrease in the number of children subject of plans. We also have a working hypothesis that the practice culture in Devon may have been to use measures under the Public Law Outline rather than the child protection conference process. If this hypothesis is validated, and practice develops, we might expect to see an increase in children subject of a protection plan and a corresponding decrease in the use of PLO.

Caution must be exercised, we are still working to embed our new conference model and rates are anticipated to continue to show some fluctuations.

### **Repeat Child Protection Plans**

Repeat child protection plans measures whether children who start a plan in the current reporting year have ever had a previous CP plan between the ages of 0-18 years. The purpose of this indicator is to consider the extent to which the previous child protection plan effectively supported longer term family changes to ensure the safety of the child. While a low rate is indicative of effective planning and decision making; historic performance issues and very high rates for child protection plans in 2015/16 in particular will continue to have a residual impact in this area.

On average, 26.5% of children on a plan, have previously been on a plan. This compares unfavourably with Statistical Neighbours at 21.5% and good Local Authorities at 17.9%. This indicator is improving, in September 2016, 39% of children had previously been subject of a plan. Members should continue to monitor this indicator. The second repeat plan indicator measures second plans within two years of the first and here Devon's performance (12.6%) is more in line with performance of other Local Authorities.

Scrutiny has paid attention to short duration plans (those ended at 3 months). The year to date average is 19%.

### **Children in Care**

The number of children in care (692) has remained relatively stable. The rate, 48 per 10,000, compares favourably with our statistical neighbours at 53 but is significantly worse than good Local Authorities at 39. Steady managed reduction is the strategy here. Whole system improvements which see every child and family receiving the right help at the right time, underpin the achievement of lower rates of children in care. Developments in Early Help, services to children in need, developing threshold to care responses and improving assessment and care planning, along with improved

placement stability and quality of care all contribute to reducing this rate. It is important to understand that lower numbers are not in themselves the aim; rather, when families receive the right services at the right time, children are less likely to need to come into care

90% of visits to children in care in September 2017 were timely. This performance is in line with good Local Authorities.

The majority of children and young people in care experience high levels of placement stability. Nevertheless there remains a group who due to issues of their needs and placement sufficiency have experienced very many more moves than is desirable. The table, on page 14 of the Performance Book, shows that 12 children have moved more than 10 times in the preceding 12 months. The nationally reported indicator is 3+ moves in a year. 5.2% of our children in care have moved 3+ times since April 1st. The 2017/18 outturn is likely to be a deterioration on last year's performance. The key issue here is a national crisis in placement sufficiency, which compromises placement matching which is at the heart of stability. More detailed reports of performance for children in care are the responsibility of the Corporate Parenting Board and these issues are all closely monitored by the service throughout the course of the year.

## **Caseloads**

Caseloads are holding reasonably well but constant vigilance is required, at all levels of management, to prevent any upward drift. Caseloads were higher in August, when pressures in the service were particularly intense, especially in the South and North Localities. A major re-profiling of the workforce is underway to ensure we are making the very best use of all available resources.

**Electoral Divisions:** All

Cabinet Member for Children Services and Schools: Councillor James McInnes

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972: LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

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