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Time: 2.00 pm

Venue: Shrewsbury/Oswestry Room, Shirehall, Abbey Foregate, Shrewsbury, Shropshire, SY2 6ND

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PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

TO FOLLOW REPORT (S)

6 Children's Social Care & Safeguarding Performance (Pages 1 - 20)

To explore in detail four key areas of performance highlighted from the Quarter 4 report 2021/22, to follow.

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| <u>Committee and Date</u> |
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| Performance Management Scrutiny Committee |
| 13 July 2022 |

| <u>Item</u> |
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| <u>Public</u> |

CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE & SAFEGUARDING – A DETAILED EXPLORATION OF FOUR KEY AREAS OF PERFORMANCE HIGHLIGHTED FROM THE QUARTER 4 REPORT 2021/22

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1. Synopsis

Following presentation of Children's Social Care performance data at Cabinet, we were asked to bring four specific aspects of that data to Performance Management Scrutiny for a more in-depth view of the data.

2. Executive Summary

2.1 Following Cabinet on 8th June 2022 Children's Social Care were asked to attend the Performance Management Scrutiny meeting in order to explore in further detail four areas of data:

- Increase in numbers of Looked After Children – why do we have this?
- Assessments - timeliness of completion.
- Children on a Child Protection Plan 2+ years.
- Care Leavers In & Not In Education, Employment or Training.

2.2 This report sets out the detail behind each of those data sets, defines any issues and seeks to give Members assurance that performance is scrutinised, understood and what needs to be done to improve is identified and being progressed.

2.3 The report commences with a section on data and quality assurance, to enable an understanding of the performance and quality assurance framework used within Children's Social Care & Safeguarding.

2.4 Members of Performance Management Scrutiny will be aware that Children's Social Care & Safeguarding is inspected and regulated by OFSTED. Our most recent inspection took place in February 2022 and the

report, published in March, graded the service as overall 'Good' and stated that: -

"Leaders in Shropshire know themselves well. They are making good use of data and management information and learning from quality assurance to inform service planning and developments within the local authority and across the partnership." (Ofsted, March 2022).

2.5 Six Inspectors worked with us over 2 weeks and interrogated a wide range of data and audit work. Including meeting with practitioners and discussing with them their learning from audit and impact on their learning and development.

3.0 Data and Quality Assurance

3.1 Shropshire Children's Services were recognised as providing services to children, young people and their families that are overall 'Good' in November 2017 and March 2022. This grading was impacted by their recognition of a robust Quality Assurance Framework implemented across Children's Services by Senior Leaders:

3.2 There is a clear understanding across the service of the value and impact of robust data interrogation and quality assurance, this underpins a culture of learning, as described by our social work workforce during the inspection. The Quality Assurance Framework is robust, well embedded and we can evidence impact on practice through follow up auditing and changes in practice.

3.3 There is a wide-ranging suite of data available to leaders in the service, including live daily data, weekly snapshot data, monthly and quarterly reports; these include regional and statistical neighbour benchmarking and trajectory comparisons. In addition, we have audit analysis reports quarterly and published learning briefings from those analysis reports. A range of audit tools are used: child journey audits, dip sample audits, group audits, reflective learning circles; social workers are wherever possible included in the audit of their work.

Learning from data and audit is used to interrogate specific issues to ascertain assurance or learning and changes that need to be made.

3.4 An example of this has been the regular scrutiny of Looked After Children numbers through the breakdown and review of cohorts and regular audits of the latest 50 children to come into care. Thresholds for decision making have continuously been tested and reviewed, as recognised by Ofsted:

"Quality assurance arrangements are strong, with a comprehensive approach to learning from audit. There is effective learning from thematic audits. Good communication and training with workers to share learning

is helping to improve practice, for example, in testing threshold decision-making in section 47 inquiries.” (Ofsted, March 2022).

Despite this assurance on threshold, the numbers of children subject to a child protection has continued to be low - 222 on the 27/06/2022. Children Looked After has continued to increase.

There will be an ongoing focus on using data and audit to understand performance and provide assurance, there will be continued utilisation of auditing and learning reviews to share key messages with partners, that providing the right help at the right time can prevent the accommodation of children.

