

PERFORMANCE REPORT: CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE

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

Recommendations:

1. That the children's scrutiny committee receive this report
2. That draft comparator data (South West region) is noted
3. That activity to develop a new suite of data, presented online in an interactive manner thereby supporting a more timely and extensive use of performance and management information is also noted.

Background

Performance and management 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 and other performance reports. The workbook in its current format has significant limitations in terms of the time taken to produce it and in accessibility and use.

Work is progressing to ensure that when the Eclipse database is implemented there is continuity of performance and management information provision and that the overall range of information is increased with greater ability to analyse information at worker, team, locality and service levels.

This report moves away from the style of report published in recent months and does not directly use the Performance Workbook but instead draws from this and other data sources. Current 'headlines' are reported, together with analysis where appropriate and subject to the appropriate technology being available at the time of the Committee meeting a demonstration will be provided of the very different performance and management information that we shall be rolling out over the coming months.

1. Population Profile and caseloads

- 1.1 At the end of December 2017, children's social care services were working with 5,122 Children in Need (a decrease in number of 140 from the previous month). The precise cause of this cannot be determined but contributory factors might include the reduction in referrals generally experienced at times of school holidays, and a service focus on closing cases where there was no longer a social work role.
- 1.2 The number of Children in Care as at the end of December 2017 had also fallen slightly to 712 (from 714 in the previous month), and at the time of writing this report has fallen further to 705 (as at 26 February 2018).
- 1.3 The average caseload across the service at the end of December 2017 was 17.6 (18.6 in November). This is attributed to an increase of 2 FTE case holders following recruitment and a reduction in the overall number of cases. Average caseloads within and across teams though varies considerably and the measure that we are aiming for is a manageable caseload with only a very small band of variance across the service

2. Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) and referrals

- 2.1 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.
- 2.2 The volume of enquiries received by the MASH fluctuates throughout the year and can be affected by school holidays, awareness-raising campaigns and other activities. The reduction in the number of referrals in December was most likely a consequence of school holidays. Of the 644 enquiries received, 258 (40.1%) were forwarded to social work teams for a single assessment.
- 2.3 Devon's re-referral rate remains a little lower than the National and Statistical Neighbour rates but has risen in recent months and in December was at 29.2% (but a much lower rate of referral overall in the month). Activity is ongoing to determine the outcome of re-assessment for a sample of this cohort as this should tell us something about why we have seen a rise in this rate.

3. Children in Need

- 3.1 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.
- 3.2 The overall number of child in need cases had risen slightly since the summer but has now fallen again to pre-summer levels. In-year fluctuation is to be expected. Whilst this will be monitored closely, the rate had not risen at a rate that should cause any concern at this time.

- 3.3 The number of single assessments started has increased in recent months (with the exception of December, due to the reduced referral rate) and the percentage of these that have at outcome of 'case closed' at the conclusion of the assessment is now 41.4% across the year. This is a concern for the service and may be indicative of a number of factors, including assessments being opened where one might not have been required had more information been gathered at the time of the enquiry. It might also for example be a symptom of higher caseloads in some teams compared to others, or a change in the quality of assessments overall (although there is no evidence of this emerging from quality assurance activity).
- 3.4 The use of 'case closed' as an outcome can itself be misleading as it does not necessarily mean that the family was offered no support during the period of assessment. In many cases, families will have been offered information, advice, or guidance, or signposted to other services.
- 3.5 As at 31 December 2017, 76.8% of single assessments had been completed and authorised within 45 working days of being commenced. Whilst representing a slightly better performance reported in the preceding month this is below our target rate of 85% and the Head of Service has given a clear message to managers of his expectations at recent Service Development Meetings and has signalled that unless performance improves in the short term, team managers together with their area manager and locality director will be called in to explain poor performance and to indicate what they are going to do to improve the situation.

4. Child Protection

- 4.1 The number of children and young people who are the subject of a child protection plan has been reducing steadily since August 2017 and numbered 433 at the end of December (from 511 in August). The rate per 10,000 in Devon is currently 30.2/10000 which is below the national and statistical neighbour rates.
- 4.2 There is no apparent single reason why CP numbers are reducing at this time and Members will know that numbers have fluctuated over the past two years. This will be monitored by the service and analysis made over time to determine what impact, if any, the revised conference model and changes to child in need procedures may be having.

