

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 challenges and pressures that continue to exist in parts of the service as well as the impact of significant efforts in recent months to bring about improvement in a number of practice areas.

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), expected early in 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, for the first time, from use of the Children's services Analysis Tool (ChAT). ChAT is a tool developed as a part of the collaborative Data to Intelligence Project between some London authorities and Ofsted. The tool is increasingly being used by children's services across the country to support analysis of available business information.

2. **Performance information**

Contacts and referrals

- 2.1 In the three months up to 31 October 2018, the service received 2631 contacts, of which 1177 progressed to referrals. The rate of referrals per 10,000 children aged 0-17yrs is currently 325. The referral rate per 10,000 is significantly lower than our statistical and regional neighbours (506 per 10,000 and 553 per 10,000 respectively) and our recent historical position has been relatively stable (353 per 10,000 in 2016-17 and 369 per 10,000 in 2017-18). The strengthening of our early help system and a proactive approach from the MASH with partners have been key to effectively

managing down our referral rate. However, we remain vigilant to ensure that every child who needs a statutory social work service, receives one.

- 2.2 Our re-referral rate (children with more than one referral in the 12 months prior to the reporting date) has risen from 19% at 31 March 2018 to 23% at 31 October 2018. The rate will vary during the course of a year and service leaders are working to better understand any possible causes for the current rise. Our Statistical neighbours at the end of last year (2017-18) reported a rate of 23% as well.

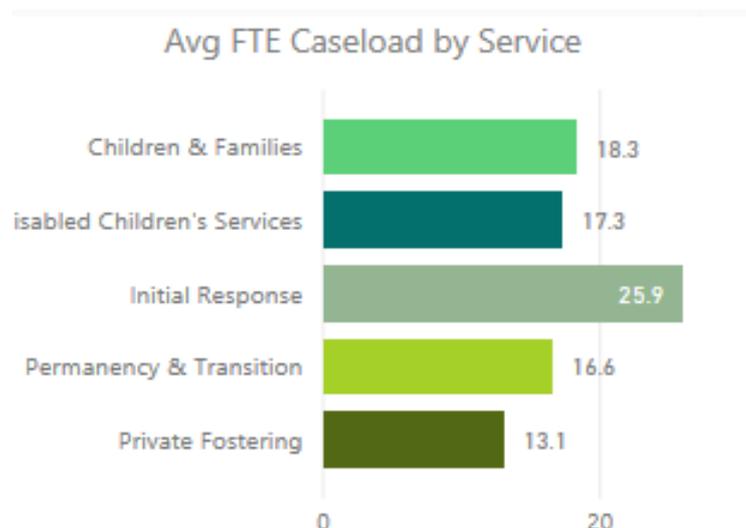
Assessments

- 2.3 In the six months up to 31 October 2018 the service completed 2771 single assessments. A further 1008 had an assessment ongoing at 31 October 2018. When comparing the number of assessments per 10,000 people as a rate, we are conducting 12% more assessments than we did in 2017-18. This may well reflect the lived experience of more families struggling.
- 2.4 63% of the 2771 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). 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.
- 2.5 Recent quality assurance activity is indicating that the quality of assessments in those cases audited is improving. Each open case having a good quality, up-to-date assessment is one of our three service priorities.

Caseloads

- 2.6 As at 31 October 2018, the average caseload in case holding social care teams was 18 cases. This marks a return to caseload levels last seen in December 2017, following which the service had seen the average rising most months, to a height of 22 in August 2018.
- 2.7 Average caseload by broad service area is illustrated in figure 1.

Figure 1: Caseloads by service area



- 2.8 Higher average caseloads still exist in the Initial Response teams but here again we have seen a significant reduction in recent months. This is to be expected because of the faster turnover of work in these teams. 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, we are seeing month-on-month improvement.

- 2.9 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

- 2.10 As at 31 October 2018, there were 3285 children in need being supported by the service (excluding children the subject of a CP Plan; those who are Children in Care, and finance-only cases).

Children in care and care leavers

- 2.11 As at 31 October there were 720 children in the care of Devon county council and services were supporting 525 care leavers.
- 2.12 141 children in care ceased to be looked after in the past six months (156 become looked after). Of these 141 11% (15 children) ceased to be looked after because they were adopted and 17% (24) ceased to be looked after because a Special Guardianship Order (SGO) was granted.
- 2.13 At 31 October 2018 our rate per 10,000 children was 50, an increase since our March 18 position of 48 which reflects increasing demand. The Council's commitment to investment in an edge of care service is designed to ensure that we have the intensive support families at the threshold of care need if they are to continue looking after their older children.
- 2.14 1% of our children in care are unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC).
- 2.15 The breakdown of the legal status of our children in care is summarised as follows:
- Interim Care Order 16%
 - Full Care Order 56%
 - Placement Order granted 7%
 - Accommodated under S20 21%
- 2.16 73% of our children in care are placed in foster placements. 53% 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.
- 2.16 20% of our children in care are placed outside Devon which whilst still higher than we would like, is an improvement on the 25% at 31 March 2017.
- 2.17 Short term placement stability remains at about 12% (12% of our cohort have experienced 3 or more moves in the past 12 months) and is an improvement on the position 18 months ago of 14%. The national average for England over a 12-month period was 10% in 2016-17, rising to 11% when comparing our statistical neighbours for the same period. The range between authorities on this indicator is very narrow so fractions of a percent are significant. Our performance is symptomatic of some of the challenges in identifying appropriate placements for some children. 60% 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.
- 2.18 We are in touch with 84% of our care leaver cohort and of these, 49% are in education, employment or training (EET) and 88% are reported to be in suitable

accommodation. This figure has improved since our March 2018 year end position of 80.9% but is lower than the national average of 92%.

