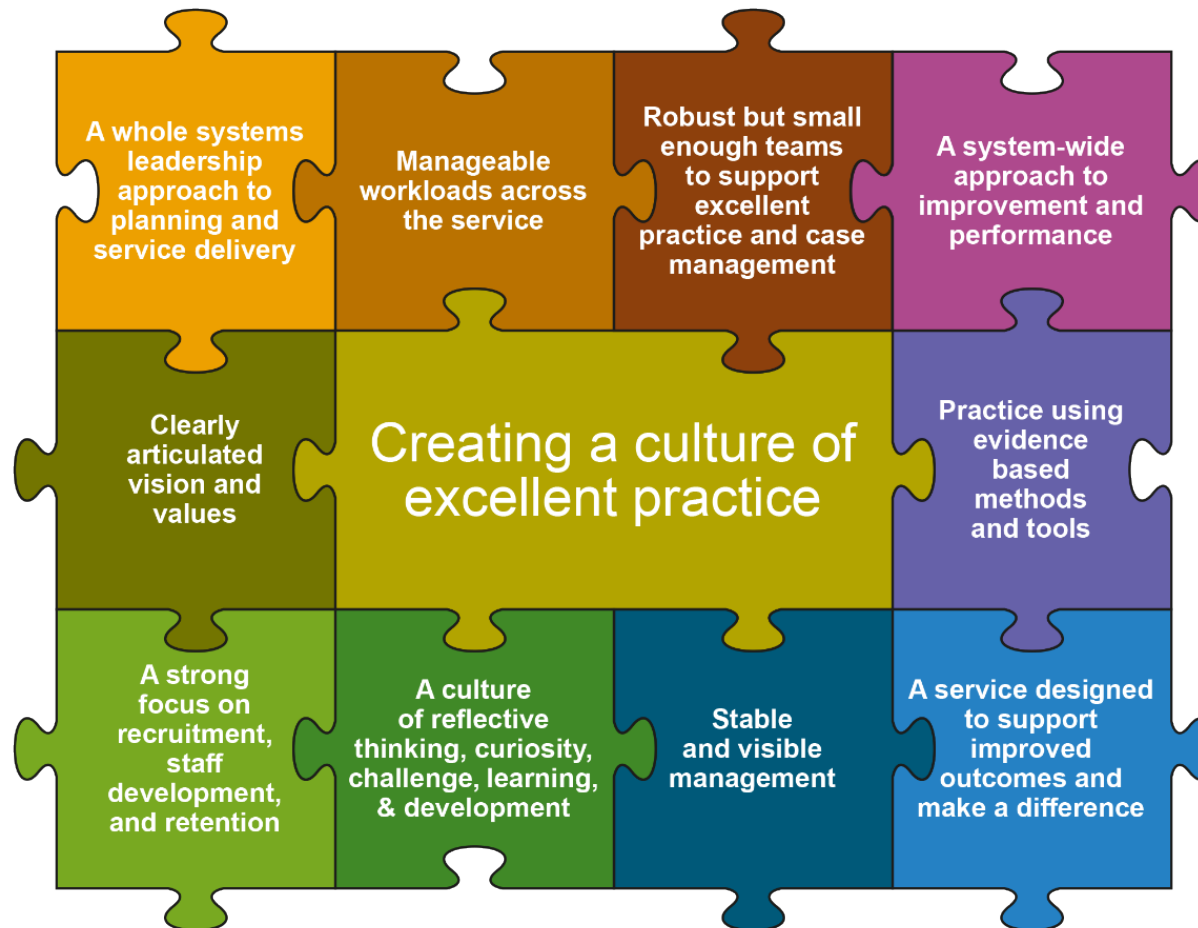


# SELF-EVALUATION OF SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

November 2018 (*updated January 2019*)



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## FOREWORD

Devon County Council children's services were most recently inspected by Ofsted in February 2015 and were judged then as requiring improvement to be good overall (adoption was good, care leavers and the LSCB inadequate). Previously, in 2013, the authority had been judged to be inadequate.

The service has changed and improved since 2015 and, as always, this has not been linear; the pace of change inevitably moves through the gears with planned changes to structure and leadership. Political and executive leadership is very stable, the Locality Leaders have been in place for 18 months and the Deputy Chief Officer (Head of Service) for a year; as a consequence, improvement is being driven at pace.

Leaders are demonstrating a determination to improve outcomes for children and this has been supported by purposeful corporate investment and commitment.

Our commitment and determination to improve services for the children, young people and families we serve across Devon can be seen and measured within this self-evaluation, which offers a transparent and honest overview of the steps taken to develop services, the level to which this has been achieved and the progress we have made in securing the consistency needed to provide the right service to the right child at the right time, for all children.

Our ambition is to provide a social work service that is at least good. Our self-assessment is that we are in a stronger position in all areas, notwithstanding some setbacks on the way (examined in more detail later), we nevertheless require further improvement to be judged good.

**Jo Olsson**

Chief Officer – Children's Services

**Darryl Freeman**

Deputy Chief Officer – Children's Social Care

## OUR VISION: GIVING CHILDREN THE BEST START IN LIFE

- We want the best start in life for all Devon's children and young people and they are at the heart of everything we do.
- We believe children should live with their family or someone who knows them best and we will help to support families to achieve the changes they want to see for themselves and their children
- We will take swift action when children need to be protected from harm
- We do everything we can to make sure that children in our care and care leavers are set up for life.



## SERVICE PRIORITIES



- **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.



