



<u>Committee and Date</u>
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<u>Item</u>
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CHILDREN'S SERVICES KEY PERFORMANCE DATA

**Responsible
Officer**

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1. Synopsis

As one of our key priorities, we track and monitor Children's Social Care performance via a comprehensive suite of data across a wide range of indicators. This report shows performance throughout 2021/22 providing information to Members and demonstrating the health of the system.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1. This report summarises the key performance indicators within Children's Social Care (CSC) at the end of quarter four 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 report is the 2nd of the bi-annual performance reports to Cabinet.
- 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, and subsequent legislation that relates to the statutory function.
- 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 (England) and across Statistical Neighbours is included. The latest benchmarking data is for the year 2020/2021. Benchmarking data is published annually in November. The next set of comparator data for 2021/22 is expected Nov 22. For reference, the Statistical Neighbours figure is the average of the 15 local authorities who are most statistically similar to Shropshire.
- 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. Reference 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).
- 2.7 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. Q4 shows Continued high levels of contacts and referrals, indicating sustained high demand for social care services continues. (Page 2 of Appendix A)
- 2.8 A referral is where information shared relates to a concern about a child's welfare, the threshold for intervention is met and further information or action is required. The main referral source is from the Police with numbers now increasing from schools following reductions during the pandemic.
- 2.9 Re-referrals into CSC remain low, suggesting that children requiring support are new to social care, or have not been supported in some time. Re-referral rates being low indicate effective intervention in the previous period of being open to Children's social care and is therefore an indicator of positive performance.
- 2.10 Social Work Assessment timeliness has decreased, this was anticipated and a result of high levels of Covid-related sickness in Q3 and Q4. Timeliness did improve in the latter stages of the year and remains an area of performance focus. Action plans are in place to address out of timescale assessments and are on track to be improved performance by end of May 2022.

- 2.11 There has been a decrease in children subject to child protection plans. We regularly audit the threshold for Child Protection plans, we know that numbers have been impacted directly by children becoming looked after, as they do not remain subject to a Child Protection Plan. We are also regularly audit the threshold for Sec 47 enquiries, which directly relate to the number of children subject to a child protection plan. We have seen a decrease in the number of large sibling groups that was impacting on our numbers in 2020/2021. In addition, we are working differently with young people at risk of Child Exploitation, using Contextual Safety Plans rather than the traditional Child Protection Plan, to manage the risks of exploitation – this is in line with national practice and relates to where parents are clearly a protective factor within the risk of harm to their children.
- 2.12 The increase in Children Looked After supported by the Council has continued to increase throughout the year. Rates are now higher than the latest available benchmarking data. There are multiple and combined factors for the increase in children looked after, including; large sibling groups, increase in neglect, increasing number of young children especially under 1's coming into care through injuries or significant harm, delays in court proceedings being completed, delays to exiting children's care plans and an increase in Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children which is mandatory requirement under the National Transfer Scheme.
- 2.13 In addition to the usual performance reporting, it should also be noted that the Children's Social Care & Safeguarding Service was subject to an inspection of its services in February 2022 by Ofsted. The overall rating of the inspection was Good. The report highlighted a number of strengths in the quality of social work practice and this provides us with confidence of the quality of our services. There were several recommendations for improvement especially in relation to the Public Law Outline (pre-court proceedings) for which there is an action plan in place to track progress, as well as areas for improvement in working with partners in particular the police and health colleagues. A development plan is in progress of being agreed and will be submitted to OFSTED and Cabinet at the beginning of July 2022. (Appendix 2 – Ofsted Report)

3. Recommendations

Cabinet 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

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

- 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. Performance and financial risk are addressed in the Corporate Risk register and clear mitigations defined, including the financial risks being mitigated by savings being made elsewhere.
- 4.2. Effective monitoring and follow-up against key measures of success provides the opportunity to manage risks and ensure that desirable outcomes are achieved.

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 a provisional "controllable" overspend on Children's Social Care and Safeguarding for 2021/22 of **£3.682m** for the financial year

2021/22. This is a provisional figure; final outturn will be reported to cabinet in due course.

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.
- 6.2. 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 12,818 contacts were received by Children's Services during 2021/22.

