

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;
 - the difficulties currently faced by Devon and other local authorities to complete and submit annual census return data;
 - changes made to the service practice priorities and the commencement of a period of accelerated improvement; and
 - the impact of continuing efforts to bring about improvement in a number of key practice areas.

1. Annual Department for Education returns

- 1.1 Typically, we would expect to be reporting the headline unvalidated data emerging from the annual census returns which would be going through a process of validation ahead of submission at the end of June. This year however the DfE online portal through which this process happens is experiencing technical difficulties and local authorities are not able to submit and analyse data and have been informed that this may take some time to resolve.

2 Performance information

Comparator groups

- 2.1 The service uses several comparator groups to aid analysis of performance against that of others. In most instances, the most recently published England average and Statistical neighbour average will be used.
- 2.2 Our Statistical neighbours are: Cornwall, Dorset, East Sussex, Gloucestershire, Herefordshire, Norfolk, Shropshire, Somerset, Suffolk, and Wiltshire. Of this group, one local authority is judged as outstanding and three as good by Ofsted whilst the others mostly require improvement to be good.
- 2.3 Where we have access to comparative data (typically the mostly recently nationally published data) we have elected to also use a custom comparator group of local authorities with similar characteristics as Devon (geographic size, for example) who are rated as either outstanding or good by Ofsted. The group are: Cambridgeshire, Cornwall, Essex, Hertfordshire, Lincolnshire, and North Yorkshire.

Contacts and referrals

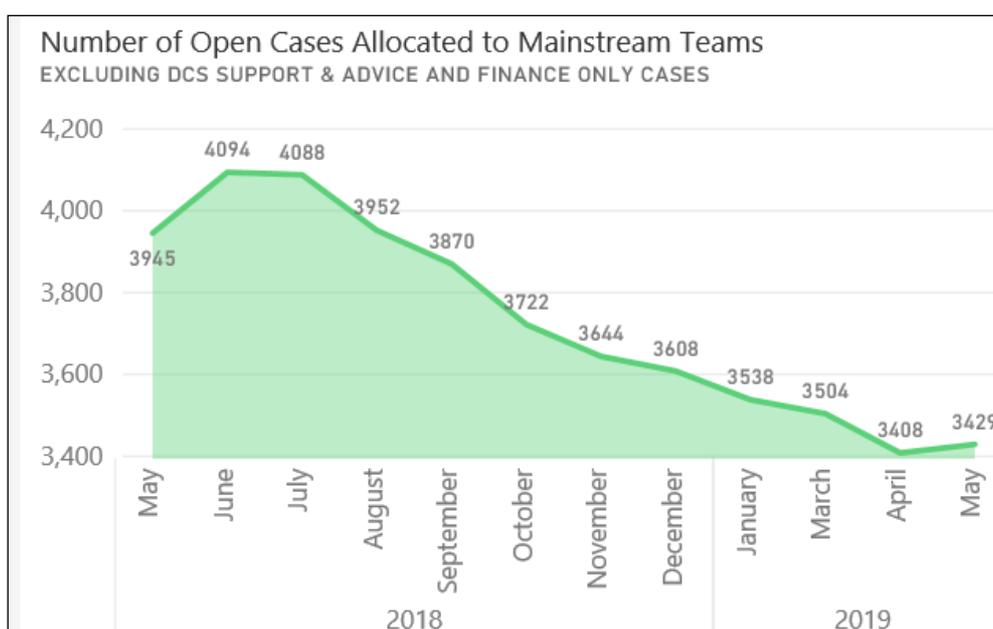
- 2.4 In the three months to 20 May 2019, the service received 1911 contacts, of which 1004 progressed to referrals. The rate of referrals per 10,000 of the 0-17yrs population during this period was 278 which is almost half the mostly recently published England average and is below the most recently published rate (369) of that of our custom comparator group of good or outstanding authorities.
- 2.5 The re-referral rate (Children with more than one referral in the 12 months prior to the reporting date) had risen to 22% in the previous report to Scrutiny Committee and is now down to 18% during the three months to 20 May 2019. This suggests a downward trend and is below the England average rate (22%) and the Statistical neighbour rate (20.5%) and is just above the custom authorities' rate of 17%.