## 1. THE EXPERIENCES AND PROGRESS OF CHILDREN WHO NEED HELP AND PROTECTION

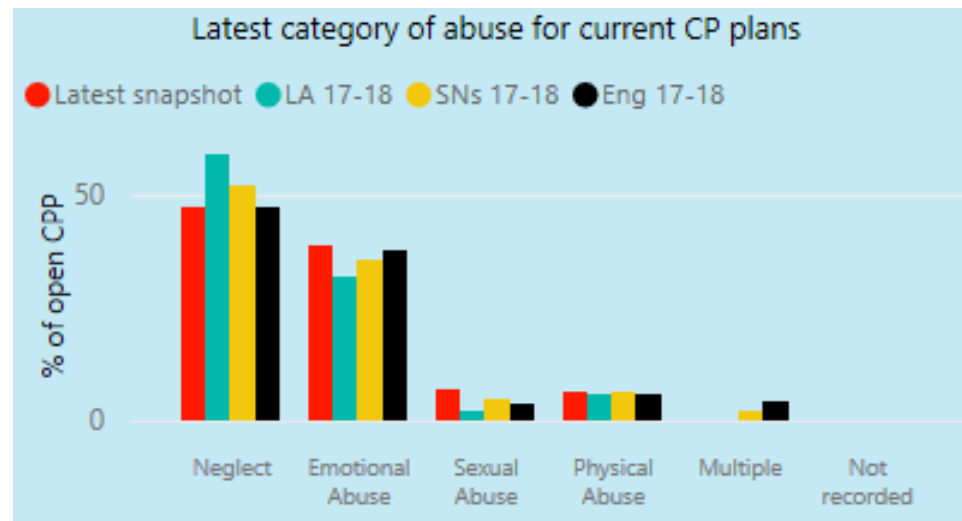
- 1.1 Children's services saw a 5.5% increase in the number of referrals received during the year to 31 March 2018 compared to the previous year together with a rise in the rate of re-referrals (to 24% compared to 21% in the previous year) (CIN01.01). Our rate of referrals is lower than national and statistical neighbours, which suggests that partners have a good understanding of threshold and that the needs of children and families are being better met through the early help system. Last year we noted that early help needs significant improvement to be good. We still want to do better but the need for improvement is not of the same order. This year the trend of increased referrals continues, which reflects the national picture of increased demand for social care.
- 1.2 There is a timely and effective response to referrals, including out of normal office hours. When children's needs escalate, staff in the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) make appropriate decisions about the level of intervention required to safeguard children. Some work completed by the MASH could be managed in other parts of the service or by other agencies. When concerns for children escalate, multi-agency responses to information requests on referrals are monitored effectively by a visual RAG (red, amber, green) rating system. This ensures that all partners in the MASH know of, and share accountability for, the progress of requests for information.
- 1.3 Professionals' understanding, and application of thresholds continues to grow. The partnership has recognised that the threshold document needs revision to better support professional decision-making and following a period of multi-agency development activity a revised threshold document will be published in Spring 2019.
- 1.4 Many children and families in Devon access a range of early help services when they need support. We have fully embedded EH4MH (early help for mental health) in our schools. EH4MH is an online resource, plus face to face counselling for children and young people, with accompanying clinical supervision for staff in school. The whole package has been very warmly welcomed by children, young people and frontline staff and is designed to support staff in schools to manage higher levels of need and complexity in school without referring to CAMHS, which, nationally and locally is under very intense pressure. We hope to be successful in a CCG led Green Paper trailblazer bid (wave two) to further extend the scope of this project, alongside the CCG's roll-out of a resilience framework. CHAT Health, a text service for young people, provided by the School Nursing Service, has also been rolled out successfully.

Schools continue to be the major contributor to early help assessments. In April 2019, the Council will in-source, from Virgin Care, its Public Health Nursing Service. This will give us an excellent opportunity to further consolidate the ownership of early help assessment and intervention. An increasing number of children benefit from coordinated multi-agency early help. Children's Centres, which have been redesigned to provide a more targeted service for vulnerable families, are a strong player in this space. A short-term, accelerated improvement plan for the Troubled Families programme has seen a transformation in Devon's position nationally. Senior managers recognise much has been achieved and more will be done to further develop the early help offer and to increase the number of impactful early help interventions.

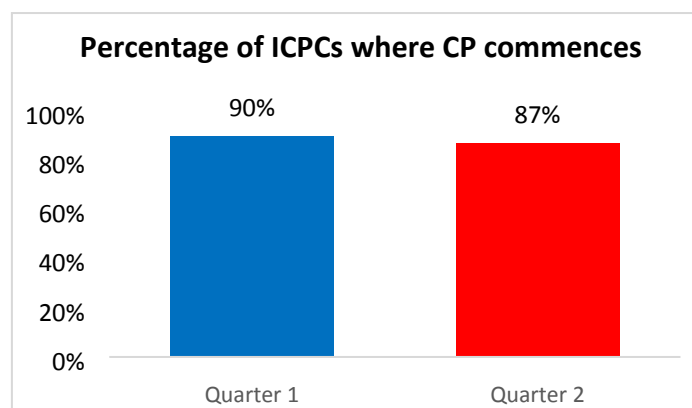
- 1.5 All partners can access *Right for Children* (multi-agency electronic case recording system) to share family information and support coordinated activity. The use of the system has significantly increased but is not yet fully embedded with all partners. Overall there are 3,653 current user accounts with an average 122 new user accounts created each month since the start of 2018 (CIN01.04)
- 1.6 93% of cases on Right for Children have a nominated Lead Practitioner. For those families with a Lead Practitioner there is a clear family plan that the family has developed with the Lead Practitioner. The family plan includes goals and milestones. Children's Centres and some other providers additionally make good use of the Outcomes Star and there is increased use of worry scales. We have an increased focus on quality assurance and impact, though there is more to do on this.
- 1.7 The implementation of Eclipse, our new case management system, has presented us with some challenges. In the last quarter of 17/18 and first quarter of 18/19 we stood down some of our performance reports to scope and build the new performance reporting arrangements. This was a measured strategic risk decision and wasn't without expected impact. Eclipse goes live on 21.1.19.
- 1.8 5282 Single Assessments were started in the year to 31 March 2018; our rate of completion within timescales fell from 89% (in 2016/17) to 77% at year end, with similarly reduced performance in quarter one. The re-instating of performance reporting and renewed focus is recovering the position which is currently at 68% (CIN01.02) and further improvement is expected during the year. We are satisfied that the performance decline reflects a fall in compliance with recording requirements rather than any drift in practice quality.



- 1.9 Quality assurance activity tells us that an increasing proportion of our assessments are of a good quality, but some do not yet show consideration of the impact of a child's history or the use of information to analyse the capacity of parents to do things differently in the future. The lived experience of children is not always described or considered and does not always inform analysis of risk.
- 1.10 We have invested in the development of our frontline and middle managers during the past year having continued the roll-out of our Frontline Managers Development Programme and introduced a new development programme for our Area and Operations Managers. Decisions are made by suitably qualified and experienced managers. Quality Assurance activity tells us that evidence of management oversight is seen in many more cases but is not yet consistently evidenced in all case files. Managers authorise assessments and plans but are not yet always ensuring consistent quality.
- 1.11 Average caseloads have reduced significantly, particularly during the period August – October 2018. Management action has specifically focussed on this and the three service priorities. The average caseload in social work teams is 18 (as at 31 December 2018) with fewer individual workers having caseloads significantly higher than the average. The caseload reductions are evidence of stronger housekeeping by team and area managers, they do not reflect a shift in the pattern of demand.
- 1.12 Quality Assurance activity consistently indicates that our practitioners know children and young people well and have a good understanding of their lived experience. Children are consistently seen and seen alone, where it is in the best interests of the child. Recording of direct work in children's case records is not yet consistently achieved and we know that the introduction of Eclipse will better support this.
- 1.13 The number of children subject of a Child Protection Plan (CPP) rose in the year to 31 March 2018 to 483 (a rate of 33 per 10,000 compared to 31 per 10,000 in the previous year). There has been a further increase to 521 as at 31 December. The increased rate matches national increases and is still lower than both the Statistical Neighbour and England averages, as we might expect given Devon's demographic profile (CIN01.01). The pattern of category of registration (see table below) has shifted this year, we are seeing more explicit recognition of sexual abuse and less use of neglect as a catch all. This reflects partnership work we have focused on in the last couple of years.



