

Performance report: Children's social care

Report of the Head of Children's Social Care (Deputy Chief Officer)

Please note that the following recommendations are subject to consideration and determination by the Cabinet (and confirmation under the provisions of the Council's Constitution) before taking effect.

Recommendation:

Members of the committee are requested to:

- Receive this report and note the impact of continuing efforts to bring about improvement in a number of practice areas as well as the challenges and pressures that continue to exist in parts of the service.

1. **Background to the Report**

- 1.1 The majority of the business information now available to leaders and managers in children's social care services is provided via an online portal which allows users to better interrogate the available data.
- 1.2 The data behind many of the reports is drawn from CareFirst, the current case management system (CMS). In general, this data is refreshed every two weeks.
- 1.3 Work is in progress to ensure that within as short as possible a period after the implementation of the new CMS (Eclipse), planned for 21 January 2019, a full suite of reports will be available to the service using data drawn from Eclipse which will be updated daily.
- 1.4 This report includes information extracted from the service business information reports and also, from use of the Children's services Analysis Tool (ChAT).

2. **Performance information**

Contacts and referrals

- 2.1 In the three months up to 10 December 2018, the service received 2623 contacts, of which 1262 progressed to referrals. The rate of referrals per 10,000 children aged 0-17yrs is currently 349 indicating a small increase in rate in recent months. We experienced a rise in the rate of referrals during 2017-18 and the current in-year position is expected to fluctuate month-by-month and is closely monitored.
- 2.2 The re-referral rate (children with more than one referral in the 12 months prior to the reporting date) has risen from a reported 19% at 31 March 2018 to 22% at 10 December 2018. The rate varies during the course of a year and is scrutinised by the Senior Management Team. At 22% Devon has a rate almost equal the most recently published England average rate (21.9%) and a slightly higher rate than statistical neighbours (20.5%).

2.3 Schools, the police, and health services are the three main broad sources of referrals to children's social care with the percentage of referrals received by these agencies in the past three months being 25%, 21% and 20% respectively.

Assessments

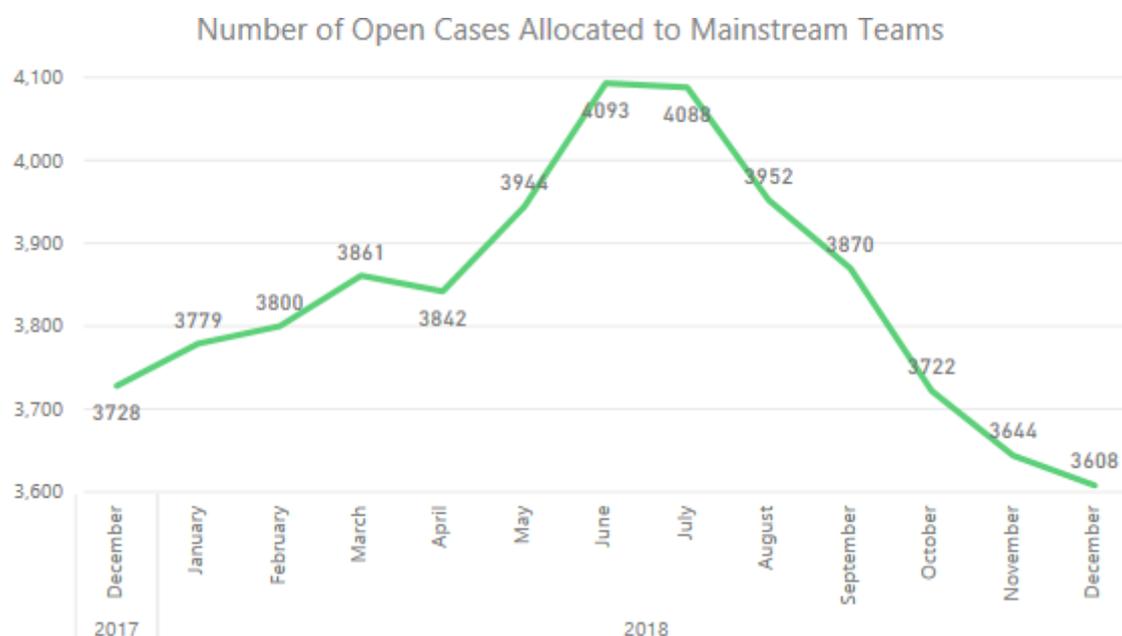
2.4 In the six months up to 10 December 2018 the service completed 3000 single assessments. A further 922 had an assessment ongoing at 10 October 2018.