The number of contacts has remained similar to the 12,833 received during 2020/21

The average number of contacts received per month was 1,068

50% of contacts required no further action. 13.1% of contacts progressed to Social Care higher than the 11.8% in 2020/21. 12.5% were referred to another agency, 12.5% progressed to an Early Help Episode and 6.2% the provision of information and advice

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 In 2021/22, there were 1890 referrals (threshold for child in need / significant harm is met) to Children's Social Care decreased slightly against the previous year. Falling from 2029 in 2020/21, this represents a decrease of 6.8%.

The referral rate for 2021/22 is 313 per 10,000 children. This is lower than the latest available comparator data for 2020/21.

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.

Most referrals, 94.1% go on to receive a social work assessment, with only 3.6% requiring no further action. This indicates appropriate application of threshold. Of those progressing to assessment, 55% require a Strategy Discussion to be held, which indicates the child may be at a potentially higher level of risk.

76.4% of referrals are recorded with the category of Abuse or Neglect with Child's Disability being the second highest category (10.5%)

During 2021/22, the main referral source was the police (27.4%) which is the same rate as in 20/21. and this has been maintained during 21/22 to date. Data and audit activity have shown referrals from the health system to be low, work is underway to improve this measure with health colleagues across the system and we saw a significant increase in quarter 4.

- 7.3 At the end of 2021/22 the proportion of re-referrals within 12 months of a previous referral was 13.8%. This is lower than the re-referral rate of 15% for 2020/21

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

Re-referrals can be costly to local authorities, but more importantly, they can be stressful and harmful to the children themselves, as well as to their parents or guardians. Potentially, multiple referrals can be detrimental to children's development, as they may imply prolonged periods of unmet needs and recurrent episodes of abuse, neglect, maltreatment, etc. Furthermore, referred children often live in deprived and poor families (Bilson & Martin, 2016)

- 7.4 During 2021/22 there were 3,870 assessments completed, or 323 per month on average, which is slightly higher than the rate of 316 per month during 2020/21.

At Q4 the annual rate of assessments completed within 45 working days was 79.2% compared to 87.3% in 2020/21. This decrease was expected, following on from sickness and lockdown related delays in Q4 20/21 and a focus on completing the out-of-date assessments caused by this.

There has been a gradual improvement in timeliness during the year with cumulative rates of Q2 (76.5%), Q3 (78.2%) and Q4 (79.2%). In quarter performance for Q4 was 82%.

While Shropshire is now performing below statistical neighbours (86.3%) and the England average (87.6%), based on their 2020/21-year end position, this data is cumulative and has been impacted by decreased timeliness in the first half of the year. An action plan is in place and on target to have improved Performance by end of May 2022.

- 7.5 At year-end 2021/22, there were 609 looked after children in Shropshire, an increase of 105 Children. This represents an increase of 20.8% from the 504 looked after children in 2020/21.

During the year 2021/22, 241 children started to be looked after, this is 24.2% greater than the 194 children starting in the same period in 20/21. However, ceasing levels have also increased, with 136 children ceasing in 21/22, this is 52.8% higher than the 89 who ceased during 2020/21.

The rate of children looked after has increased to 101 children per 10,000 U18s. This is higher than the 2020/21 SN average (61.4) and England average (67).

There are a range of reasons for the increase in children looked after, including large sibling groups, increase in neglect, delays in court proceedings being completed which causes delays to exiting children's care plans.

As part of our obligations under the National Transfer Scheme Shropshire Council was looking after 30 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children (UASC) as at 31/3/22.

Whilst looked after numbers have continued to increase, the service reiterates that the priority is to provide the right level of support at the right time to protect children from harm.

- 7.6 The rate of children subject to Child Protection Plans (CPPs) has decreased during 2021/22 against year-end 20/21. At the end of March 2022 there were 207 children subject to a plan, which has decreased from 281 at the end of March 2021. This is a decrease of 26.3%. The latest rate per 10,000 Under 18s is 34.3.

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

- 7.7 At the reporting date (March 22), 48.3% have neglect listed as their primary category of abuse. 36.7% with emotional abuse, 7.7% sexual abuse and 7.2% physical abuse. Rates for previous years:

	2020	2021	2022
Number of CP	270	281	207
Neglect	51.1%	48.4%	48.3%
Emotional Abuse	40.7%	42.3%	36.7%
Physical Abuse	3.7%	4.3%	7.2%
Sexual Abuse	4.4%	5.0%	7.7%

The rates for neglect have decreased for the last two years but remain the highest primary category. Rates are now similar to national categories. Emotional abuse has seen a decrease in rates. Physical abuse rates have increased over the past two years and are now the same as national rates. Sexual abuse has also seen successive rate increases and is higher than the last available national rates.