Assessments

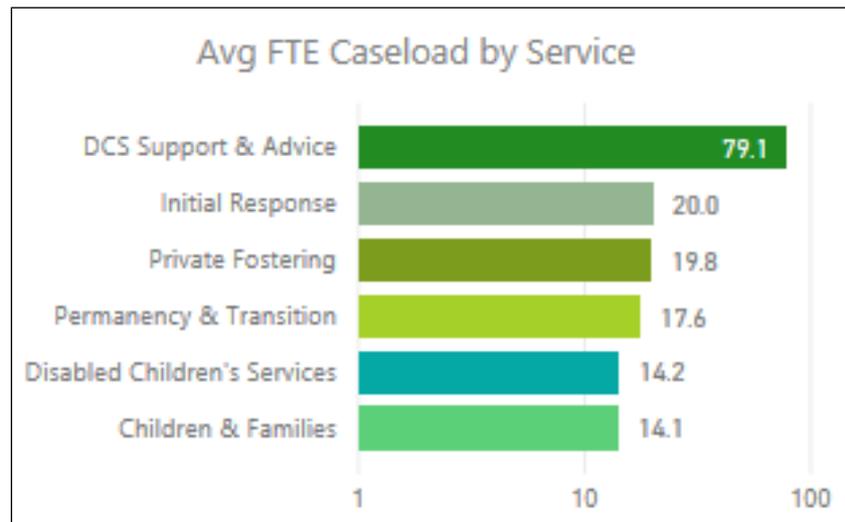
- 2.6 In the six months up to 20 May 2019 the service completed 2406 single assessments. A further 621 had an assessment ongoing at 20 May 2019.
- 2.7 82% of the 2406 assessments were completed in 45 working days which whilst falling just short of our target rate (85%) marks a significant improvement on the last reported figure of 67% completed within timescales. The percentage of assessments completed with 45 working days in the year 2017-18 for Devon was 77% (compared to 78% among statistical neighbours and 83% as the England average rate). The 2017-18 rate for the custom authority group was 91%.
- 2.8 We know from quality assurance activity and from feedback from the recent Focused Visit by Ofsted that Assessments vary in quality and this will be subject to increased oversight and scrutiny in the coming weeks and months.

Caseloads

- 2.9 As at 15 May 2019, the average caseload in case holding social care teams was 15.8 children (the average caseload as at 31 December 2018 was 17.8). This marks a further period of reducing caseloads across the service. The number of children allocated to mainstream teams is considerably 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.



2.10 Average caseload by broad service area is illustrated as follows:



- 2.11 Slightly higher average caseloads still exist in the Initial Response teams (20 children) but here again we are seeing month-on-month improvement. The average caseload in Initial response teams had risen to a high of 34.4 children at the end of July 2018 and was reported as being 23 children at 31 December 2018 (and 26 children reported in the November Scrutiny Committee report).
- 2.12 Across the service, action has been taken to reduce caseloads by improving workflow and transfer of cases where appropriate; the closure or transition to early help 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.
- 2.13 Performance and management information, together with feedback from the recent Focused Visit by Ofsted indicate that there is more that we can do to ease the process by which children and families who no longer require support from a social worker but who may require ongoing support from Early Help services move between services and this will be a focus of additional oversight in the coming months.

Children in Need

- 2.14 As at 20 May 2019 there were 2832 children in need being supported by the service (including children the subject of a CP Plan (542); those who are Children in Care (756), and care leavers (471).
- 2.15 The rate of children in need per 10,000 of the 0-17yrs population is below the average rate among Statistical neighbours, our custom comparator group, and the England average.

Children in care and care leavers

- 2.16 As at 20 May there were 756 children in the care of Devon County Council and services were supporting 471 care leavers. This represents an increase in the number of children in care and of the number of care leavers being supported by the service.
- 2.17 Analysis of the increase in numbers shows that the rate at which children and young people become looked after per 10,000 of the population of 0-17yr olds has fallen to 20 per 10,000 over the past six months (compared to rate of 21 per 10000 in year ended 31 March 2018 and 22 per 10,000 in the previous year). The rate at which children and young people cease to be looked after has fallen to a rate of 15 per 10,000 in the past six months (compared to a rate of 21 per 10,000 in the year ended 31 March 2018 and 24 per 10000 in the previous year). This means that whilst the rate at which children are becoming looked after in Devon has fallen, the

rate at which children cease to remain looked after has fallen more sharply resulting in an overall rise in the number of children in care and a change to the length of time children spend in care.