2.19 Services for care leavers were the subject of a focussed visit by Ofsted in September 2018 and the Local Offer was published in the same month.

Child Protection (CP) plans

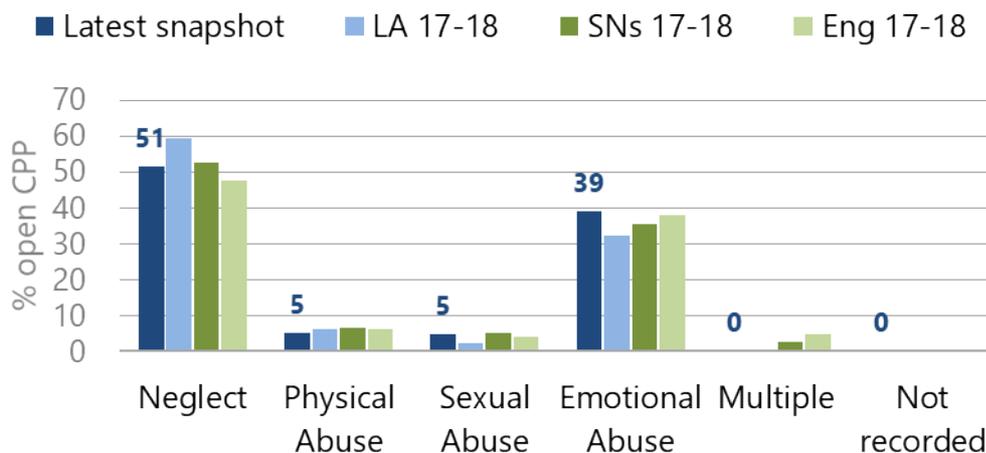
2.20 As at 31 October, 502 children were the subject of a child protection plan, a 9% increase compared to the same period last year and a 6% increase in the last 6 months.

2.21 Whilst we have seen a rise in the number of children the subject of a CP plan, the number does fluctuate over time and is closely monitored and remains below the average rate per 10,000 children among Statistical neighbours (40 per 10,000) and the overall England average (45 per 10,000). The Devon rate per 10,000 is 33.

2.22 In most of cases, the duration of the open CP plan is less than 12 months (86%). 13% of open CP plans have been open for between one and two years and just 1% has been open for between two and two-and-a-half years.

2.23 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

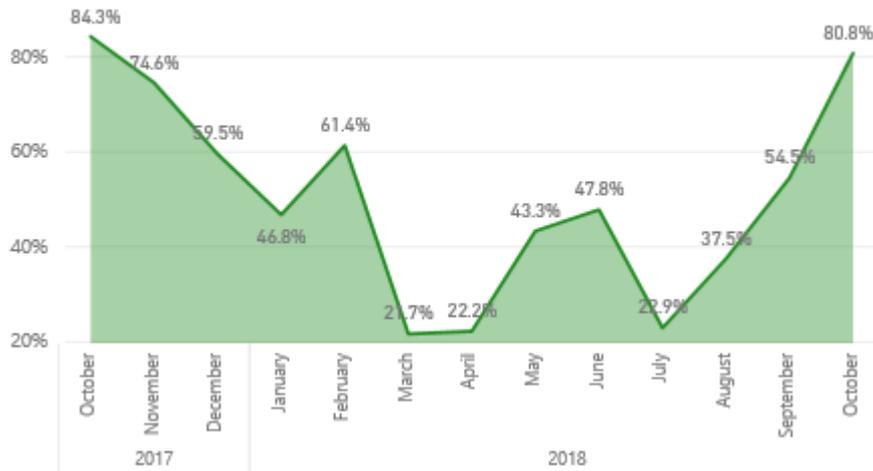


Source: ChAT tool 1/11/18

2.24 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 80% of ICPCs held within the required 15 working days in October. (See figure 3). Further improvement is expected.

Figure 3:

% of Initial Child Protection Plans Completed in Time
 WITHIN 15 WORKING DAYS OF STRATEGY MEETING DECISION FOR S47



Source: Performance dashboard (PowerBI)

Service Priorities

2.25 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, 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.

2.26 Due to the limitations of the current case management systems and the difference systems within which some of this information is recorded there have been challenges in gathering accurate management information to measure progress against these priorities. Recent activity to resolve these issues will put us in a better position to report progress over time and this will be included in future reports to the Children's Scrutiny Committee.

Accelerated Improvement Period

2.27 A period of accelerated improvement activity across the service commenced on 1 October and will continue until Christmas. The primary focus of this is 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).

2.28 The impact of this activity will be included in the January 2019 report to the Committee.

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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