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CHILDREN'S SERVICES KEY PERFORMANCE DATA

Responsible Officer

email:
tanya.miles@shropshire.gov.uk

Tel: 01743 255811

1. Synopsis

Children's Social Care is a priority for Shropshire Council, and to monitor our performance a comprehensive suite of performance data used on a daily through to annual basis is assembled to track and monitor performance. This report shows performance up to quarter 2 2021/22

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 This report summarises the key performance indicators within Children's Social Care (CSC) at the end of quarter two 2021/22. CSC has a number of statutory key performance indicators which are collated nationally and this report focuses on these. The Local Government Association good practice guidance advises that Cabinet has regular oversight of CSC performance. This is the first time in recent years that CSC performance has been presented to Cabinet and regular updates will be part of the forward plan.
- 2.2 The Children and Young People's performance data set aims to evidence performance in line with statutory responsibilities, demonstrate the 'safety of the system' and identify key areas of declining or improving performance. It is important to note that the activity of Children's Social Care relates to statutory intervention under the Children Act 1989 relating to Children in Need of support and Children at risk of significant harm.
- 2.3 This report is one of a comprehensive suite of performance data that are used daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly and annually to track and monitor performance. It also forms part of the CSC Quality Assurance framework where we link performance data with audit activity to identify learning and areas of improvement required, as well as areas of good practice.

- 2.4 The performance report follows 'the journey of the child' through the system, taking the reader through the statutory points from the 'Front Door' to assessment, child protection, children looked after and Care Leavers.
- 2.5 For some indicators, where available the benchmarking data nationally and across Statistical Neighbours is included. This benchmarking data is 2019/2020, updated benchmarking data is due to be published, therefore our performance variations re the impact of covid 19 are included but the benchmarking data does not include any of those variations.
- 2.6 The key messages from this performance report are detailed as well as any implications and where appropriate what is being done to address any variations. 2.7 Points 2.7 through to 2.12 highlight the main performance areas to highlight to cabinet; further narrative and next steps is provided in the main body of the report. Page numbers referenced refer to the performance dashboard pages (Appendix 1).
- 2.8 A contact is where there is an enquiry, information shared or requested, or a concern is reported from any partner agency, a family or a member of the public. Continuing high levels of contacts and referrals, indicating sustained high demand for social care services continues. (Page 2 of Appendix A)
- 2.9 A referral is where information shared relates to a concern about a child's welfare and further information or action is required. Referrals from schools now back to pre-covid levels following reductions during the pandemic.
- 2.10 Re-referrals into CSC remain low, suggesting that children requiring support are new to social care, or have not been supported in some time.
- 2.11 Social Work Assessment timeliness has decreased, this was anticipated and a result of high levels of Covid-related sickness in Q4 20/21. It is an improving trajectory.
- 2.12 There has been a decrease in children subject to child protection plans, in line with trends seen nationally.
- 2.13 The increase in children looked after supported by the Council has continued during Q2. This includes an increase in Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children in this quarter.

3. Recommendations

Members are asked to:

- 3.1. Note the issues raised in the report and consider the impact of sustained increased demand on both the Council and children and young people in the county.
- 3.2. Review the performance information and identify any areas that they would like to consider in greater detail or refer to the Performance Management Scrutiny Committee.

REPORT

4. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

- 4.1. Poor performance could have implications for vulnerable people (including children) who are supported by Council services and economic growth in Shropshire. In turn, there may be significant financial, legal and reputational risk to the Council, Schools (and Academies), and partners from across the public and voluntary and independent care sectors.
- 4.2. Effective monitoring and follow-up against key measures of success provides the opportunity to manage risks and ensure that Children and Young People and in Shropshire remain safe and achieve the desired outcomes.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1. This report does not have any direct financial implications but presents service and financial information to support decision making. Accountable officers and senior managers may use the information to inform actions or interventions for improving service performance and the prioritisation and use of resources.
- 5.2. The impact of delivering these performance indicators is an overspend of £2.5m at quarter 2.

6. Climate Change Appraisal

- 6.1. Whilst this report does not have any direct climate change or carbon management implications, vulnerable children and adults are most likely to be adversely affected by the environmental and health impacts of climate change. The delivery of CSC services contributes to the Council's corporate carbon footprint through staff

travel, the operation of social care buildings and through the carbon impact of commissioned services. Together with Adult Social Care Services, this represents around 25% of the Council's gross carbon footprint. It will be important in future to collect and report more detailed information about the carbon and climate change impacts of the delivery of CSC services to inform actions or interventions for improving service performance.

7. Report

- 7.1. Contacts to the 'front door' of children's social care are an important measure of demand. During 2020/21, 12,833 contacts were received by Children's Services during 2020/21. This was an increase on 2019/2020 and expected in response to Covid 19.

During 2021/22 to date, 6430 contacts have been received by Children's Services, suggesting similar levels of contacts are being made. However, in 20/21 around 800 contacts were updates on existing cases, the process for managing these has now changed and they are no longer included in this data. This suggests demand from contacts regarding new children has slightly increased this year.

Contacts data includes the rate of NFA – this number include the requests for information, signposting etc.

