

SECOND QUARTER PERFORMANCE REPORT: CHILDREN'S SOCIAL WORK AND CHILD PROTECTION

Report of the Head of Children's Social Work and Child Protection

The performance information enables us to identify good performance as well as where there is a need to target action plans with the emphasis on improving our performance to be more in line with 'good' Local Authorities.

The Children's Social Work and Education and Learning's management information team's work together to give managers comprehensive monthly data on key performance indicators (KPI's) in order to support their management and oversight of priority areas.

The Quality Assurance Framework (appended) reports on some (KPI's) for the Children's Social Work service as at the end of Q2, September 2016. All figures in this report relate to September 2016.

1. 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 may be concerns. This enables concerns to be responded to by the most appropriate service, including early help or children's social work where needed. The MASH Development Plan continues to focus on ensuring that professionals use judgement in relation to decisions about risk and the need that referrals are made at the appropriate time and receive the appropriate response. The recent reduction in numbers of enquiries and referrals indicates progress in this area and this work will continue including through the Devon Safeguarding Children Board.

2. Early Help

The early help system provides integrated support to children, young people and their families at an early point to prevent needs from escalating. The aim is to intervene early in terms of the age of a child, and early in terms of an issue arising in the life of a child – from pre-birth to nineteen. Early help works with children, young people and families who are experiencing difficulties and provides services for children who need extra help with their learning, social, emotional, behavioural, developmental and other needs.

Activity in this service is currently measured by the number of Devon (Common) Assessment Frameworks (DAF) that are recorded in the Holistix data recording system. The DAF is an early help, inter-agency assessment led by any professional who has identified that a child may need extra support and that offers a basis for the early identification of children's additional needs.

Since October 2015, a reduction in the number of DAFs being completed has been seen and this trend has continued to date: Q2 16/17 (81), Q2 15/16 (369). We are currently piloting early help tools that are more user-friendly and intuitive. The Alliance has reinforced its commitment to Holistix and we expect the new early help tools to be being used from February 2017.

The data on the number or rate of DAFs needs to be treated with some caution, as DAFs are currently used for a range of purposes:

A) for their intended purpose as an early help assessment of need; leading to an early help plan, early help intervention and improved outcomes for the child or, if outcomes do not improve, as a tool to aid decision making on subsequent steps and

B) for unintended purposes as a record of basic information, as a MASH Enquiry, or as a referral form to other services.

The DSCB has asked all partners to record their current activity in relation to their multi-agency early help offer and to set targets to encourage their use in more cases. To be counted, the work must include an assessment recorded on Holistix, a multi-agency team around the child/family and an intervention or care plan for the family. At this time we are very cautious about what can be inferred from the reported data. A new approach is being planned for early 2017.

3. 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 and looked after children.

Our rate of children identified as being in need in Devon has been high, we have approximately 75 children in need per 10,000 more than our neighbours which indicates more should be done to support families earlier through early help and leads to higher caseloads.

As a result of ensuring only cases where there is an active social worker remain open in the social work service the number of Children in Need (CIN) continues to decrease to 5,149 at September 2016.

This includes 1,296 children where a budget only is allocated for a short break (usually disabled children) and if these are excluded, Devon's number of CIN is now 3,853. This has enabled SW caseloads to reduce.

4. Referrals into statutory children's service

Referral levels continue to remain relatively consistent except around the periods of school holidays where we see a drop in activity. The monthly average for the number of referrals to Q2 2016/17 is (499) which is lower than the monthly average for 2015/16 (580)

Re-referrals to the service, defined as those children being re-referred to social care with 12 months of their original referral has decreased from 24.6% in September 2015 to 22.4%

currently for Q2 (Sep-16) This is better than latest comparison figures for 15/16 where the national rate is 24.0%, South West Authorities is 24.6% and in line with DCC's statistical neighbours are at 22.5%.

5. 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.

Although variable on a month by month basis, as at Q2 2016/17 90.5% of referrals progressed to an assessment. The year to date rate at the same point last year (Q2 2015/16) was 93.5%. 2906 single assessments have been completed and authorised by Q2 2016/17, of which 90.7% have been authorised within the 45 working day threshold.

This is a significant improvement in performance from last when outturn performance was 68.0% and now significantly better than other LA's. Comparing DCC's performance for 2015/16 (90.6%) against the latest available published data, the 15/16 national figure for assessments completed on time was 81.5%; other South West Authorities 79.3% and statistical neighbours (79.1%). Our focus is now on assuring the quality of these assessment and on ensuring only complex assessments take longer than 15 working days, if a family's needs can be identified and met quickly they should be.

By the end of Q2 2016/17 52% of the assessments undertaken led to no further involvement from the statutory social work service, although they may have been signposted for additional support from early help. This suggests that families are being brought into the statutory service when it is not needed which is both costly to the Council and potentially damaging to families. An improved early help strategy would help.

6. 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. The number of such enquiries initiated in 2015/16 was 2,276, averaging 190 per month. The monthly average to Q2 September 2016 has reduced to 143 per month indicating strategy meetings are enabling better joint decision making about risk. The enquiries should only lead to a multi-agency initial child protection conference being held when children cannot be safeguarded from harm without a multi-agency plan.

7. 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. Historically in Devon, 45% to 50% of all Section 47 enquiries lead to the initiation of an

ICPC. In 15/16 this increased to 53.1% with 1,202 such conferences being held. 2014/15 benchmarking figures were Devon 50.5%, South West 48.7%, national 44.6% and SN 52.5% Devon's figure to Q2 206/17 is 43.9%.

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.

The number of children who are subject to a CP plan has fallen by 32% from 714 at the end of 2015/16 to 482 at the end of Q2 2016/17 which now represents a rate of 33.8 per 10,000, below both SN (51.1) and the South West (54.3). An audit will be undertaken in the next quarter to ensure decision making is appropriate.

Improvements are currently being put in place to ensure strategy meetings enable child protection enquiries to be thorough and that child protection conferences are only held when they are needed. This will reduce the high number of child protection plans put in place at a conference that ended after only three months. The previous trend whereby almost a third (28%) of those children made subject to a child protection plan, were removed from it either on or before their first review within 3 months of the ICPC decision continues to improve to 11% at the end of Q2 2016/17.

8. Repeat Child Protection Plans

The rate of repeat child protection plans is calculated by looking at whether the children who start a CP 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 whether the previous child protection plan failed to protect the child adequately.

The CIN census 15/16 reported a higher rate (22.4%) of repeat child protection plans in 15/16 compared to the national rate (16.6%), SN (19.6%) and the South West (19.4%)

Good performance for repeat CP Plans is around 15%, and our current rate at the end of Q2 September 2016 is 22.9% (57 children out of total 249 starting CP Plans). Further investigation will need to be undertaken to determine whether this indicates a concern about the decision to end the previous CPP.

Electoral Divisions: All

Cabinet Member for Children, Schools and Skills: Councillor James McInnes

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972: LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

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