4.0 Timeliness of Social Work Assessments

4.1 A Social Work Assessment is the statutory assessment of a child who is determined in statute (Children Act 1989) to meet the definition of either a child in need or children suffering or likely to suffer significant harm. The assessment is the first step in the social work process and based on this assessment a plan will be devised to assist the family to overcome challenges and issues, addressing any potential risks to children. The national timescale for completion of a Social Work Assessment is 45 days and this is a key performance indicator, collated nationally and regionally.

4.2 Whilst assessments are largely undertaken by the Assessment Teams (following the referral into children social care), they are also completed across other parts of the service, albeit fewer in volume.

4.3 Performance of the service in relation to the timely completion of assessments has until the pandemic been very strong, benchmarking as one of the highest performers regionally. Performance across the service has directly been impacted on by Covid, especially staff having Covid and needing to self-isolate and recover from being unwell.

4.4 Overall, performance around timeliness has steadily declined since the onset of the pandemic in 2020.

TOTAL ASSESSMENT COHORT:

| Timescale | 2020 /21 | % | 2021 /22 | % | 2022 /23 to date: | % |
|------------------|------------|-----|------------|-----|-------------------|-----|
| In Timescale | 712 | 82% | 630 | 72% | 62 | 71% |
| Out of Timescale | 154 | 18% | 241 | 28% | 25 | 29% |
| Total | 866 | | 871 | | 87 | |

4.5 As the data shows in Appendix 1 (the breakdown of assessment timeliness by Team / Service Area), whilst social work assessments have been completed across all areas of children's services it is, in the main, a particular performance issue affecting the Assessment Teams and Disabled Children's Team:

Assessment Teams 2020/2021 **13.45%** out of timescale
Assessment Teams 2021/2022 **24.35%** out of timescale

Disabled Children Team (DCT) 2020/2021 **62.64%** out of timescale
Disabled Children Team (DCT) 2021/2022 **78.98%** out of timescale

4.6 Impacting factors:

- Increased demands at the front door (Compass) (and DCT – 78% increase of new assessments in 2021 compared to 2020 and 1 in 5 allocations across the social work teams are open in DCT)
- The periods of lockdown when most other agencies were not doing face to face visiting and support services were either closed or had reduced operating models; this led to difficulties in completing assessments as there were gaps in information from agencies working with families.
- Increased complexity of need.
- Reduced capacity – across the system; especially in DCT with short- and long-term sickness, long term vacancies and challenges in recruiting staff.
- Staff absence directly linked to Covid 19 infections and recovery time. In Q4 of 2021/2022, we had a whole assessment Team out for just over a week with Covid – the impact is an accumulation of assessments that need completing balanced with the need to respond to continued incoming work to ensure the immediate safety of children.

4.7 What have we done (Assessment Teams):

- Continued daily oversight of assessments and clear work plans with social workers to determine priorities of completion.
- Milestone plans agreed with Team Managers and social workers to systematically complete outstanding assessments.
- Increased management oversight at the front door (Compass) to ensure improved scrutiny and quality assurance of contacts and referrals.

4.8 What are we doing (Assessment Teams):

- Workshops are planned across Assessment Teams to reinforce staff learning and understanding around proportionate assessments so that these can be completed in reduced timescales, meeting KPIs as well as ensuring better outcomes for children.
- Duty rota systems in place enabling assessment workers to have a week on duty for new allocations and a week off duty to complete visits and write up assessments.

- Compass Early Help Hub is being implemented (September 2022) which will hopefully ensure children referred into Compass who do not require a social work response will have a timely offer of early help support where appropriate to reduce risk of further escalation of need.
- Targeted recruitment to fill outstanding vacancies within the team.

4.9 Progress:

As at 23.06.22 **7.3%** of open social work assessments within the Assessment Teams are overdue, this is demonstrating a significantly improving picture, in line with the plan in place to make progress.