Benchmarking data for contacts is not collected as part of the annual statutory returns, due to the varied approaches LAs take to managing their social care front door, therefore comparator data is unavailable.

- 7.2. A referral to social care is the next step following a contact, where it is suspected that a child may need additional support or there is concern about harm. In 2020/21 there were 2029 referrals to CSC, which represents a 7.8% increase on the 1882 received during the previous year.

In 2021/22 to date, there have been 968 children referred to social care, which is 5.6% higher than the same period last year, when there were 917 referrals.

Latest available benchmarking data for 20/21 indicates that Shropshire's referral levels are below most of its statistical neighbour (SN) group. The average for the group being 396 referrals for every 10,000 U18 residents, where Shropshire's y/e 20/21 figure gives a rate of 336. Nationally the rate is 494.

Benchmarking for 20/21 indicates that referral rates have fallen across all comparator groups with England falling from 535 to 494, SN from 423 to 396 and West Midlands from 529 to 495. This suggests that the rising referrals in Shropshire are not being seen universally in other local authorities. We are of the view that families have found it difficult to cope through lockdowns and the impact has been significant. Many support services in Shropshire saw staff re-deployed especially in Health or services closed with limited face to face contact.

Most referrals (93.6%) go on to receive a social work assessment, with only 4.3% requiring no further action. Of those progressing to assessment, 55.4% require a Strategy Discussion to be held, which indicates the child may be at a potentially higher level of risk.

During 20/21, the main referral source was the police (28%), and this has been maintained during 21/22 to date; indicating that the police are the first point of identifying harm to a child, often when responding to another issue. Referrals from schools, which dropped during the pandemic, have now returned to expected levels. Referrals from Health colleagues remain low, and this is being discussed with Health partners as to why.

- 7.3. At the end of 20/21 the proportion of children being re-referred to social care within 12 months of a previous referral was 15%.

During 21/22 to date, re-referrals represented 13.1% of all referrals received, which is an increase against the Q1 position of 9.8%, though still lower than the 20/21 year-end position.

Shropshire has comparatively low levels of re-referrals, with the 20/21 SN average being 20% and the England average being 23%.

Low levels of re-referrals are interpreted as intervention having been effective in making changes in a family and those changes being sustained. In this instance low % is positive, if this key measure increases significantly at all it is a key indicator that can signpost changes in practice and is immediately investigated through audit. Dip sample audits are regularly undertaken, sometimes with partners, to understand which children and families are in the re-referral cohort and why.

- 7.4. On average during 2020/21, 316 social work assessments were completed each month, though this figure includes review assessments, as well as those following on from referral. During 2021/22 to date, there were 1976 assessments, or 329 per month on average, which is slightly higher than 20/21.

At Q2, 76.5% of assessments had been completed within the required 45 working days. This is a decrease against the 87.3% at

Q4 20/21. Shropshire is now performing slightly below both statistical neighbours (86%) and the England average (88%), based on their 20/21 year-end positions.

Some decrease was predicted, following on from the impact of increased Covid related sickness in Q4 and lockdown, and a focus on completing the out of date assessments caused by this. This measure is tracked weekly and monthly by Service Managers and close management oversight is maintained. We are clear this measure will demonstrate improvement in Q3. The measure covers all social work assessments completed in the service. We know that the completion rate of assessments in timescales in the assessment teams is higher and is consistently in the high 90's % range.

- 7.5. Page 4 and 5 - The rate of children subject to Child Protection Plans (CPPs) has decreased during 21/22 against year-end 20/21. At the end of March 2021 there were 281 children subject to a plan, which has decreased to 221 at the end of September 2021. This gives a rate per 10,000 0-17 years olds of 36.7.

Shropshire has a slightly lower rate than the 2020/21 national average (41.4) and is in line with statistical neighbours (36.6). Both nationally and within Shropshire's SN group, rates of child protection plans fell during 20/21.

- 7.6. Of the active CPPs at the reporting date, 41.6% have neglect listed as their primary category of abuse. 49.8% have emotional abuse, 3.6% sexual abuse and 5% physical abuse. This means that the use of neglect as a primary category of abuse, which has historically been higher in Shropshire than comparators, has fallen. We are currently investigating through audit what the reasons for this are.
- 7.7. Nationally, the categories of abuse are identified as: neglect 47%, emotional abuse 40%, 4% sexual abuse and 6% physical abuse. Some authorities also report against multiple categories, nationally this is reported at 2%.
- 7.8. Child protections plans that are open for over 2 years can be an indication of drift in casework. Benchmarking for this measure compares the proportion of ceasing CPPs that had been open for 2 years or longer at the point of closure.

At the end of Q2, 4.5% of CPPs ceasing had been open for two years or longer. This is lower than the year end 20/21 position of 6.3%, though remains above the SN average (3.7%) and the national average (3.7%) for 20/21. However, this is a cumulative measure, and the trend appears to be moving closer to the national average. It has been affected by large sibling groups being subject to a child protection plan.

- 7.9. A Child in Need (CiN) is one that has been assessed by social care to need a service. The rate of CiN in Shropshire decreased during Q2 21/22 to 307.1 children per 10,000 U18s.

