

<b>REPORT TITLE</b>	<b>Children's Services Performance Report</b>
<b>DATE OF MEETING</b>	<b>8<sup>th</sup> December 2021</b>
<b>REPORT AUTHORS</b>	<b>Kelly Headley, Performance and Improvement Manager Andy Dempsey, Director of Partnerships and Strategy</b>
<b>REASON FOR PRESENTING REPORT</b>	<p>The purpose of this report is to provide Children's Services Leadership Team with an overview of performance against key metrics for <b>October 2021</b>. It highlights areas of good performance and those in which further improvement is needed. The report is intended as a high-level summary of key activity from contact through to permanence to enable Senior Leadership to understand and address key drivers of/barriers to improved performance.</p> <p>Child level interventions (for missing or overdue visits etc) will continue to be actioned through the locality performance surgeries, with information available to Managers through daily web reporting. This report will also form the basis of reporting to Corporate Leadership, Improvement Board and Overview and Scrutiny Committee.</p> <p><b>Note:</b> Targets are reviewed twice a year. Stretch targets were implemented in April and October. As a consequence, some measures that were previously meeting target may currently be within tolerance or worse than target. This reflects the leadership's objective of continuing to increase the standards that we set for the children of Gloucestershire.</p>
<b>REPORTING PERIOD</b>	The data provided in this report represents a mature cut of performance data for <b>October 2021</b> .
<b>OVERVIEW</b>	<p>The monthly average number of children open to Social Care has been at its highest in 4 years during 2021/22 (4,149 compared with 3,906 in 2020/21, 4,114 in 2019/20 and 3,956 in 2018/19). In October, the number of children that Social Care were working with was at the highest level recorded to date (4,393 children).</p> <p>We have also seen increased turnover during 2021/22, following the lifting of the third lockdown. While performance management means that some under-performing workers have exited the service, our performance tracking tells us that the greater proportion of leavers are ones that are rated green or blue (no outlier performance activity for children or outlier performance is an exception), highlighting the difficulties in retaining experienced, good quality Social Workers. We know from exit interviews that management support is of key importance to staff and it is therefore critical that improvement is made in our performance in terms of PDR completion (19% at the end of Quarter 2) and case supervision (77% against a target of 95%, a decline from 87% in May). Likewise, it is important that our supervision (77%) and annual reviews (84%) for Foster Carers also increases to ensure that appropriate support is in place.</p> <p>In October, the performance position was one of decline as demand and workforce challenges placed increasing pressure on the service. Two-fifths of measures moved in a negative direction, while almost one-fifth of measure remained similar to last month and were worse than target.</p> <p>Over 65% of measures are performing worse than target. Although this reflects the appropriately challenging targets that the leadership sets for children, as just over 55% of our measures continue to achieve either Good (above 80%, with a good proportion in the mid-high 80%'s) or Outstanding performance (above 90%, with half in the mid-high 90%'s).</p> <p>Continuing strengths include a reduction in the proportion of children being re-referred to Social Care, seeing Children in Need and in our care, as well as keeping in touch with Care Leavers and seeing our Older Care Leavers.</p>

However, seeing children subject to a protection plan was worse than target in October and needs improvement. Timely ongoing reviews of Children in Need and those subject to protection and in our care are further strengths. This ensures we are regularly considering how well we are managing and reducing risk, progressing work that makes a difference and sustaining our focus on achieving good outcomes for the child.

We have robust oversight of our Foster Carers through up-to-date DBS and medical checks. However, the timeliness of unannounced visits which had been better than or within tolerance of target for the majority of 2021/22 has declined over the last two months and needs to improve in order to ensure appropriate oversight is in place. The proportion of children returning to care remains low and is better than national levels. Due to improvement work undertaken over the last year, the proportion of children accommodated in care under a Section 20 agreement has reduced from 27% in January to 21% resulting in a phased stretch target being implemented from October with the aim of bringing us in line with national performance. We have high utilisation of available in-house Foster Carer capacity. Work is being undertaken to look at the variance between overall capacity and available capacity to ensure that placement availability is being managed well and in a timely way to support our placement sufficiency strategy.