5. Children Looked After and Care Leavers

- 5.1 The number of children in care as at the end of December 2017 was 712 (a rate of 49.6/10,000). 505 (71%) are the subject of either an interim or a full Care Order and 160 (22%) are accommodated by voluntary agreement (section 20).
- 5.2 The challenges of identifying suitable placements within the County for some children and young people has previously been reported and placement choice and sufficiency remains a challenge to the service. These challenges have an

impact on areas of performance such as visiting, arranging initial health assessments, and placement stability.

- 5.3 Despite the distance involved in some visits, the percentage of children Looked After who have been visited within statutory timescales remains high and has been consistently at or above 90% since April 2017 (dipping to 89.7% in December). There are reasons why some visits might not happen within timescales but the service is currently focussed on improving this performance further.
- 5.4 474 of 712 children Looked After have had just one placement in the past twelve months and 151 have had two placements. 86 children and young people have had three or more placements in the past twelve months and it is anticipated that work to develop placement sufficiency and choice in the coming year will help to reduce this number and further improve placement stability.
- 5.5 Scrutiny committee at its previous meeting requested data on placement stability across the whole of a child's period in care. This information is not readily available from the data as it is captured and reported in CareFirst but work is underway to be able to produce this report in the future.
- 5.6 Most recent data regarding our care leavers indicates that the service is in touch' with 78.4% of our care leaver cohort compared to the 70% reported in our most recent statutory return (March 2017) and that more care leavers (45.6%) are known to be in education, employment or training (EET) compared to 32% in March 2017.

6. Adoption

- 6.1 Devon's Adoption services continue to perform well compared to the England and statistical neighbour averages and timely and robust permanency planning arrangements are evidenced by almost 70% of children waiting less than 14 months between entering care and placement for adoption.

7. South West region comparative data (Q3)

- 7.1 Rate of referrals. Our rate of referrals for Q3 (87.6 per 10,000) and for the year to date (279.3 per 10,000) remain amongst the lowest in the region and below the national average (411.2 per 10,000 for a year). There has always been some difference between local authorities in what is called and referral and what is a contact or as we refer to it in Devon, an enquiry, but in general terms a referral is broadly an enquiry that is passed to a social work team for an assessment. Devon has an established and robust MASH compared to many local authorities and also has a developing early help offer and both of these factors may be contributing to our relatively low referral rates.
- 7.2 Devon's re-referral rate for Q3 (24.3%) was at about the mid-range for the region but for the year to date is in a better position (21.5%) and just slightly lower than the National average (21.9%).

- 7.3 Devon's rate of assessments per 10,000 in the year to date is the lowest in the region at 257.5 and significantly below the national average (386.3). Factors this might influence include difference in demographics, robustness of the 'front door' into services, and the strength of the early help offer, etc. The service needs to keep checking through audit and other activity though that the threshold remains appropriate.
- 7.4 As reported already in this report our rate of completion of assessments within 45 working days is below our target and for the year to date is in the mid-range of the south west authorities (eight authorities performing more poorly than Devon and six authorities performing better). Our year to date figure at the end of Q3 was 76.7% compared to a national average of 82.9%.
- 7.5 Devon's rate of children subject to a child protection plan per 10,000 as at the last day of the quarter was the lowest in the region (30.2), with the highest rate in the region reported at 78.0 against a National average of 43.3.
- 7.6 In contrast Devon appears to have the higher percentage of children becoming the subject of a child protection plan for a second or subsequent time during the year at 25.9 (although it should be noted that seven other authorities have a percentage above 21%) and more will need to be done to understand the reasons for this.