4.10 What we are doing (Disabled Childrens Team)

- As above - Compass Early Help Hub being implemented (September 2022). This will have a focus on children with disabilities who may not necessarily need an ongoing response having a timely offer of early help support, where appropriate, to reduce risk of further escalation of need
- Social Work Assessment Tracker in place and weekly Social Work Assessment tracking meetings
- Pause on allocation of Social Work Assessments for DCT, unless safeguarding concerns identified, for a period of time (initially one month then review) - agreed at Directorate Management Team June 2022.
- Increased recruitment efforts to fill social work vacancies within DCT

5.0 Child Protection Plans over 2 years

5.1 An audit took place of children who were subject to a child protection plan for more than 18 months and this was a total of 7 children across 3 families. Of the children reviewed, 1 child had already become Looked After and their CP registration was in the process of being removed and 2 children in one family's attendance had been impacted by COVID and loss, and were now in the Public Law Outline process (pre-court proceedings) - this process has been successful in supporting change for the children and they are likely to be stepped down at the next review.

5.2 For the remaining 4 children in 1 family, ongoing risk has reduced and they are likely to be stepped down at the next review, for this family, resources were slow to be put in place and this may have been impacted by COVID. We regularly monitor and audit this cohort of children through Child Protection Panels, the impact of which is that we have low numbers who are on a plan for longer than 18 months.

5.3 A recent audit of 7 children who were subject to child protection plans for 18 months or more showed the impact of COVID on planning for children, in delaying services to children. An audit of children subject to

repeat CP plans, showed that these families often were not engaged with services when stepped down from a plan .

5.4 However auditing of the most 50 recently Looked after Children has shown that the majority have not been on a child protection plan prior to their accommodation, or known to early help services.

5.5 In summary the number of children being subject to a Child Protection Plan for 2 years or more in Q4 2021/22 is not a number of concern and there is clear rationale and plans in place for each of the families.

5.6 What is an issue is the number of families of children becoming looked after that do not have the opportunity of the support of a child protection plan before coming into care. It is essential that there is clear understanding of why this is happening. The work to explore the children becoming looked after is detailed below.

6.0 Children Looked After

6.1 The Children Act 1989 places a duty on local authorities to provide services to try to keep families together and reduce the intrusion in family life. Children should remain living with family where it is possible to safely and with support if needed.

6.2 However, for a small number of children the local authority also has a duty to provide care and accommodation if a child needs safeguarding or is remanded to the care of the local authority, or where their ordinary caregiver is prevented or unable to care for them and meet their needs within their family. Such children become 'looked after' by the local authority.

6.3 Children are 'looked after' by the local authority when:

- Immediate action is taken to safeguard a child by placing the child in the care of the local authority- Emergency Protection Order
- The Council shares parental responsibility through a Care Order or interim Care Order granted by the Family Courts
- The Youth Court remands a young person to the care of the local authority
- At parental request when they are unable to care for them and there is no other option – Section 20 Voluntary Accommodation.
- When a child is 'abandoned'
- If a 16- or 17-year-old child is homeless and requests to be looked after
- An unaccompanied asylum-seeking young person is under 18 years of age.

6.4 Our aim is always to support parents to resume care of their child when possible, or to seek family members with whom a child can live to

enable them to stay within their family. Mostly this is not within any legal intervention.

On occasions children will remain or return to a parent, with the local authority continuing to share parental responsibility for a time to ensure their safe care. They may also live with family or friends (kinship care) with them being approved as a 'connected carer' or under Special Guardianship.

This is not possible for some children who may be at risk of harm if returned to the care of their family, or who have special needs requiring specialist care, or where they have been rejected by their family.

The options for this group of children can be living with foster carers (non-kinship), residential home, or supported living for older young people moving to adulthood.

A small number of younger children are adopted by an alternative permanent family.

6.5 The number of children looked after has risen in Shropshire since the onset of the Covid pandemic:

- 31 March 2020 there were 399 children looked after.
- 31 March 2021 there were 504 children looked after.
- 31 March 2022 there were 609 children looked after

As at 28th June 2022 there are 622 children looked after.

6.6 A great deal of work is undertaken to understand this increase in numbers. Audits of thresholds, decision making, quality assurance of Legal Planning discussions, audits of the last 50 children to become looked after.