- 2.18 There are 45 more children and young people who have been in care for four years or more than there were at the same time last year. This group of children were accommodated prior to Spring 2015. We are undertaking further analysis of this group to model the impact on numbers over time (including how many will reach their 18th birthday during the year and cease to be looked after but require support through leaving care services).
- 2.19 At 20 May 2019 our rate of children in care per 10,000 children was 52. Whilst the rate has increased by one in recent months it remains lower than that of statistical neighbours (at 57/10,000) and the most recently published England average rates (64/10,000). The most recently published average rate for our custom comparator group of local authorities is 41/10,000).
- 2.20 21 (3%) of our current cohort of children in care are unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.
- 2.21 76% of our children in care are placed in foster placements (compared to the last reported figure of 71%). 50% of our children in care are placed in our own provision (the rate amongst our comparator group of good and outstanding local authorities is 63% in own provision). The service continues to experience challenges regarding the availability and choice of placements available.
- 2.22 22% of our children in care are placed outside Devon which whilst a higher proportion than we would like, is a slowly improving statistic and is a lower rate than the England average, the Statistical Neighbour average, and of the custom comparator group of good and outstanding local authorities.
- 2.23 We do not yet know the year-end figures for placement stability with the overall data analysis for the complete year having been significantly impacted by technical issues experienced by the DfE (see para. 1.1). For the year ended March 2018, 88% of our Looked After Children had experienced either one or at most two placements within the previous 12 months but 12% of our cohort had experienced 3 or more moves in the previous 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%. The rate for our custom comparator group was also 11%. We are optimistic that when the data is finally validated that we shall have slightly improved on last years' position.
- 2.24 Long-term placement stability. For the same reasons indicated in para. 2.22, we do not yet have the full year data for long term placement stability. For the year ended 31 March 2019, 70% of our current children in care who had been looked after for 2 ½ years or more had been in the same placement for more than 2 years. This compared to an England average rate of 70% and Statistical neighbour rate of 72%. The average rate among the custom comparator group was 71%.
- 2.25 Having now moved to Eclipse, the ability to report short-term and long-term placement stability throughout the year is possible and is one of several new reports currently in development.
- 2.26 Of 471 young people supported as care leavers we are in touch with 85% of the 17-18yr olds (*Statistical neighbours – 87%, England average - 92%, and custom comparator group – 94%*) and 95% of the 19-21yr olds (*Statistical neighbours – 89%, England average – 88%, and custom comparator group – 84%*). This represents an improving position and is we believe an under-report for the 17-18yr old cohort as practitioners get used to recording differently in Eclipse.

- 2.27 47% of the 17- 18yr olds (*statistical neighbours – 60%, England average – 62%, and custom comparator group – 70%*) and 43% of the 19-21yr olds (*statistical and England average rates – 50%, custom comparator group – 57%*) are known to be in education, employment or training (EET). Compared to the data held by the Virtual School, this appears to be an under-report (the Virtual School data acknowledged to be the more accurate and up-to-date with their established links to schools and to Careers South West). We are working with Virtual School colleagues to ensure that the social care records reflect the EET position with the same level of accuracy.
- 2.28 75% of 17-18yr olds (*Statistical neighbours – 82% and England average 88%*) and 83% of 19-21yr olds (*Statistical neighbours and England average – 84%*) are known to be in suitable accommodation. This again is an improving statistic but indicates that there is more to do.

Child Protection (CP) plans

- 2.29 As at 20 May 2019, 542 children were the subject of a child protection plan.
- 2.30 We have seen a small rise in the number of children the subject of a CP plan recently. The current rate of Child Protection Plans per 10,000 of the population is 37, compared to 33 at 31 March 2018. The rate tends to fluctuate during any given year and is closely monitored and remains below the average rate per 10,000 children among Statistical neighbours (40) and the overall England average (45). The average rate among the custom comparator group at 31 March 2018 was 29.
- 2.31 In most cases, the duration of the open CP plan is less than 12 months (84%). 14% of open CP plans have been open for between one and two years and 2% have been open for between two and two-and-a-half years.

Service Priorities

- 2.32 In the late Spring 2018 the service adopted three service priorities that we strongly believe, as improvements are made and the impact 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.
- 2.33 Following their Focused Visit in May 2019 Ofsted fed back to us these were appropriate priorities and that whilst they could see progress has been made, there remained 'weaknesses in all three of these areas...' and recommended that we pay attention to these.
- 2.34 Having considered the Ofsted feedback we have added a fourth practice priority area, being Visits (timeliness and purpose).
- 2.35 During the period up until our next Ofsted inspection we will monitor progress against each of these four priority areas in terms of performance and management information and through more stringent quality assurance measures.

Accelerated Improvement Period

- 2.36 A period of accelerated improvement activity across the service commenced shortly after the Ofsted Focused Visit and will continue until we receive our ILACS inspection. The primary focus will be to:

- Continue the efforts to ensure that all practitioners have manageable caseloads;
- to close any cases that should no longer be open to children's social care services, and where there is a need for support by Early Help services ensure that the move between services is completed with minimal delay;
- to intensify the activity related to our four service priorities;
- to monitor, through a monthly Performance Board, progress against the four service priorities, the Ofsted recommendations, and the wider service improvement plan.

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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