2.5 67% of the 3000 assessments were completed in 45 working days. The percentage of assessments completed with 45 working days in the year 2017-18 was 77% (compared to 78% among statistical neighbours and 83% as the England average rate). 67% represents an improved position from that seen earlier in the year but falls short of service expectations and managers are working hard to improve the rate of completion and also ensure both the quality of the assessment and the timeliness of provision of support where needed.

2.6 The range of and nature of quality assurance activity in recent months has been extended and continues to indicate that the quality of assessments in those cases audited is improving and each open case having a good quality up-to-date assessment is one of our three service priorities.

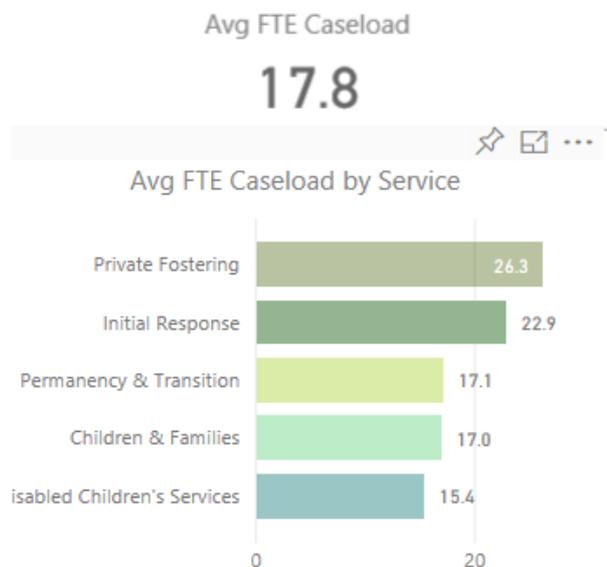
Caseloads

2.7 As at 31 December 2018, the average caseload in case holding social care teams was 17.8 cases. This marks a further period of reducing caseloads across the service. The number of cases allocated to mainstream teams is now lower than at this time last year and the significant reduction in recent months is a result of intensive activity to review caseloads and case work and where appropriate to close cases or to transfer/refer to other services, such as Early Help. It is not anticipated that the number of open cases will continue to reduce at this rate.



2.8 Average caseload by broad service area is illustrated in figure 1.

Figure 1: Caseloads by service area



- 2.9 Slightly higher average caseloads still exist in the Initial Response teams but here again we have seen a significant reduction in recent months. The average caseload in Initial response teams had risen to a high of 34.4 cases at the end of July and following management action taken at time we are seeing month-on-month improvement. The average caseloads in these teams at 31 December 2018 was 23 children (compared to 26 children reported in the November Scrutiny Committee report).
- 2.10 Across the service, action has been taken to reduce caseloads by improving workflow and transfer of cases where appropriate; the closure or step-down of cases that no longer required a social work service; the continuation of efforts to recruit to vacant posts; and additional capacity being provided to the South and North locality areas where pressures had been more acute.

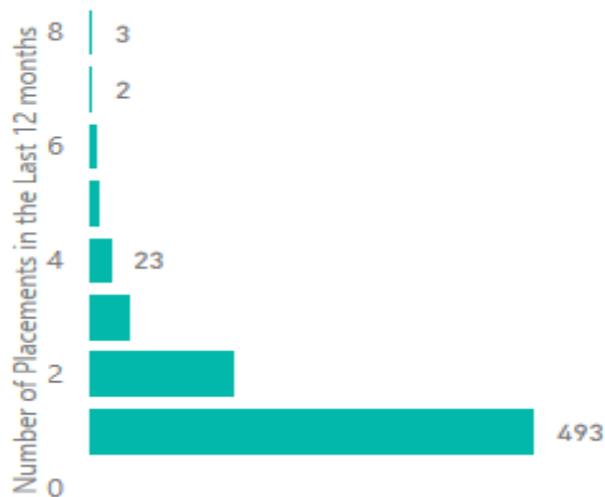
Children in Need

- 2.11 As at 10 December 2018, there were 3811 children in need being supported by the service (including children the subject of a CP Plan (529); those who are Children in Care (743), and care leavers (451).