6.7 The number starting to be looked after has increased faster than the number ceasing to be looked after, even though the number ceasing has risen faster than in previous years before 2020:

- 2020-21-total starting 213; total ceasing 94
- 2021-22- total starting 241; total ceasing 130

6.8 In the last 6 months (Jan-June 2022):

- 108 children started to be looked after (17 were unaccompanied asylum-seeking children)
- 55 children ceased to be looked after. This is evidence that plans to exit children and young people are increasing and if this progress continues will start to have an impact on the overall numbers.

6.9 There are 3 key areas where there has been a growth in the number of children looked after since March 2020:

6.9.1 Growth in Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASCs)

Under the National Transfer Scheme (NTS) Shropshire has accepted unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) 'from port' who have landed in Kent or Portsmouth. The NTS is a Government mandated scheme where local authorities are allocated a number of UASCs from port to share the number across all local authorities. Shropshire currently has 37 UAS young people- an increase from 8 in 2020. This has significantly contributed to our increase in looked after children numbers.

At the end of June we reached the threshold of 0.07% of our looked after population being UAS young people so we will be taken off the national rota until our numbers dip below this figure again as the young people reach 18 and become care leavers (forecast for October 22).

A Business Case has been made and agreed to utilise the dedicated budget for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children to form a specialist team to manage the increase in work in this highly skilled area of work.

6.9.2 Growth in number of children looked after due to risk of significant harm

Breakdown of the legal basis for the current cohort of children being looked after:

- 154 Interim Care Order (LA shares parental responsibility until court determines final outcome)
- 358 Full Care Order (LA shares parental responsibility as ordered by the court until the child is 18 or other legal option is applied for)
- 23 Placement Order (allowing the LA to place a child for adoption)
- 3 Police Powers of protection- immediate safe place offered by the LA-72 hours
- 84 Voluntary accommodation (as agreed with a parent or child aged 16 or 17). 37 of these children are unaccompanied asylum-seekers.

The number of children subject to care proceedings has increased through 2020/21 and it can be seen that there was a peak in children subject to care proceedings in March 2021. This was when court delays were impacting most, coupled with the 'post-lockdown' impact on families coming to the attention of more partner agencies and family members again.

Nationally there has been a rise in the number of babies and children under 2 who have suffered significant non-accidental injuries and this is reflected in Shropshire, contributing to the rise in care proceedings.

These care proceedings take longer as medical information has to be robust to be assured the injury is non-accidental and a 'Finding of Fact' can be up to 18 months after the injury came to light, especially as it is

usually a contested matter. We have a small number of these situations in progress.

Number of children in care proceedings:

| Feb 2020 | October 2020 | March 2021 | October 2021 | January 2022 |
|---------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| 47 (69 children) | 79 (128 children) | 116 (211 children) | 95 (190 children) | 93 (178 children) |

A Business Case was made in June 2021 to establish an additional Project Court Team. This team is for a time-limited specific purpose to support capacity across the system to progress the care proceedings that arose during 2020-21.

Although the number has started to reduce in 2021/22 it is not yet at the pre-Covid pandemic level.

By the end of May 2022 there were 84 care proceedings (101 children) in progress. 49 are projected to conclude by the end September 2022.

In addition, as identified in the recent Ofsted report, an increased focus on pre-court work (PLO – Public Law Outline) is part of the range of measures which will assist in working to reduce the number of children becoming looked after.

6.9.3 Growth in number of children looked after living with a relative or friend (Connected carers)

Since 2020 the number of children looked after with a connected carer has risen from 91 households (119 children) in March 2020 to 137 households (193 children) in March 2022

Breakdown by type of care:

- There are 154 children within care proceedings whose plan is not yet determined and where a return home or to a relative or friend remains an option. 19 of those children have remained living with a parent and 37 are living with a relative or friend under 'temporary approval' as a connected carer.
- 11 children are living with foster carers who are willing to adopt the child should the court determine this is their plan (foster to adopt).
- There are 61 children remaining or having returned to live with a parent-19 under an interim Care Order and 42 under a full Care Order.
- There are 126 children placed with a relative or family friend (connected carer) where this is yet to be confirmed as a permanent arrangement and 63 children placed with a connected carer on a long-term basis. This equates to 137 connected carer households.