8. Children's Social Work Workforce data 2017

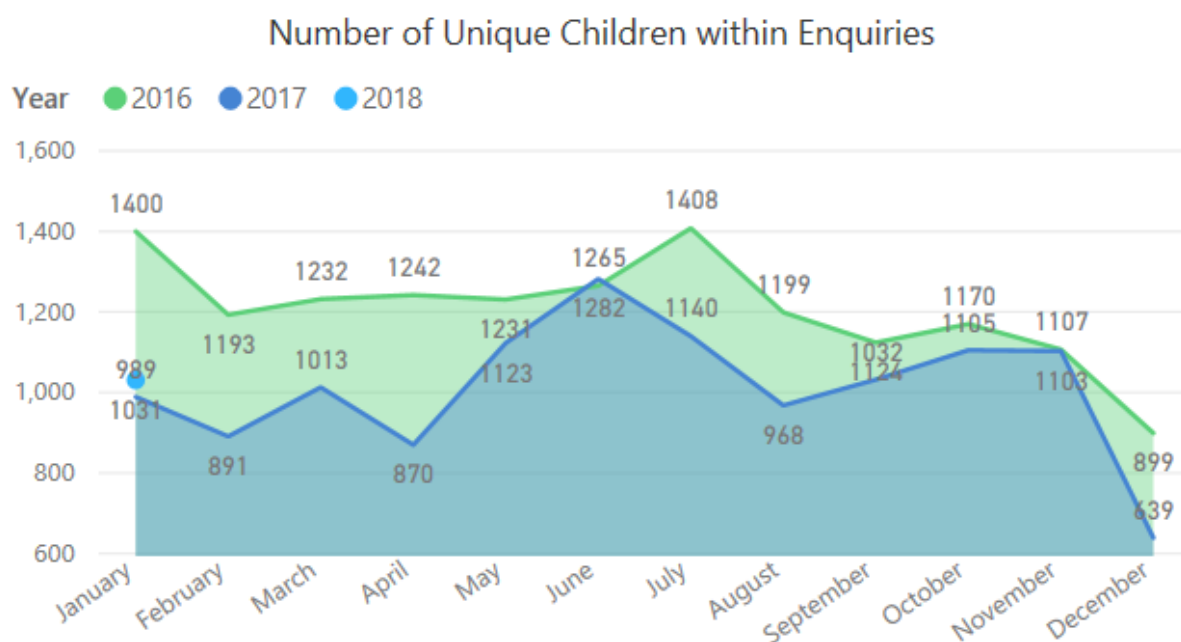
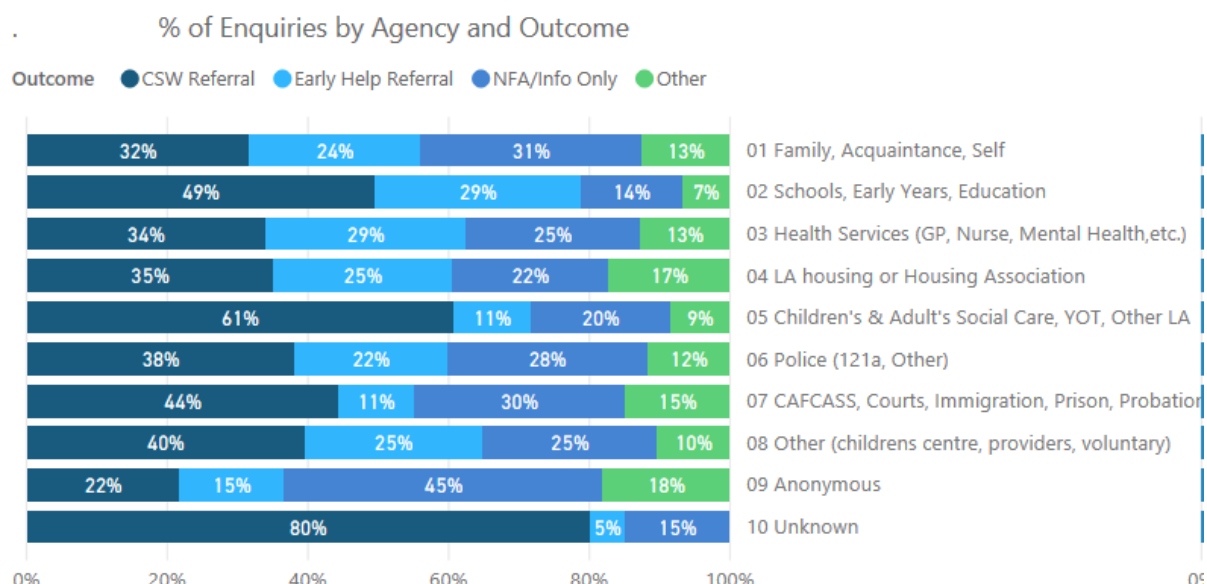
- 8.1 The government recently published the 2017 national data for the children's social work workforce.
- 8.2 Agency staff (FTE) – 13.7% agency staff compared to 15.8 nationally and 13.3% regionally. 91% of Devon's agency usage is for covering a vacancy.
- 8.3 Caseloads – Devon average of 19.3 cases per FTE at that time. Nationally the figure is 17.8 and regionally it is 17.5.