During the year there has been a wider variation of rates with emotional abuse ranging from 50% in Q2 and a significant drop to 37% in Q4. Neglect has ranged from 42% in Q2 to 48% in Q4.

Nationally, the categories of abuse are identified as: neglect 46.3%, emotional abuse 40.3%, 3.7% sexual abuse and 7.2% physical abuse. Some authorities also report against multiple categories, nationally this is reported at 2.5%.

7.8 At year end 2021/22, 19.0% of CPPs starting during the year were for children who had had a previous plan at any point. This is lower than the rate of 21.3% at the end of 2020/21. During quarter 4 the rate of CPPs starting for those with a previous plan saw an upturn in rates from 13.3% in Dec 21 to 19% by March 22. The latest rate is lower than the national average (22.1%) and the SN average (23%) for 2020/21.

7.9 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 Q4, 5.2% 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 slightly above the SN average (3.7%) and the national average (3.7%) for 20/21.

7.10 A child in need (CiN) is one that has been assessed by social care to need a service. The rate of CiN in Shropshire increased during Q4 21/22 to 322 children per 10,000 U18s. The service will conduct an audit to investigate the recent rise of CiN.

Shropshire's rate is now above the 2020/21 SN group rate of (277), and is similar to the England average (321).

- 7.11 The age profile of Shropshire's current looked after children (at the end of Q4) is evenly distributed, with 50% of children under 10 and 50% 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 (57%) aged between 0 and 9, with 39% aged 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 52% are age 15+, with many of these being young people turning 18.

Slightly more of Shropshire's current looked after children are male (52%) than female (48%).

An audit of the last 50 children to become looked after from 1 March to Mid-April 2022 was undertaken as to what intervention had previously been undertaken with the family. A high % had had no previous intervention through any type of early help provision. The referral to Children's Social Care was at the point where significant harm was such that the child had to become looked after for their own safety. Thresholds for bringing a child into care were robustly explored by the OFSTED Inspection Team and no concerns raised as to children being accommodated unnecessarily

- 7.12 Fostering placements make up the highest proportion of looked after placements in Shropshire, with 70.2% of children placed with foster carers. 10.6% of children are placed in homes/hostels and 8.7% are placed with their parents. 2.4% of Shropshire's looked after children are placed for adoption.

The number of children completing an adoption during 2021/22 was 12 compared to 8 in 2020/21

- 7.13 Most looked after children in Shropshire (87.1%) 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.

56.9% are subject to a full care order, 26.3% subject to an interim care order, and 3.9% subject to a placement order.

12.4% 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.

- 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 in the reporting period. For Q4, this means that all young people having a 19/20/21 birthday in April - March are included
- 7.15 For care leavers in this cohort, there is a proactive duty on the local authority to keep in touch. Shropshire Council is in touch with 97% of all care leavers in this cohort. This is above the 20/21 national average (91%).
- 7.16 97% 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 2020/21 national average for this measure is 88%.
- 7.17 52% of care leavers in the reporting cohort are in education, employment or training. This is in line with the 2020/21 national average of 52%.

The Care Leaving team received specific recognition for their work from the OFSTED Inspectors.

8. Conclusions

- 8.1. Children's Social Care is under increasing pressure from rising demand at many points in the system.
- 8.2. This demand has also created budget pressures with a provisional overspend of £3.682m for the financial year.
- 8.3. 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. This is recognised by the recent Ofsted Inspection where a rating of Good was awarded.
- 8.4. There is continued proactive effort in joint working with Legal Services – as well as the courts, CAFCASS and the Local Family Justice Board and families to progress the children's plans that were delayed in being finalised through Covid 19. We have had an increase in Special Guardianship Orders made with 15 granted during 2021/22 and 6 more due for completion in June. The increase in Special Guardianship Orders (SGO) is significant and is placing a demand pressure on the fostering team, additional posts to support this work have been agreed and are in process of being recruited to. SGO is often the plan that is in the Child's Best

interests as it supports continued living with extended family or connected carers in the community.

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 – Q4 Children's Dashboard

Appendix 2 – Ofsted ILACS Inspection Report