- There are 60 children living with a foster carer long-term and 168 children living with a foster carer where their plan is yet to be determined – 138 are with independent fostering agencies (IFAs) and 90 with Shropshire Council approved foster carers.
- There are 29 children currently living with their adoptive family – 18 are awaiting an Adoption Order to be granted. These children only exit care once the final adoption order is made.
- 59 children live in residential homes and 7 live in residential schools- 10 within our own Shropshire homes. Some of those children have specific complex needs related to a disability or trauma and need a high level of support. 11 children have a plan to 'step down' to foster care or return home.
- 49 young people aged 16 or 17 live in supported or semi-independent accommodation that is aimed to support them towards adulthood – of these 34 are asylum-seeking young people.

A Business Case has been made and agreed for a dedicated Kinship Team to support all children living with a connected carer where they are looked after or have a Special Guardian. These posts have been recruited to and the team is in progress to be developed – the purpose will be to ensure a targeted and timely focus on progressing plans for kinship care to Special Guardianship. This targeted resource is required as this is the largest area of growth to final placements for permanent homes for children. It is also one of the best outcomes for children in the long term.

6.10 We have focussed on 3 key areas to reduce the number of children looked after:

6.10.1 Restorative practice with families to enable them to care safely so children can remain at home without legal intervention.

We are part of a regional review of 'pre-proceedings' where we work with families where the threshold for care proceedings is met but there is the opportunity to 'turn around' and effect change. This is in the early stages and the impact is being tracked. (as above referred to as PLO)

6.10.2 Discharge of Care Orders where children have been placed with a parent under a Care Order for 12 months+

This cohort of children is tracked on a monthly basis and we have piloted having a dedicated social worker for these families. This has been effective.

Currently there are 9 children in this cohort where this is the right plan for them. 6 applications are currently with our legal services and 3 have hearing dates.

6.10.3 Discharge of Care Orders where children have been placed with their connected carers for 12 months+

This cohort of children is tracked on a monthly basis and we have very recently appointed a dedicated social worker for these families, which is proving to be effective. It is early days, but it is anticipated that this role will be able to expedite the discharge application work that needs to be completed.

Currently there are 38 children who have lived with their connected carers for 12 months+ where we are supporting them to actively pursue Special Guardianship. 8 applications are currently with our legal services and before the courts, 7 with hearing dates.

6.11 Our audit and analysis:

6.11.1 Challenges

- There has been an increase of 223 children looked after from the end of March 2020 to the present. The Covid pandemic was a large factor. However, these factors seem to have had greater impact in Shropshire:
 - Statutory partner agencies and preventative and community-based resources were reduced or did not operate, especially face to face.
 - Families found it difficult to support each other, especially as Shropshire is a rural county, if at a distance and at the start of the 'lockdown' in March 2020 before 'support bubbles' were introduced.
 - At the start of the 'lock down' schools were only open for children already identified as 'vulnerable'.
 - There was a larger than usual proportion of children who had not previously been open to social care, or referred at a late stage, who became looked after following police or social care emergency intervention following physical assault or neglect by their parents.
 - Deterioration in the mental health of a parent or care giver, and/or increased alcohol or drug misuse and children being in households where there was a high level of domestic abuse were the most common factors.
 - An increase in families who have not accessed any previous universal or targeted early help to support them with their issues.
- Our own audits and the Ofsted findings from the ILACS inspection in February 2022 endorsed the view of Children's Social Care and the courts that there is no child who became looked after who should not have been.
- However, our own self-evaluation, shared with Ofsted also showed we could be more proactive with those families who could have benefitted from earlier help before being referred to social care or where families are already known to social care to prevent the need

for legal intervention. Stepping Stones is an element of this proactive approach (see below)

- The high number of children being brought to social care attention suffering serious neglect or injury led to a rapid increase in care proceedings in 2021/22. Regionally there are delays within our court system in ending care proceedings once started, and there is a regional response to tackle this. Shropshire is actively engaged in the regional improvement plans which are very recently starting to take effect. The Local Family Justice Board is proactive in working with partners in the court system to address court delays.
- Sufficiency of foster and residential homes for children remains a challenge and an increased number of children live in homes provided by external providers.