9. Looking ahead

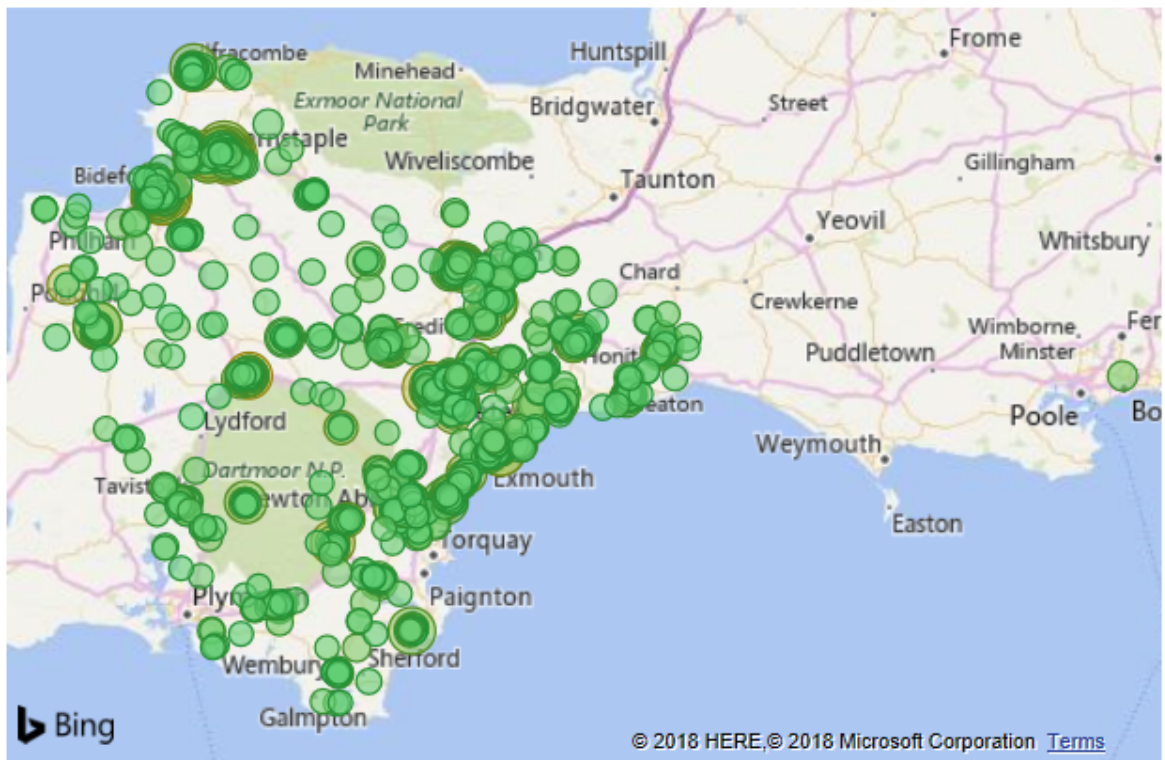
- 9.1 Work is progressing to develop a new suite and style of performance management information reports.
- 9.2 Using PowerBI information presented in different formats will be made available online (via SharePoint) to authorised users drawing on data from Eclipse once this system is launched which in the majority of instances will be not more than 24hrs old.
- 9.3 The new reports will allow users to filter and change the parameters of the report, allowing individuals to drill down from service to team level and into different outcomes or processes.

9.4 The technology will also enable us to map activities, such as referrals, or issues emerging from assessments and this will in turn enable us to consider where and how we develop or commission services.

9.5 Screenshots of some of these future reports are provided, and a demonstration will be provided at the meeting of the scrutiny committee if time and technology permit.



Post Codes with more than 5 Enquiries



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

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