Timeliness of decisions and visiting following contact and referral need significant improvement, as does the pace of initial child protection conferences. We also need to speak to more children who go missing and do so in a timelier manner. While timeliness of conferences improved in October, performance for each of these areas of response to risk remains in the mid-50%'s-mid70%'s and urgent performance improvement is needed.

The greater majority of children in care have evidence of the IROs footprint on their case notes in the last 6 months, although performance has been worse than target for the last two months. Our IRO's need to more frequently contact and see our children in care. Timeliness of seeing our younger Care Leavers achieved a 12-month high in September but continues to need to improve in order to narrow the significant gap to target. In order to ensure we're supporting children to have a voice, more children subject to protection plans aged 5 years need to be seen alone.

Putting CiN plans in place, particularly for those children stepping down from a protection plan, and initial reviews for Children in Need need to be timelier. Timeliness of initial reviews increased by more than 10% points but continues to impact timeliness of reviews overall. We continue to see significant fluctuations in the proportion of children returning to a protection plan; over time we have higher levels of repeat protection work than our peer comparators.

There are continuing whole system pressures impacting the timeliness of health assessments for children in care and the pace of completing pre and court proceedings. Improvement in the performance of timely dental checks for children in care plateaued over the last four months and is still some distance from target.

Pathway planning for children in care needs to improve with performance remaining low in October following a decline since May. More work is needed to support Care Leavers to find education, training and employment opportunities and see Higher Education as an option.

In October, 65% of workers were responsible for 18 children or fewer. 94.1% held 25 children or fewer; this was worse than target for the first time in 12 months having reduced from 98.9% in May.

# Contents Page

[Overview](#) ..... 1

[Executive Summary](#) ..... 4

[Performance Dashboard - Thematic](#) ..... See Appendix 1

[Performance Dashboard – Performance Group](#) ..... See Appendix 2

## **Performance Summary**

### **Contact, Referral and Assessment**

- ES.01 Contact demand reduced from 3,113 to 2,850 in October but remains high. In the 3 previous financial years, the number of contacts received monthly, on average, was between 2,200-2,500. The monthly average in 2021/22 has been 2,900 contacts. Just over 40% of incoming demand continues to close, with around half of these receiving advice, guidance and support at the point of contact.
- ES.02 Initial decisions were timely for around 80% of children in October, however, timeliness of finalising contact decision declined to 68%. There was a further increase in the number of contacts rated as Red this month (222 compared to a monthly average of 70 between Sep-20 to Aug-21). Timeliness of decision making for these children improved slightly but is too low (75%). Performance for each of these measures is significantly worse than target.
- ES.03 Utilisation of the Neglect toolkit at contact continues to be low. Of the 163 contacts relating to Neglect from professional referral sources, neglect toolkits were completed for 11 children (7%).
- ES.04 Referrals reduced from 967 to 851 but remain at the second highest level seen in the last 5 financial years. Referrals from the Police remain high.
- ES.05 Timeliness of initial visits remained low in October (74%). Performance across localities is worse than target ranging from 49% in the Cotswolds to 78% in Tewkesbury. This is with the exception of Stroud where 91% of visits were timely and performance has been better than target for the last 3 months. Visiting for children progressing under Section 47 continues to experience substantial fluctuation, dropping over 30% points in October (58%). Overall, visits for 175 children were overdue in October, while over 26 children were awaiting an initial visit which was outside of timescale. This includes 7 children referred in June, July and September who have not yet been seen.
- ES.06 Referrals for around 10% of children continue to be closed without them being seen. Children whose referral is closed without a visit taking place continue to experience a higher chance of being re-referred than those children who are seen (on average 30% compared to 17%). Decisions for just under three-quarters of children closed without being seen were timely (72%) compared to 83% at the same time last year.
- ES.07 Around one-fifth of referrals are for children being re-referred to Social Care within 12 months. This is slightly better than target and our peer group. All localities had a better than or within tolerance level of re-referrals (up from 4 localities in September). The level of re-referrals over a 12-month period is improving with Tewkesbury and Stroud performing within tolerance of target and Cheltenham and Cotswolds narrowing the gap towards tolerance of target.
- ES.08 Timeliness of completion of single assessments declined slightly in October resulting in performance returning to a worse than target position for the second time in three months. Performance in Cotswolds declined for the fourth month from 92% in June to 58% in October and is at the lowest level compared to the other localities. Large declines in performance were also seen in Stroud (78% down from 88%) and Cheltenham in October (67% down from 81%). Almost three-fifths of assessments concluded with no requirement for a Social Care service (58%).