- 1.14 The percentage of Child Protection Plans commencing at conference, (see table below) has shown a slight improvement during Q1 and Q2 from 86% overall for 2017/2018, a figure already in line with good authorities, to 89% average during Q1 and Q2. This figure sits just above good authorities and acknowledges the reality that some thresholds are finely balanced and need a rigorous multi agency forum to agree the best way forward. These figures provide evidence of stability of thresholds achieved by the screening process (discussed below).



1.15 Our re-registration rates for CPP (ever) rose slightly from a rate of 25% in 2016-17 to 26% in 2017-18.

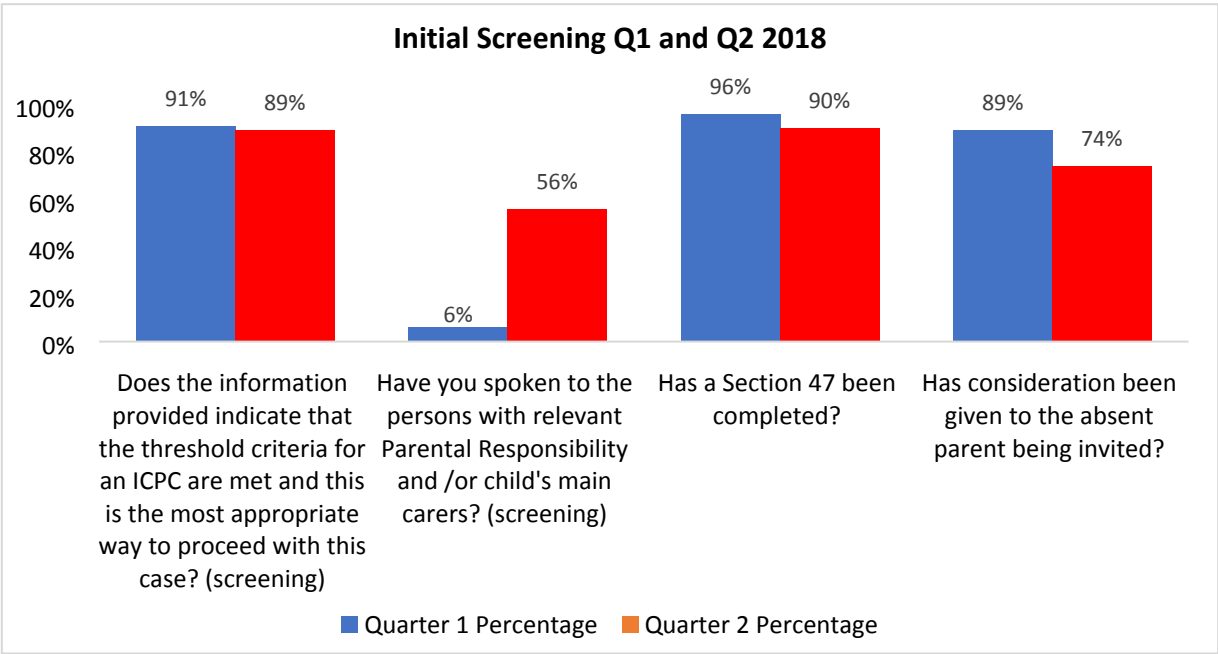
1.16 We have taken firm action to address the rate at which the service was convening Initial Child Protection Conferences (ICPCs) within 15 working days of a Strategy which had fallen to 67% in 2017-18 compared to 85% in the previous year (CIN01.01). This is another example of the decision to stand down performance reporting for a period. Notwithstanding Q1 performance, we have seen month-on-month improvement since July and we achieved a rate of 90% in December 2018.

As part of our drive to strengthen and make more purposeful our Quality Assurance function, a new strengths-based conference model (Stronger Families: Safer Children) was introduced for Initial Child Protection Conferences, Core Groups and Review Child Protection Conferences in February 2017. The model brings together a range of approaches including systemic, solution focussed, relationship based and restorative practice. A recent deep-dive considering the impact of this model so far reported that “Professionals highlighted that they found it to be a much more collaborative and less punitive way of working with families. Families are encouraged to find their own solutions. The focus was felt to be on working “with” and not “to” or “for” families which in the longer term should lead to more sustained changes being made.” (CIN01.05)

1.17 A Quality Assurance screening tool is the critical threshold gateway and mechanism by which we aim to improve the quality, participation and effectiveness of meetings. It is designed to be an inclusive and collaborative decision-making tool, involving both locality teams and parents. Significant improvement work, including cross-service workshops and in-service development sessions, has

taken place over the last two quarters to improve the consistency of decision making between the Initial Response, Children and Families and QA Service and to strengthen the preparation work for families that the tool should ensure.

A snapshot of key information derived is shown below;



- 1.18 The data shows the impact of the development work in this area, with an improvement in the number of requests for ICPC resulting in a meeting up to an average of 90% over Q1 and Q2 from 77% overall during 2017/2018 and the proportion of requests with a completed s47 recorded up from 75 % during 2017/2018 to an average of 93% during Q1 and Q2.
- 1.19 Strong improvements are also shown in relation to pre-meeting contact with parents, an area of weakness identified in the annual data for 2017/2018 and further targeted improvement work linked to the QA Service’s participation priority will continue over the coming year.

- 1.20 In response to the findings of the Independent Service Review 2017, CiN IROs are already contributing to more effective tracking of CiN cases, reducing drift and delay. In addition, they are facilitating workshops to drive practice improvement and undertaking a range of quality assurance activities.
- 1.21 Internal audit activity indicated that pre-proceedings were not always used early or proactively enough to manage risk. A small minority of children experienced drift and delay in achieving permanence. This was particularly evident for unborn babies, where pre-birth assessments and planning was not always sufficiently timely or rigorous. Management oversight of pre-proceedings arrangements has been strengthened to ensure that plans for children are progressed swiftly to ensure that in all cases children's circumstances improve substantially and in an appropriately timely way.
- 1.22 We have recognised that for some children, transition planning into adulthood did not start soon enough and therefore did not always provide the needed reassurance to children and families about future adult care and educational placement arrangements. We have been working with our colleagues in Adults' Services and in the Education and Learning services to further develop this area of our service. This activity includes testing a revised system-wide approach to transitions for a small number of children and young people under the overarching Purposeful Systems programme and a separate piece of work considering possible service options for the future (0-25).
- 1.23 Educational outcomes for children with SEND are well above the national average for both those with EHCP plans and those on SEN support. Partnership working is well established via the SEND Improvement Board and this includes representatives from parent and carers groups. Local SENCO forums and the SENTIENT TRUST ensure good collaboration with schools. SEN Advisors support work in school and monitor the implementation of the principals of the SEND code of practice. The timeliness of EHCP assessments however needs significant improvement. Additional staffing has been provided to address the rise in requests and an action plan is being put in place to deliver this across all agencies. (CIN01.04)
- 1.24 Our Youth Offending Service (YOS) is performing well and is committed to exploring alternative intervention wherever possible to avoid criminalisation and is working increasingly closely with colleagues within children's services and our partners to deliver good outcomes. *"Devon YOS are amongst the highest performers in the country in relation to the National Indicator set produced quarterly through PNC and YJB return data. YJB local intelligence has uprated frequency offending and FTE ratings to reflect an enhanced qualitative element*