Children in care and care leavers

- 2.12 As at 10 December there were 743 children in the care of Devon county council and services were supporting 451 care leavers. This represents a recent increase in the number of children in care and a decrease in the number of care leavers being supported by the service.
- 2.13 123 children in care ceased to be looked after in the past six months (168 become looked after). Of these 123 15% (19 children) ceased to be looked after because they were adopted and 18% (22) ceased to be looked after because a Special Guardianship Order (SGO) was granted.
- 2.14 At 10 December 2018 our rate of children in care per 10,000 children was 51. Whilst the rate has increased in recent months it remains lower than that of statistical neighbours and the most recently published England average rates.

- 2.15 Almost 3% of our children in care are unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC).
- 2.16 The breakdown of the legal status of our children in care is summarised as follows:
- Interim Care Order 19%
 - Full Care Order 54%
 - Placement Order granted 6%
 - Accommodated under S20 21%
- 2.17 71% of our children in care are placed in foster placements. 52% of our children in care are placed in our own provision. The service continues to experience challenges with regard to the availability and choice of placements available.
- 2.18 22% of our children in care are placed outside Devon which whilst a higher proportion than we would like, is a slowly improving statistic.
- 2.19 88% of our Looked After Children have experienced either one or two placements within the past 12 months but 12% of our cohort have experienced 3 or more moves in the past 12 months. The lower the number who have experienced 3+ moves the better and our rate is higher than we aspire to and is symptomatic of some of the challenges in identifying appropriate placements for some children. The most recently published England average was 10% and the statistical neighbour rate was 11%.



- 2.20 Long-term placement stability. 59% of our current children in care who have been looked after for 2 ½ years or more have been in the same placement for more than 2 years (125 of 212 children). There has been no change in our rate in this current reporting year but the figure is poor compared to most recently published England average rate (70%) and Statistical neighbour rate (69%).
- 2.21 Of 466 young people supported as care leavers we are in touch with 85% of the 17-18yr olds (*Statistical neighbours – 87% and England average 92%*) and 92% of the 19-21yr olds (*Statistical neighbours – 89% and England average – 88%*). This represents an improving position as recognised by Ofsted in their recent focussed visit but there is clearly more to be done to make further improvement.

2.22 49% of the 17- 18yr olds (*statistical neighbours – 60% and England average – 62%*) and 42% of the 19-21yr olds (*statistical and England average rates – 50%*) are known to be in education, employment or training (EET). This is an improving statistic and the service is working hard to make further improvement.

Child Protection (CP) plans

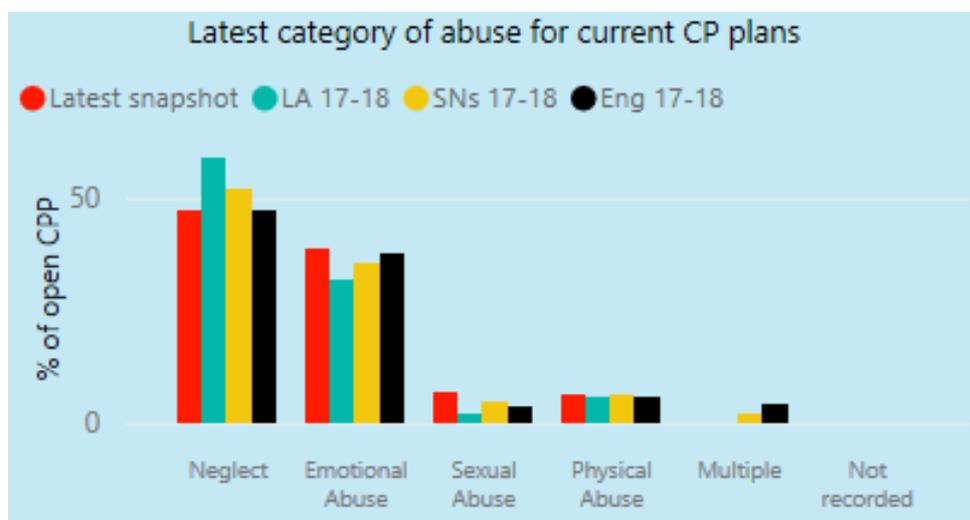
2.23 As at 10 December 2018, 532 children were the subject of a child protection plan.