ES.09 The number of ongoing single assessments has increased significantly over the last two months. In October, the number of open assessments exceeded the level seen prior to the pandemic (1,493 compared with 1,376 in February 2020). This is likely to be a significant factor in sustaining timeliness of assessment completion. There are 92 children for whom the completion of their assessment is currently overdue, including 16 children whose assessment has been ongoing for more than 90 working days.

### **Early Help**

- ES.10 One-third of the work undertaken by Targeted Support is in support of children open to a Social Care intervention (34%). Almost two-fifths of the children receiving targeted support work have had a previous Early Help episode within the last 12 months (38%). Further work is needed to understand whether this is following work undertaken by Early Help or due to repeat Social Care work that is receiving support from the Early Help service. Timeliness of initial visits to children requiring targeted support work remains very low (18%). Visits to our disabled children are the most timely, although still need significant improvement (51%), while timeliness within our Family Support teams is 31% and across Children and Family Centres is 9%. Work is underway to disaggregate reporting so that there is a clearer picture as to where performance issues may arise during the allocation and visiting process. Children and Family Centres do not apply the same practice standards as Family Support Teams. This continues to raise questions about inequality of service for children and families depending on who is providing support to them.
- ES.11 Two-fifths of assessments were completed within timescale in October, down from just over half in September.
- ES.12 Half of the episodes closed following Targeted Support in October were for children and families whose needs had been met or partially met. A significant proportion of episodes for families receiving advice, guidance and support (32%) or Targeted Support (20%) continue to be closed due to non-engagement or withdrawal of consent.

### **Children in Need**

- ES.13 Two-thirds of Children in Need starting a plan in October had a plan in place in a timely way. Pace of plan development following step down from a protection plan or care is impacting performance and may affect sustaining change with children and families (28%). This needs improvement.
- ES.14 We continue to see and work with the greater majority of our Children in Need regularly (89%). However, marginal declines over the last two months mean that performance is at risk of moving to a worse than target position.
- ES.15 Three-quarters of Children in Need have had a timely review; performance has been worse than target throughout 2021 and declined in October. Performance is particularly low in Gloucester (64%) and Tewkesbury (65%). Timeliness of initial reviews saw an increase of 12% points but continues to impact performance overall (72%).

### **Child Protection**

- ES.16 In September and October, the number of Strategy Discussions undertaken has been significantly higher than in previous months (423 and 485 respectively, compared with a monthly average of 308 in 2020/21 and 360 in 2019/20). The level of demand seen in October is the highest in five financial years. This is likely to be impacting timeliness of discussions where performance was worse than target for the second month and had declined slightly further in October. The proportion of Strategy Discussions progressing to an S47 enquiry declined for the third month, from 74% in July to 66% in October, raising questions about decision making to undertake such a high level of Strategy Discussions.

Timeliness of S47 enquiries also declined; around 80% of Strategy Discussions and S47 Enquiries were timely.

Timeliness of initial child protection conferences improved but remained worse than target (73%). Response to risk needs to increase to ensure children receive the support and protection they need quickly.

- ES.17 Neglect is cited as a factor in the current category of abuse in three-fifths of cases for children subject to a protection plan. A Neglect Toolkit has been completed for one-third of these children. While still very low, this is the highest level of completion in 2021. There were 72 children made subject to a protection plan in October where Neglect was a factor; the toolkit had been completed for one child.
- ES.18 One-third of children made subject to a protection plan in October had had one or more previous protection plans (33%, 24 children). Repeat protection planning remains worse than target (25%) and the peer comparator average (23.3%). A growing proportion of children have been subject to 3 or more protection plans (10%, 71 children).
- ES.19 The majority of children subject to a protection plan were seen in a timely way in October, although there was a decline in performance to worse than target (87%). More than 80% children aged 5 years and over who are subject to a protection plan were seen alone in October; performance still remains some way from target.
- ES.20 The vast majority of children subject to a protection plan had an up-to-date review.
- ES.21 The number of children subject to a protection plan for more than two years reduced in October and remains low (18 children); pre or court proceedings were underway for more than half of these children.