6.11.2 Strengths

- When looking at permanence options for children looked after we are proactive in supporting parents and family and friends to care for their own children. Offering creative long-term support when needed.
- We track all children to ensure their permanence options are all explored at the earliest opportunity and any drift or delay is addressed.
- We have focussed on enabling more children to remain with their family who no longer need the local authority intrusion in their lives through statutory order and the number ceasing to be looked after due to discharge of Care Orders has been steadily increasing.
- We proactively seek prospective adopters willing to care for a child whilst the court determines their plan with a view to adoption to reduce the disruption for a child (foster to adopt).

6.12 A key area of development for us has been Stepping Stones – in working with families to prevent children becoming looked after and to enable some of those who are in care to return home if it is safe to do so.

6.12.1 Stepping Stones

The Stepping Stones Business Case was approved by Council in 2019. The project is based on the premise that children achieve better outcomes living in a home environment wherever possible. The aim of the project is to work with children on the edge of care, to in the first instance, avoid them becoming looked after and if there is no alternative within the extensive family then within a foster home. Residential care is not considered as an optimal solution for any child or young person.

Stepping Stones is different in that as well as working with children we work with adults in their own right (separate to their children) to

understand their own lived experience and trauma, working through any issues and providing tools and strategies that enable them to effectively parent their own children. It is a whole family approach.

The project is split into two phases: phase 1 launched on 12th July 2021 with the outreach team having been recruited and trained in a range of therapeutic approaches to working with children and adults.

Project Targets

The Three-year Project targets set out in the invest to save business case are shown in the table below:

| Number of Placements | Year 1 2021- 22 | Year 2 2022- 23 | Year 3 2023- 24 | Total |
|--|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------|
| Potential average savings placement total avoidance | 3 (half year effect) | 5 | 7 | 15 |
| Avoidance target (£) | £340,300 | £1,134,400 | £1,588,200 | |
| Potential average savings step down from residential to internal foster care | 3 (half year effect) | 5 | 7 | 15 |
| Savings target (£) | 358,100 | £1,193.600 | £1,671,000 | |
| Total Revenue Savings Targets | £698,400 | £2,328.000 | £3,259,200 | £6,285.600 |

Year 1 targets were significantly exceeded with 26 placements avoided and 6 step downs from residential to family or foster home a saving to the council of £1.9613 mil.

Phase 2 will launch in July 2022 and will focus on the development of the residential and fostering hub with the aim to offer young people a short-term home (respite or time out), whilst therapeutic and outreach work is undertaken with them and their carers with a view to a speedy return home or move to a foster family.

Next Steps:

We are seeking to upscale Stepping Stones threefold as an invest to save, increasing capacity builds on the wrap around support to children and their families to keep them at home and if they cannot remain at home or within their extended family to a foster home.

6.12.2 Education, Employment and Training for care leavers (EET/NEET)

Local authorities track all children who have reached statutory school leaving age in respect of whether they are in Education, Employment or Training (EET). Young people who are not in EET are classed as Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET).

Our 16-18 cohort remains reported around the 85% range which is in line with the national average. Between 17 and 18 there can be a lot of change as young people move between education, training and employment options. It is harder to capture this data on our systems in real time and it can show as 'not known' at any one time. However, this is tracked by our 16+ Virtual School Advisor who ensures there is an individual plan with all children looked after up to the age of 18.

We have a focus on tracking our children looked after and those who have ceased to be looked after but are supported as care leavers from age 18 up to the age of 25. We report their EET/NEET status up to the age of 21 to central Government and comparator data is published annually.

Nationally care leavers fare worse than the general population of 16–25-year-olds. Whereas between 10-14% of the national population are NEET at any one time, this rises nationally to an average of 40% for care leavers.

Nationally about one quarter of all young people who are in the NEET category are unable to work due to sickness, level of disability or through being in custody.

In Shropshire our number of care leavers who are EET/NEET have varied over recent years. We remain within the national average but aspire to do better for our children looked after and care leavers.

In 2021 there was an improvement owing to the number of young people who were able to access the government's 'Kickstart' scheme. This has fallen back to previous levels since the Kickstart scheme ended earlier this year. EET/NEET figures are collated in a 'snapshot' timeframe over a specific period.