*of practice to the raw data returns. Alongside the impressive national data, the YJB recognise that Devon YOS are performing well across the basket of measures above. Significant changes have taken place in the delivery model of the YOS but core practice activity is maintained to an appropriate level. Development of a tri-YOS strategic approach and work to embed JAC provision is in hand which could bring further benefits". (YJB Performance report, January 2018).*

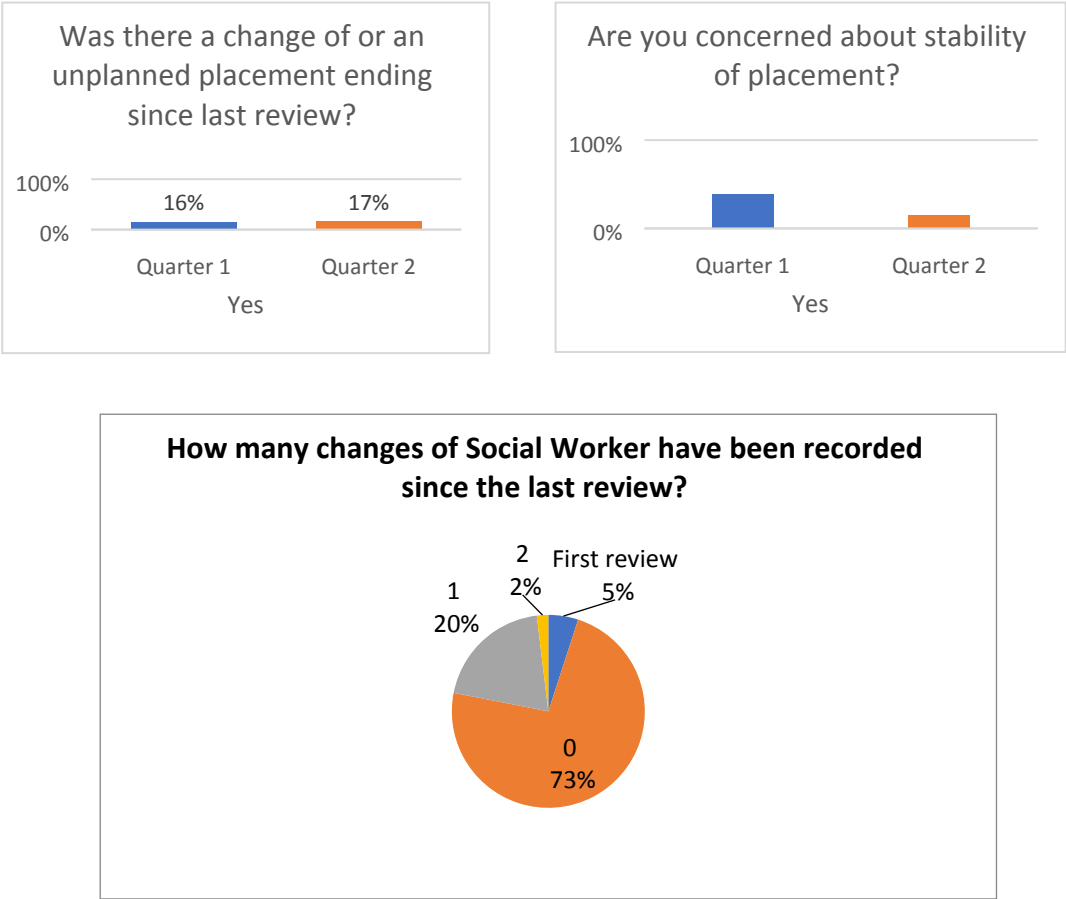
- 1.25 Over the past two years there has been increasing evidence of child criminal exploitation through emerging County Lines. A multi-agency group 'The County lines Strategic Forum' was set up with representatives across all partners to ensure a cohesive response to this threat. Protocols were put in place to ensure that children found subject to this exploitation were viewed as victims and protected and disruption activity was undertaken by Devon and Cornwall police. This swift multi-agency work has been viewed by the Government as innovative and is being copied by other Local Authorities. A new Exploitation Strategy is in place and is supported by training and online information (due to go live in February 2019). The introduction of Eclipse in January 2019 will support the timely generation of performance and management information for this and other areas of practice.
- 1.26 The delays in Eclipse implementation have required managed strategic risks, that impacted on reported performance data. This does not imply any deterioration in practice standards, rather slippage in recording compliance. We can see the very positive progress that continues to be made from last year and earlier years.

## 2. THE EXPERIENCES AND PROGRESS OF CHILDREN IN CARE AND CARE LEAVERS

*“Corporate parenting is now a key strength in Devon, and leaders have also ensured that this has been embraced by partner agencies.”*  
(Ofsted, Focused Visit, September 2018)

- 2.1 The number of children in care rose slightly in the year 2017/18 to 694 (at 31 March 2018) from 682 the previous year. Stability of placements (3+ moves) has been steadily improving year on year and in 17/18 improved to 12% of the cohort but is not yet as good as either statistical neighbour or the England average rates (CLA02.03). Overall placement stability (length of placement) is 60% (64% in the previous year) (CLA02.03). Strong performance in other aspects of permanence affects this indicator.
- 2.2 Placement stability remains a key priority. We are investing in a senior leader for children in care and care leavers to further accelerate our progress; this was a recommendation from our peer review. We have also just published our Sufficiency Strategy. Placement sufficiency is a key driver of stability and it remains a very vexed strategic challenge, locally, and across the Region. The use of unregulated placements and/or exceptional arrangements continues to be an area of operational focus. Purposeful systemic action in 2018 has led to a dramatic reduction in the use of exceptional arrangements. All of these children are personally overseen by the Deputy Chief Officer.
- 2.3 The Stability Index, 2017, an initiative by the Children’s Commissioner to measure the stability of the lives of children looked after by local authorities, measures three aspects of children’s experiences of care - placement moves, school moves, and changes in social worker;

Data from this period shows a significant and positive shift, (39% of IROs concerned about stability in quarter one compared to 15% in quarter two) though the actual percentage of unplanned moves remains unchanged.