2.24 We have seen a rise in the number of children the subject of a CP plan recently. The number tends to fluctuate during any given year and is closely monitored and remains below the average rate per 10,000 children among Statistical neighbours and the overall England average.

2.25 In the majority of cases, the duration of the open CP plan is less than 12 months (85%). 14% of open CP plans have been open for between one and two years and 1% have been open for between two and two-and-a-half years.

2.26 The percentage of current CP plans broken down by category of abuse is indicated in figure 2.

Figure 2 : Latest category of abuse for current CP plans



Source: ChAT tool 10/12/18

2.27 It was reported previously that our end-of-year census data had shown the percentage of Initial Child Protection Conferences (ICPCs) held within 15 working days of a Section 47 enquiry start date across the year had fallen to 67% (compared to a statistical neighbour average rate of 80% and an England average rate of 77%). Management action initiated in the spring has produced month-on-month improvement since July with 90% of ICPCs held within the required 15 working days in December. (See figure 3).

Figure 3:



Source: Performance dashboard (PowerBI)

- 2.28 Snapshot data as at 10 December 2018 showed that 89% of children the subject of a child protection plan had been seen by a social within the four weeks prior and that of these, 78% had been seen alone.

Service Priorities

- 2.29 In the late Spring the service adopted three service priorities that we strongly believe will as improvements are made and the impact of these is embedded will provide a very strong foundation for an environment and culture within which excellent social work practice will flourish. These are:

- Every child will have an up-to-date assessment of need that informs the current intervention.
- Every child will have a SMART plan that clearly sets out the reason for the intervention and the outcomes to be achieved.
- All practitioners will receive regular supervision that is of a high standard and that supports excellent practice. This will include observation of practice where appropriate, and appraisal.

- 2.30 Due to the limitations of the current case management systems and the difference systems within which some of this information is recorded there remain challenges in gathering accurate management information to measure progress against these priorities.

- 2.31 As at 31 December 2018 61% of all open cases (excluding finance only cases) have an up-to-date assessment in place (authorised/updated within the past 12 months).

- 2.32 The data relating to plans is more complicated owing the range of different plans and the the different requirements with regard to reviewing and updating these. Snapshot data in December indicated that 89% of children the subject of a CP plan had an up-to-date recorded plan and that 63% of Children Looked After had an up-to-date recorded plan. 68 of children in need cases held in child anf family teams also had an up-to-date assessment. Each of these are likely to be under-reported figures reflecting the challenges in extracting some data from the current case management system.

- 2.33 Our ability to report accurately the supervision rate is challenged by the variance in the manner in which this is recorded. A solution to this is being developed.

Accelerated Improvement Period

- 2.34 A period of accelerated improvement activity across the service commenced on 1 October and continued until Christmas. The primary focus of this was to:

- bring caseloads down to a manageable level for all practitioners;
- to close any cases that should no longer be open to children's social care services;
- to intensify the activity related to our three service priorities; and
- to fill where possible any vacant case holding posts (using locums in the short term if a permanent appointment is not possible).

2.35 The impact of this activity has been broadly covered elsewhere in this report with the exception of an analysis of the current workforce profile. An detailed analysis of the current workforce profile will be provided as an appendix to the report presented to the Scrutiny Committee in March 2019.

Darryl Freeman

Head of Children's Social Care (Deputy Chief Officer)

Children's Services

Electoral Divisions: All

Cabinet Member for Children Services and Schools: Councillor James McInnes

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972: LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

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