- 2019/20 care leavers age 19-21 47% EET/53% NEET
- 2020/21-care leavers age 19-21 65% EET/35% NEET
- 2021/22-care leavers age 19-21 55% EET/45% NEET

Whilst this is the age range 'counted' by the DfE if 18 year old care leavers were included then currently 68% of care leavers are in employment, education or training.

We currently have 119 care leavers age 19-21

55% (65) young people are in our EET category:

- 3% (4) in higher education-3 are being awarded their degree this year.
- 17% (20) in another form of education
- 34% (41) in training or employment

37% (44) young people are in our NEET category:

- 17% (20) due to illness or disability
- 3% (4) due to pregnancy
- 17% (20) are being supported by a job coach from the DwP and their personal advisor to find suitable training or employment. We hold regular NEET panels to discuss options with our 16+ Virtual School Advisor and partners from the DwP, Learning and Skills and HR.

8% (10) of our care leavers as they are either 'missing' (1 former UASC who went missing when still looked after but would be 20 now) or no longer 'in touch' (by choice).

7.0 Recommendations

7.1 Performance Management Scrutiny Members are asked to consider if they have been assured about the oversight and actions being taken to address the 4 areas of performance identified.

7.2 Performance Management Members to consider if there is further information or actions they wish to follow up on.

REPORT

8. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

(NB This will include the following: Impact on Children and Vulnerable Adults, Risk Management, Human Rights, Equalities, Community and other Consultation)

8.1 There is consistent risk assessment of the impact of being a looked after child on children and an acknowledgement that where it is safe to do so children are best cared for by parents or extended family. The role of the Independent Reviewing Officer is to keep this aspect under review and always seek the best possible outcome for children and young people.

8.2 Every decision made about a child, especially those before the court and those placed for adoption, has to explore Human Rights issues for that child and that family. In particular the right to family life and the right to a fair trial.

8.3 The impact of the pandemic on vulnerable children and families, and the impact on services, family stress and adult mental health is a factor that is taken into account in assessments and plans for children and young people.

9.0 Financial Implications

9.1 The long-term position financially of a continued increased trajectory of children becoming looked after is not a financially sustainable position for the council. Whilst it is clear that there is a legal duty to safeguard children, and this will always be enacted on, it is essential that the partnership works together to ensure that a robust prevention and early help framework is in place to enable support to families is available at the earliest opportunity. Reducing the number of high-cost residential placements is a key area of focus for the service, along with partners who also have a role to play in the long-term planning for children and young people.

9.2 This is fully understood by the Executive Director, Assistant Director, Service Managers and Finance Business Partners and work is ongoing to ensure that all possible measures are in place to monitor placement spend and reduce it where appropriate.

9.3 In the short to medium term, there will be several years where we will have more children looked after as they are already cared for and their plans for permanence decided. Work to support children to return home and exit care in the best way for them requires consistent focus and appropriate resourcing to ensure it is effective and long term stability is achieved. In the longer term the impact of Stepping Stones, especially if it is scaled up will mean there is a creative, flexible, cost effective resource

10.0 Background

10.1 Example of a learning from audit staff briefing (see Appendix 2).

10.2 OFSTED report March 2022 (link below).

10.3 Quarter 4 Performance report presented to Cabinet in June (link below).

11.0 Additional Information

11.1 None at this time

List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)

Example of a learning from audit staff briefing (Appendix 2)

Ofsted Inspection of Shropshire local authority children's services (published February 2022)

[50180006 \(ofsted.gov.uk\)](https://www.ofsted.gov.uk/inspections/50180006)

Quarter 4 Performance report presented to Cabinet 8.6.22.