- 2.4 These figures are consistent with 2017-2018. The profile of the workforce, predominantly young and female makes some changes inevitable. A maternity leave could see three changes of social worker in a year, with a second social worker holding the case for the duration of the maternity leave, pending the return of the original social worker. Our workforce strategy is successfully maintaining a secure permanent workforce, without losing the benefits that high quality, experienced locums bring.
- 2.5 Most children in care and care leavers receive a good service. Despite significant pressures on the availability of placements, most children live with carers who meet their needs effectively.
- 2.6 Earlier this year Devon was involved in the Bright Spots survey (CLA02.06), led by Coram in partnership with Bristol University, administered through designated teachers and supported by the Virtual School. This has given us a very rich and authentic picture of children's experience, unmediated by adult interpretation or influence. Because Bright Spots is used in many Local Authorities, we can interrogate the data for difference. The summary data is attached as [appendix 3](#) as it is the clearest voice of the Devon child in care.
- 2.7 In the year to 31 March 2018, 91% of Children in Care aged 5-plus and 100% of children in care aged under 5 had an up-to-date health assessment. (CLA02.03).
- 2.8 Our local offer for care leavers was published in September 2018. (CLA02.05)
- 2.9 Proposals to develop edge-of-care and crisis care services have been accepted and investment committed from April 2019.
- 2.10 As at 31 December 2018, 18 of our Children in Care were unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, being 2% of our children in care population (CIN01.02). Ofsted inspectors conducting a focused visit to Devon in September concluded that *"The level of support and expertise offered to unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people in Devon is a strength. Partnership working is effective and assessments and plans for this group of young people are routinely clear, specific and measurable, and result in consistently good outcomes for them"* (CLA02.01).
- 2.11 The majority of care leavers live in good-quality accommodation, and most have a choice from a range of options. The vulnerability of individuals is considered, and care leavers are supported to find suitable accommodation. Personal advisers are tenacious in exploring options and supporting young people to be successful in achieving independence.

- 2.12 Care leavers receive assistance and support to strengthen their journey into full independence. The proportion of young people aged 16 to 18 who are not in education, employment or training is decreasing. 50% of young people aged between 19 and 21 are not in education, employment or training. This is in line with statistical neighbours and the England average.
- 2.13 Apprenticeships for care leavers are available within the council and work is underway to increase the number of these with employers other than the council.
- 2.14 Most children in care benefit from good educational placements. Personal education plans are of good quality and are routinely reviewed and revised according to children's changing needs. The virtual school maintains an ongoing dialogue with schools. The service has developed effective systems for assessing the risk of each child missing education, and they work well with other agencies to trace the whereabouts of missing children.
- 2.15 The virtual school leads on the coordination of work to celebrate the achievements of children in care. For example, the annual awards evening acts as a focal point to celebrate the individual and group achievements of children in care across the county. Children, carers and staff highly value this event.
- 2.16 Foster carers are recruited, assessed and approved within appropriate timescales. Assessments are comprehensive and analytical, and consideration is given to the impact of fostering on the whole family. Connected carer assessments take account of both the potential carer's history and the needs of the children to be placed. The partnership is undertaking a local learning review in a case of a newly placed child, subject of an SGO, who sustained significant injuries. We will test whether the practice indicates the need for wider system learning.
- 2.17 A revised fees and allowances framework for foster carers was agreed by Cabinet in October 2018, to be introduced in January 2019, that will deliver a fair and equitable support package, linked to the needs of the child. This will place Devon in a stronger and more competitive position to be able to increase our recruitment of in-house foster carers, which is a key plank in the Sufficiency Strategy. The framework includes elements linked to participation in training events and support activities which will contribute to the continuing development of a highly skilled and well supported group of carers.

- 2.18 Adopters are well prepared. They are given a good understanding of the needs of adopted children and the impact of early trauma. Experienced practitioners have a very good understanding of children's needs and provide comprehensive advice and support packages for adoptive families. For children placed for adoption, stable and secure placements with their adoptive families ensure positive outcomes.
- 2.19 The average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family in Devon was 448 days, compared to the England average of 529 days. (2014-17 Scorecard).
- 2.20 Last year, we recognised in our self-assessment the need to significantly strengthen the Quality Assurance function. Leadership changes have enabled excellent progress to be made. During the year we have listened to practitioners and managers and worked with them to develop a more flexible and locally-owned approach to quality assurance and audit activity which has resulted in changes to some processes and forms and more peer-to-peer audit activity in locality or service areas. We are also introducing Appreciative Inquiry – identifying what has gone well in an intervention and supporting the sharing of this across the service. We shall evaluate this activity early in the spring 2019 before publishing a revised Quality Assurance Framework. Embedding IROs in the localities is facilitating a culture of problem solving without compromising independence or risking collusion and the introduction of Eclipse again provides a further opportunity to develop and extend quality assurance activity, through case recording and manager oversight.
- 2.21 There were 117 formal escalations commenced in the service during the period 1 April 2018 to 30 September 2018. September saw the highest number (42) commenced in any one month. This is partly due to the introduction of key lead managers for IROs and CP chairs as well as the CIN IRO role, which has accounted for 16 formal escalations in the year to date. Most escalations are resolved at an informal stage, stage 1 or 2 (up to Area Manager level). Four escalations have required resolution at Locality Director or Head of Service level in this same period, with some key themes emerging that are used to shape to the practice development responsibilities of IROs:
- Quality and issues of drift in planning (n=25)
  - Delays in achieving agreed outcomes (n=14)
  - Delay in achieving permanence (n=3)
  - Quality of Assessment (n=8)

- Stability of placement (n=7)

- 2.22 The data during Q2 shows a 10% improvement (to 60%) of children and young people attending their reviews throughout 2017/2018. A small but significant (around 10%) proportion of children and young people continue to make no contribution to their review, unchanged from 2017/2018. Some of these children will have highly complex communication needs, making true participation extremely difficult and some choose not to participate. For some, we need to reach out more robustly, creatively and persistently. A fuller and more ambitious participation strategy is one of the key priorities for the QA Service for 2018/2019.
- 2.23 Devon uses the Strengths and difficulties (SDQ) measure as one indicator of emotional wellbeing and despite variations over the years, has seen an increase in higher scores over the past three years (more difficulties). This mirrors the national picture. In Devon, the average difficulty score is 16.7, a score higher compared to the South West (15.1) and England average (14.0). While this may be because we have not fully triangulated the administration of the SDQ, the data chimes with the well-being findings in the Bright Spots survey and suggests that our response to the emotional health and well-being of children in care needs to be further strengthened. In recognition of this critical area of development risk for Children in Care, Devon initiated a CAHMS pathway to ensure the emotional wellbeing needs of Children in Care are recognised and addressed at care entry, it is too early to see the impact of this.
- 2.24 We have also been engaged as one of the seven pilot sites for the Children in Care Wellbeing project, a joint venture with NHS (England). This provides additional resources to support children in care with mental health support need to access personal health budgets. To date, over 170 young people have been accepted and allocated a budget and nearly 100 have live plans, which are based on their analysis of what resources will support their well-being. They are able to access these budgets and often use them in very creative and imaginative ways, very different to more traditional therapeutic treatment interventions.
- 2.25 Inspectors from Ofsted carried out a Focused Visit<sup>1</sup> in September 2018, looking at our arrangements for care leavers. They concluded that we had *'recently made purposeful and well-targeted progress in improving services for care leavers...'* and that *'Senior leaders*