Shropshire's rate is above its SN group (277), though has fallen below the England average (322).

- 7.10. Page 4 and 6 - At year end 2020/21, there were 504 looked after children in Shropshire.

This was an increase of 26% from the 399 children looked after at the end of 19/20.

During the year 21/22 to date, there has been a further increase in the number of children looked after to 571 at the end of Q2, representing a 13.3% increase against year-end 20/21.

Page 6 - During 21/22 to date, 133 children started to be looked after, this is 46% greater than the 91 children starting in the same period in 20/21. However, ceasing levels have also increased, with 66 children ceasing in 21/22 to date, 57% higher than the 42 who ceased during the same period last year. This measure is important to understand how many children become looked after but also how many children leave our care either by returning home, becoming 18 or having permanent plans with extended family that mean they don't remain a looked after child or are adopted.

In Q2 we have had an increased number of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children as we have been proactive in supporting the National Transfer Scheme, this contributes to the 23% of children becoming looked after being 15 +years.

The rate of children looked after has increased to 94.7 children per 10,000 U18s. This is higher than the 2019/20 SN average (60.4) and England average (67).

There are a range of reasons for the increase in children looked after, including large sibling groups in 2021 into 2022, increase in serious neglect, delays in court proceedings being completed and delays to exiting children's care plans being finalised, increase in Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Young People.

- 7.11. The age profile of Shropshire's current looked after children (at the end of Q2) is evenly distributed, with 51% of children under 10 and 49% over 10. This is contrasted with the age range of those children who became looked after during the year. Here, the age profile is skewed towards younger children, with the highest proportion (64%) aged between 0 and 9, with 41% age 0 to 4. This indicates that it is more often younger children who are becoming looked after.

The age profile of those children exiting care suggests that 50% are age 15+, with many of these being young people turning 18. This has decreased during Q2, suggesting a wider age range of children ceasing to be looked after, indicating a wider range of children having leaving care for other reasons than being 18 yrs old. Which is positive.

7.12. Fostering placements make up the highest proportion of looked after placements in Shropshire, with 72.3% of children placed with foster carers. 11.4% of children are placed in homes/hostels and 8.6% are placed with their parents. 0.7% of Shropshire's children looked after are placed for adoption. This supports good practice that evidences that children are best cared for and grow up in a family environment, if they cannot live with their own birth family. We have a higher-than-average proportion of children cared for by Connected Carers – i.e., members of their extended family who care for them as foster carers or are subject to a Special Guardianship Order. As a local authority we continue to support these families both practically and financially.

7.13. Most looked after children in Shropshire (87.3%) are subject to a court order, which are usually sought by a local authority in respect of children who they believe are suffering or are likely to suffer significant harm.

55.7% are subject to a full care order (meaning they have a plan to be in our care long term), 28.4% subject to an interim care order (their final plan is not yet determined), and 3% subject to a placement order (have a plan for Adoption agreed by the court).

12.8% are looked after under section 20 of the Children's Act 1989, which means that the parents have agreed for their child to live elsewhere for a period, either to provide time to make changes in their circumstances or to facilitate further investigation.

Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking children are also accommodated under this legal category.

7.14. The remainder of this report discusses performance relating to care leavers. Benchmarking for care leavers is a new development and focuses only on those young people whose 19th, 20th or 21st birthday occurs in the reporting period. For Q2, this means that all young people having a 19/20/21 birthday in April - September are included. This means each quarter the cohort of young people changes.

For care leavers in this cohort, there is a duty on the local authority to proactively keep in touch with care leavers. Shropshire Council is in touch with 90% of all care leavers in this cohort. This is slightly below the 19/20 national average (93%). Why we are not in touch with a young person is monitored and tracked by the Team Manager

and usually relates to the choice of the young person or they have been reported as missing.

7.15. 91% of the care leavers in the reporting cohort are living in suitable accommodation, which can include independent living, supported accommodation or living with parents. The 19/20 national average for this measure is 85%.

7.16. 50% of care leavers in the reporting cohort are in education, employment, or training. This is slightly below the 19/20 national average of 53%. This varies Quarter to Quarter and is often lower in quarter as some young people have yet to start/return to college.

8. Conclusions

8.1. Children's Social Care is under increasing pressure from rising demand at many points in the system.

8.2. Overall performance remains strong and where there have been variances this is understood, and actions been taken to address issues. This contributes to us ensuring we know ourselves well.

8.3. There is a proactive effort to work with Legal Services, the courts and families to progress the children's plans that were delayed in being finalised through Covid 19. Especially those that will be living with extended family through a Special Guardianship Order or are living back at home and are placed with their parents. This progress should see a reduction in the numbers of children looked after. The increase in Special Guardianship Orders is significant and is placing a demand pressure on the fostering team.

8.4. There has been an overall increase in work through the system as a result of Covid 19 response during March 2020 to date. It will take time to see this demand work through and for us to be able to understand what the new normal levels of work will look like longer term.

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

Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder)

Cllr Kirstie Hurst Knight

Local Member

All Members

Appendices

Appendix 1 Children and Young People's Services Performance Report Q2 2021-22