[Date \(shropshire.gov.uk\)](https://www.shropshire.gov.uk)

Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder)

Cllr Kirstie Hurst-Knight

Local Member

All Members

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Timeliness of Social Work Assessments (Team by Team Breakdown)

Appendix 2 - Example of a learning from audit staff briefing

APPENDIX 1

TIMELINESS OF SOCIAL WORK ASSESSMENTS (TEAM BY TEAM BREAKDOWN)

| Completed by Team | 2020/21 | | 2021/22 | | 2022/23 | |
|-----------------------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|-----------|-----------|
| | In | Out | In | Out | In | Out |
| Assessment Team North | 218 | 46 | 183 | 55 | 11 | 2 |
| Assessment Team South | 284 | 32 | 165 | 57 | 28 | 15 |
| Case Management Team Central | 60 | 2 | | 1 | | |
| Case Management Team Central East | | | 25 | 4 | 2 | |
| Case Management Team Central West | | | 35 | | | |
| Case Management Team North East | 19 | 6 | 24 | 4 | 1 | |
| Case Management Team North West | 21 | 7 | 34 | | | |
| Case Management Team South | 26 | 3 | 41 | 1 | 2 | |
| CLA Permanency Team 1 | 4 | | 3 | | | |
| CLA Permanency Team 2 | | | 1 | | | |
| Compass Exploitation Team | 4 | | 7 | 4 | 1 | |
| Compass Team | | | 1 | | | |
| Court Team 1 | 17 | | 16 | 1 | 3 | |
| Court Team 2 | | | 13 | 1 | | |
| Disabled Children's Team | 34 | 57 | 29 | 109 | 3 | 7 |
| Initial Contact Team | 12 | | 9 | | | |
| Leaving Care Team | 12 | 1 | 43 | 4 | 11 | 1 |
| | | | | | | |
| Total | 711 | 154 | 630 | 241 | 62 | 25 |

APPENDIX 2 - Example of a learning from audit staff briefing

Quality Assurance-Key Messages Q4 21/22

As you are all aware, we had an Ofsted inspection during Q4. Feedback from the inspectors on Quality Assurance arrangements was strong and described our comprehensive approach to learning from audits and how our reporting focusses not only on compliance but also on what the findings indicate about the experience of the children, informing audit priorities and practice improvement.

Please see the below summary/key findings from the Q4. You can read the full report by clicking on the attached



Page 19

Inspectors heavily focussed on CJ Audits during the inspection. These will be considered as priority tasks going forward and you must schedule the time to ensure audits are fully completed. Again, this quarter saw several audits submitted with blank entries and no narrative, these will be copied to line managers for oversight. Audits submitted with sections left blank or omitting judgments will be returned to the auditor to ensure data analysis is of the best quality. Of the 122 CJ audits allocated 29 were completed for Q4 reporting resulting in a response rate of 24%, a reduction of 10% in comparison to last quarter. Staff were understandably preoccupied during the inspection causing a slight backlog of tasks, resulting in fewer audits being submitted for this period.

Inspectors developed a Key Line of Enquiry (KLOE) in respect of our Public Law Outline (PLO) identifying areas requiring improvements. These include decisions being made too late, letters before proceedings being of poor quality and PLO plans not consistently being reviewed or progressed. Letters before proceedings were considered overly complicated and unclear to parents what they need to do to ensure that their children remain in their care. A recent review of our PLO work found that most children presented at Legal Planning Meetings (LPM) were more likely to progress into care proceedings rather than preventing them from entering proceedings. A comprehensive action plan has been produced in response to these findings and the re-modelling of our procedures was launched on 6th June 2022. This new model is based on the Essex Children's services PLO model which is recognised as national good practice. Details of this will follow.

The wishes and feelings of younger children (0-2) and children unable to express themselves due to complex communications needs are often recorded as 'child too young or unable to verbalise'. PLEASE read the full report on how observations can really help identify the wishes and feelings of our children. 97% of assessments considered the reasons to be clearly set out. This is an excellent indication that we are collecting and analysing the necessary information about our children and families with the aim of understanding their situation and determining the correct course of action and intervention.

The role of practice supervisors is not only to have an oversight of children's circumstances/case files but to critically reflect on the social workers practice to ensure we continuously evaluate our intervention, impact and the benefit to the child. Some auditors interpret the 'challenge of practice' question in the tool under management oversight and supervision as a negative critique. This is not the intention and should be viewed as an opportunity to reflect and challenge ourselves, to maintain professional curiosity, creativity, and self-awareness to ensure the best possible outcome for both the child and their family. There has been notable improvements in the recording of MO&S with 90% judged as well recorded.

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