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<sup>1</sup> Focused visit to Devon county council children's service. Published letter. <https://files.api.ofsted.gov.uk/v1/file/50030100>

*recognise the need to increase the momentum of improvement so that good-quality practice is routinely delivered in Devon.'* Inspectors identified five areas where improvement was needed:

- Managers' use of performance information and quality assurance processes.
- The quality and timeliness of case recording and pathway planning for young people.
- The quality and timeliness of return home interviews when young people go missing.
- The range of training for personal advisers and social workers, specifically in relation to working with care leavers.
- The updating of assessments of care leavers to reflect their current needs and to inform well targeted plans for young people effectively.

2.26 The findings and recommendations from the focused visit have been shared with the Children's Scrutiny Committee and the Corporate Parenting Board as well as with the Leadership Group and managers and practitioners across children's services. The service has acted swiftly in response to the recommendations and has:

- Held a learning event for the managers of Permanency and Transition Teams and for Area managers on the use and understanding of performance and management information. The introduction of Eclipse marks a watershed in the cultural change journey in Devon.
- Clarified expectations regarding needs assessments to inform pathway planning at the first review following the 15<sup>th</sup> birthday. A themed audit carried out in November/December 2018 shows some improvement in this area.
- Commenced a wider piece of work on our responses to children who go missing.
- Prepared an initial training plan for Personal Advisers which will be further developed using the feedback from the Bright Spots survey of care leavers that concludes at the end of January and findings from the workforce survey carried out over the summer 2018.

### 3. THE IMPACT OF LEADERS ON SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE WITH CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

*“Senior leaders have good awareness of the key strengths and weaknesses in the service... Senior leaders recognise the need to increase the momentum of improvement so that good-quality practice is routinely delivered in Devon.*

*The chief officer and her team acknowledge that the service historically lacked a culture of challenge and professional accountability, and they are working to embed the use of performance information and quality assurance processes.”*

(Ofsted, Focused Visit, September 2018)

- 3.1 Senior leaders and elected members have a clear focus on prioritising support, including additional financial resources, for Devon’s most vulnerable children. Senior managers are held to account through a clear governance structure that includes the Children’s Scrutiny Committee, the Corporate Parenting Board, and the Executive of the Devon Children and Families Partnership.
- 3.2 Following a period of change there is a stable and effective senior leadership team in place which is driving improvement at pace. Leaders have a strong understanding of strengths and weaknesses and are working hard to create the conditions for social work practice to thrive.
- 3.3 The Portfolio Holder is a strong advocate for children, chairing the Corporate Parenting Forum (CPF), the Corporate Parenting Board (CPB) and the governing body of the Virtual School, the CPB is co-chaired by a young person. The Portfolio Holder maintains a relationship of ‘high support, high challenge’ with both the Chief Officer and Deputy Chief Officers.
- 3.4 The CPB meets regularly, and work is underway to reinvigorate the activities of the Children in Care Council (CiCC). The Chief Officer, Portfolio Holder and elected members of the CPB undertake an annual Summer Walkabout. These walkabouts enable members to have direct contact with young people, parents, foster carers and frontline staff and managers in all services to probe and test the quality of the lived experience. This makes excellent use of members’ expertise and ensures they can triangulate their experience with the data and the reports of officers in more formal meetings.

- 3.5 The Children's Scrutiny Committee takes a keen interest in developments and progress across the service and provides clear and direct challenge of senior leaders as well as monitoring performance. The Children's Scrutiny Committee has an independent advisor which ensures their scrutiny is focused and purposeful. The Children's Scrutiny Committee visit frontline social work offices annually, holding senior officers to account on key issues raised with them (caseloads, staffing, parking, staff morale and well-being and so on). These visits are hugely valued by members and by staff.
- 3.6 The Principal Social Worker is an important link between frontline practitioners and senior leaders and is engaged in activities across the county, developing practice and liaising with strategic partners, such as CAFCASS and the local judiciary. During the past year the PSW has played a key role in leading the development of our Practice Model to be launched in the Spring of 2019.
- 3.7 The Head of Service, together with the Principal Social Worker lead a monthly Service Development Meeting for all managers that has a focus on practice development and includes contributions from partner agencies. It is also used as a forum for sharing and discussing key service-related information including performance and budget management.
- 3.8 Management action taken during the late spring and summer of 2018 and a period of accelerated improvement (October - December 2018) together with increased capacity in targeted parts of the service has reduced caseloads and pressure on frontline teams. We have acted to address the longstanding issues experienced with performance reporting by commissioning a new children's recording system (Eclipse) to be launched in January 2019 and a powerful new business information system that is currently being rolled out to frontline managers and staff. There is evidence that managers are now actively monitoring performance and caseloads using the new business information and through performance meetings.
- 3.9 We are focussing attention on maintaining a strong, stable workforce, creating an environment for social work practice to flourish. Workforce stability is improved, with a relatively low turnover rate (16%); temporary staff account for 20% of the social work workforce. Social workers are positive about working for Devon. Leaders and managers are visible and available. Supervision and management oversight are evident in many children's case records but not yet consistently in all. Social workers receive regular supervision, recording of this is not always reflective or timely. Managers will be undertaking a programme of restorative supervision training during the winter, ahead of the launch of our new practice model training in the spring of 2019.

- 3.10 The rigour and challenge of frontline managers in monitoring and driving social work practice to ensure that services are consistently good is critical. Supervision is delivered consistently and, in some cases, provides good reflection and direction. Recordings don't always clarify sufficiently the actions necessary to improve outcomes for children. We want to further develop management capacity to ensure clear, reflective and directive supervision that impacts on social work practice, service quality and outcomes for children every time. We have further developed the Frontline Managers Development Programme and introduced in 2018 a development programme for Area and Operations managers for this purpose.
- 3.11 Continuing our drive to move beyond compliance to capture the lived experiences of children and how we are making a difference is the intention in our refreshed audit tools and quality assurance framework. Leaders have worked with members of the Children's Scrutiny Committee and the Corporate Parenting Board to support them to develop their approaches to considering the impact of services in the work that they do.
- 3.12 Devon County Council is proud to be hosting the Adopt South West Regional Adoption Agency which was launched on 1 October 2018. The RAA is a partnership between Devon County Council, Plymouth City Council, Torbay Council and Somerset County Council. The Head of Service leads on these arrangements, which we believe places the local authority in a strong regional position.
- 3.13 Devon is part of the South West Region Sector Led Improvement group and regularly takes part in its support and challenge activities including networking groups and the self-assessment challenge. This provides us the opportunity to share approaches to improvement and good practice
- 3.14 Devon, as an early adopter of the Woods Report recommendations, moved away from the traditional LSCB structures in 2017 and established the Devon Children and Families Partnership (DCFP). This was an opportunity to refresh and reinvigorate the partnership. Our new safeguarding arrangements were published on 1.11.18, they represent a very fundamental shift from the LSCB arrangements that were judged inadequate in 2015.

Partnerships and commissioning were identified as areas requiring improvement in last year's self-assessment. There remains more to do to build a partnership that really flies, with complete coherence between all its parts vertical and horizontal, but excellent progress



has been made. The partnership is now in a position to develop its strategic plan and this work is underway with a planned publication date of 1.4.19.

- 3.15 The DCFP Commissioning Group provides the leadership for Devon's joint commissioning strategy and delivery of commissioning intentions. There is a strong track record of focusing on outcomes through our commissioning processes; with some good examples of co-production and engagement with children, young people, families and providers. The STP transformation programmes aims to strengthen delivery at a system level and to shape future service design and commissioning intentions.
- 3.16 Leaders and managers are working hard to further develop an environment in which good-quality social work can flourish and have been successful in making improvements to many areas of the service. With the introduction of Eclipse and the Devon practice model, early in 2019, firm foundations are secured.

## 4. OUR PLANS TO MAINTAIN OR FURTHER IMPROVE PRACTICE

- 4.1 We know from information gathered from a range of sources including quality assurance audits, performance and management information, review by peers and a focused visit by Ofsted that focused attention on some areas of practice will accelerate our improvement:
- Ensuring that no child of family receives an unnecessary statutory intervention by further strengthening early help and a fully embedded understanding of thresholds.
  - The timeliness and effectiveness of pre-proceedings work, including the early identification and response to concerns regarding unborn children.
  - The quality of management oversight of social work practice, including supervision and the use of qualitative auditing to give a better understanding of the impact of practice.
  - The timeliness and quality of assessments so that they better inform the child's plan where an intervention or support is required.
  - The quality of children's plans so they are explicit about desired outcomes, how these outcomes will be achieved and the timescales for completion.
  - Transitional planning for disabled children as they approach adulthood.
  - A consistent high-quality response when children and young people go missing from home and care.
- 4.2 Having discussed in our Annual Conversation with Ofsted in October 2017 the improvements made to our services for care leavers (SWP03.01) and the recommendation of the CPB Summer Walkabout 2017, we invited peers from Cornwall County Council to undertake a peer review focusing in our services for Care Leavers to cast an independent and objective eye over our service. We will be reciprocating by carrying out a peer review in Cornwall in 2019. Participating in peer reviews provides us an excellent opportunity for exposure to different ways of working and the Senior Management Team have been encouraged to complete LGA (Local Government Association) training as Peer Reviewers during 2018 so that we can make the most of this opportunity in the future.

- 4.3 We have been in discussion with regional representatives of the Department for Education (DfE) and Essex County Council children's services to make use of the *Partners in Practice* resource in 2019. It has been agreed that the following practice will be the focus of support initially, with the expected outcomes being currently under consideration:
- Support for Care leavers
  - Access to services and assessment for disabled children
  - Further development of the Early Help Offer and partnership
  - Further development of our Quality Assurance and Learning framework
- 4.4 A revised Improvement and Development Plan was presented to the Council's Leadership Group in September 2018 re-focussing our activities having taken into account the findings from the 2017 Service Review and the Peer review in June 2018 together with a consideration of the impact of changes in senior leadership and delays to the planned introduction of a new case management system. This *Hard Re-set* Improvement and Development Plan built upon the existing Improvement Plan and responds to the three core issues identified in the development of the plan:
- The leadership capacity to address the challenges
  - The consequence of the complexities in Eclipse implementation
  - The consequence of the changed market in social work recruitment.
- 4.5 The plan includes:
- Proposals and additional resources to strengthen social work practice in both the North and the South Locality areas.
  - Proposals to introduce an Edge of Care service and a Crisis Care resource
  - Initiatives to boost recruitment and retention of social workers and other practitioners
  - The introduction of a practice model built on Restorative Practice and using motivational interviewing as one of a range of tools, from Spring 2019.
  - Proposals to increase senior management capacity in order that improvement can continue to be driven at pace.

- Activity to fundamentally review our placement brokerage systems coupled with the development and publication of our Sufficiency Strategy, and
- More robust management arrangements for the Disabled Children's Service.

- 4.6 The total corporate investment of additional resources being made available to children's social care services over the next five years to support this plan is £44m.
- 4.7 The Children's Services Leadership Team (CSLT) will commission a further independent and service-wide review in the Spring of 2019 if the service has not yet had an ILACS inspection by Ofsted, to provide objective feedback on the progress of the Improvement and Development Plan and continuing practice improvement.
- 4.8 Following our Focused Visit, a period of Accelerated Improvement was commenced at the beginning of October and continued through December 2018 focussing on the core priorities that we know will make the biggest difference. Already, at the time of preparation of this evaluation report, positive impact can be observed including a further reduction in caseloads; increased recruitment activity and a stronger focus across the service on our service priorities. The leadership team recognises that this level of increased improvement activity is not sustainable over a prolonged period. We intend to repeat a time limited programme of intense and focused activity annually.
- 4.9 We will introduce Eclipse, our new Case Management System on 21 January 2019. Eclipse will replace CareFirst and as the development partner working with the system providers we have worked to create a system that has practitioners and good practice at its core. It will contribute to a reduced burden of recording and provide a further mechanism to support practice improvement.
- 4.10 Our ambition is that every child and family in Devon receives a social work service that is at least good every time they encounter us. We know that in some parts of our service, we are achieving our ambition; but overall we are not there yet, though we continue to take major strides in the right direction.

## APPENDIX 1: SELF-EVALUATION EVIDENCE CATALOGUE

Reference	Evidence
<b>CIN01. The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection</b>	
CIN01.01	Child in Need Statutory return (2018)
CIN01.02	ChAT report (31/12/18)
CIN01.03	Sufficiency Strategy
CIN01.04	SW Region Devon Self-assessment 2017-18
CIN01.05	Deep dive report – Stronger Families : Safer Children
<b>CLA02. The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers</b>	
CLA02.01	Ofsted Focused Visit September 2018 Published Letter
CLA02.02	Adoption Scorecard (2014-2017)
CLA02.03	CLA Statutory return (2018)
CLA02.04	Peer Review feedback letter
CLA02.05	Care leavers Local Offer

CLA02.06	Bright Spots Survey
<b>SWP03. The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families</b>	
SWP03.01	Ofsted Annual Conversation 2017
SWP03.02	Workforce survey 2018
<b>IMP04. Plans to maintain or improve practice</b>	
IMP04.01	Children's Services Improvement Plan

## Children's services Analysis Tool (ChAT)

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## Comparisons of headline figures and performance data to published statistics

The table below shows the Local Authority's latest data for each indicator as calculated in ChAT, and the direction of travel since the latest published statistics (where available).

Decreasing, low is good  
Increasing, high is good  
No change, not RAG-rated



Lowest 25% quartile, low is good  
Highest 25% quartile, high is good  
Mid 50% range, not RAG-rated



Indicator	Latest data (ChAT)			Latest published statistics for all local authorities						Date
	LA	Direction of travel		LA	SNs	Eng	LA compared to mid-50% range of all LAs			
Referrals received (annual rate per 10,000 of children)	321	Decrease	←	369	506	553	Lower	○		2017-18
Referrals to social care that were within 12 months of a previous referral (%)	22	Increase	→	19	21	22	In range	○		2017-18
Assessments completed (annual rate per 10,000 of children)	416	Increase	→	340	467	532	Lower	○		2017-18
Assessments completed within 45 working days (%)	68	Decrease	←	77	78	83	In range	○		2017-18
Children subject to section 47 enquiries (annual rate per 10,000 of children)	132	Decrease	←	142	133	167	In range	○		2017-18
Children subject of an initial child protection conference (annual rate per 10,000 of children)	45	Decrease	←	52	58	67	Lower	○		2017-18
Initial Child Protection Conferences held within 15 working days of the start of the section 47 enquiry (%)	70	Increase	→	67	80	77	Lower	○		2017-18
Children in need (snapshot rate per 10,000 children)	259	Decrease	←	275	289	341	Lower	○		2017-18
Children who are the subject of a child protection plan (snapshot rate per 10,000 children)	36	Increase	→	33	40	45	Lower	○		2017-18
Children who became the subject of a CP plan for a second or subsequent time (%)	12	Decrease	←	26	22	20	Higher	○		2017-18
Children who ceased to be on a CP plan whose plan lasted 2 years or more (%)	1	Decrease	←	5	3	3	Higher	○		2017-18
Children who are looked after (snapshot rate per 10,000 children)	51	Increase	→	48	54	62	In range	○		2016-17
Children looked after who had a missing incident in the period (%)	11	Decrease	←	13	8	10	In range	○		2016-17
Children looked after who were away without authorisation in the period (%)	0	Decrease	←	7	2	5	In range	○		2016-17
Children looked after who had their teeth checked by a dentist in the last 12 months (%)	62	Decrease	←	85	79	83	In range	○		2016-17
Children looked after who had their annual health assessment (%)	89	Decrease	←	90	87	89	In range	○		2016-17
Children who ceased to be looked after in the period who were adopted (%)	13	Decrease	←	14	16	14	In range	○		2016-17
Children who ceased to be looked after in the period due to a Special Guardianship Order (%)	18			x	13	12				2016-17
Children leaving care over the age of 16 who remained looked after until their 18th birthday (%)	70	Decrease	←	77	74	70	Higher	○		2016-17
Care leavers aged 19-21 in suitable accommodation (%)	81	Increase	→	80	84	84	In range	○		2016-17
Care leavers aged 19-21 in education, employment, or training (%)	41	Decrease	←	42	50	50	Lower	○		2016-17
A1 - Average time between entering care and moving in with family for children who were adopted (days)	-	-		448	440	520	Lower	○		2014-17
A2 - Average time between LA receiving placement order and LA deciding on a match with family (days)	-	-		156	183	220	Lower	○		2014-17

Developer Jean Mallo - Data to Intelligence project, 2018



## Your Life, Your Care:

*A survey of the views of looked after children and young people*

In 2018 all children in care in Devon were asked to participate in an online survey, mainly through

158 children and young people



In Devon, 19% of children (8-11yrs) and 32% of young people (11-18yrs) had no face to face contact with either parent.

*I think I see members of my birth family about the right amount. I sometimes think I might like to see them a bit more but I am not bothered about it at the moment.*  
8-11yrs

*Would like to see my mum and Dad more and have some more information on why I can't see them.*  
8-11yrs

### Compared to other local authorities:



In other authorities, children and young people tended to record higher (although not significantly higher) well-being scores.



Only 73% of children aged 8-11yrs knew that they could speak to their social worker on their own compared to 87% in other authorities.



Compared to 11-18yrs in care in other authorities, significantly lower proportions of young people in Devon liked school.



Significantly higher proportions (91%) of young people in other authorities had access to the internet than young people (83%) in Devon.



Relatively high proportions of children (20%) aged 4-7yrs did not have a good friend.





### Low Well-Being:



There was a strong association between low well-being and not having a trusted adult.



Disliking appearance was identified as having the strongest association with low well-being in Devon



Compared to boys, girls in Devon were 12 times more likely to write that they did not like their appearance.

### What would make care better?

*It would be better if I could stick with one social worker, they change a lot.*  
8-11yrs

*More activities, getting out more, seeing my family more.*  
11-18yrs

*It's hard to change schools and lose friends and make new friends.*  
4-7yrs

*Make sure you choose the correct foster carers for each child carefully so that they match together really well.*  
8-11yrs

*Better if I had a bigger room and the computer/internet worked better.*  
11-18yrs

*Have no respite, although I don't go into it [anymore] because my carers are amazing! I used to [go to respite] but I hated it.*  
11-18yrs

## Recommendations

- **Help young people develop trusting and supportive relationships with their carers.** Young people with low well-being were more likely to record a lack of trust with their carers. Additionally, significantly lower proportions of children aged 4-7yrs and aged 8-11yrs thought that their carers failed to notice how they were feeling compared to children in other authorities.
- **Teach carers about internet safety so that they feel more confident letting children go online.** Significantly higher proportions (91%) of young people in other local authorities had access to the Internet.
- **Work with young people to boost their self-esteem and promote body positivity.** Not liking your appearance was the single factor most strongly associated with low well-being.
- **Explore why low proportions of young people (11-18yrs) liked school.**
- **Explore why low proportions of children aged 4-7yrs had a good friend.**
- **Ensure that all children know that they are able to speak to their social worker on their own.** In Devon, only 73% of children aged 8-11yrs knew this compared to 87% in other authorities.
- **Ensure social workers and teachers understand and acknowledge the stigma children can feel when identified as being in care.** 15% of young people recorded that adults did things that made them feel embarrassed about being in care.

## bright spots

This survey was developed by Coram Voice and University of Bristol together with 140 children and young people in and from care as part of the national Bright Spots programme,

It asks children in care about their life, based on the things that are important to them.

To find out more go to:  
[www.coramvoice.org.uk/brightspots](http://www.coramvoice.org.uk/brightspots)

Or email  
[brightspots@coramvoice.org.uk](mailto:brightspots@coramvoice.org.uk)

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