### **Children in Care**

**Note:** Based on positive performance over time, stretch targets have been implemented in October for the following measures: children in care accommodated under a Section 20 agreement, long term placement stability and in-house available foster placement utilisation. The proportion of Section 20 arrangements in place is therefore off target in October, while long-term placement stability is within tolerance of target; both had previously been performing better than target. The historic performance trend in the performance dashboards has been updated to reflect performance against the new targets.

- ES.22 One-fifth of children in care are accommodated under a Section 20 arrangement (21.4%, 179 children down from 25.5% in May, 203 children). We continue to accommodate a higher proportion of children under a Section 20 arrangement than nationally but have narrowed the gap from 10% points to 4% points since the beginning of 2021. Proceedings are underway for one-fifth of these children in order to secure permanence arrangements (19%).
- ES.23 There have been more than 800 children in care at the end of each month since May. At the end of October there were 836 children in care. This compares to an average of 778 in 2020/21 and 727 in 2019/20. A quarter of our children in our care are living in placements out of County (26%). However, there has been a small reducing trend in the proportion of children in care accommodated out of County and more than 20 miles from home (22.9% in May down to 20.5%); performance is marginally better than target and national levels (21.0%). Almost all of available in-house foster placement capacity is currently being utilised. A review is being undertaken of the 15% of placements that are currently unavailable.

- ES.24 The vast majority of our children in care had a timely statutory visit, assessment and review, although assessment timeliness has declined slightly since June and is now worse than target.
- ES.25 The overwhelming majority of children had their views represented at their review either by attending or via an Advocate, IRO or other media. A high proportion of children also have evidence of the IROs footprint on their case notes in the last 6 months, although performance has declined from a better than target to worse than target position since April, down from 98% to 88%. Both contact and visiting by IROs for children in care need to increase. IRO's have been in contact with just under two-thirds of children in care aged 5 years and over in the last 6 months (63%). For 5-11-year olds, it is considered particularly important that contact with their IRO is face to face. Just over a quarter of children in this age group have been visited by their IRO in the last six months (28%).
- ES.26 Pathway planning for children in care has been below target for more than a year with performance following a declining trend since May (83% down to 70%); this needs improvement.
- ES.27 The majority of children in care have an up-to-date health check but performance has been worse than target throughout 2021 and is broadly static. The proportion of children in care aged 2 or older with an up to date dental assessment had followed an increasing trend between March-August but has now been static for three months, leaving performance still almost 10% points away from target. In particular, timeliness of dental checks needs to improve in Cheltenham (42%), Tewkesbury (46%), Innovate Permanence (49%), Gloucester North 11-25 and Cotswolds (62%) which are responsible for more than half of the children overdue. Around 80% of children in care aged 4-17 had an up to date Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ). Performance has been worse than target for three months at a time when mental and emotional health concerns are on the rise nationally due to the pandemic. We are seeing an increasing number of children who have and SDQ score of 17 or above which indicates that emotional wellbeing is a cause for concern (251 up from 208 children at the same time last year).
- ES.28 Since April, there have been small incremental improvements in the proportion of children in care experiencing 3 or more placements (17.9% down to 15.9%). Performance remains a challenge and is worse than target (13%) and peer comparators (11%). Two-thirds of children who have been in care for 2.5 years or more are experiencing long-term placement stability (67%). This is an improvement over the last two months, from 64.5% in August which has narrowed the gap between our performance and the peer group average (68%).
- ES.29 Timeliness of DBS and medical checks remained high for the overwhelming majority of Foster Carers. The majority of our Foster Carers have had a timely annual review and unannounced visit, however, performance has been in decline and is worse than target. Three-quarters of our Foster Carers had an up-to-date supervision; this is significantly worse than target. Continued work to improve performance is needed in order to ensure that timely support, development and advice is provided for Foster Carers and that there is assurance in terms of quality of care and risk.
- ES.30 A quarter of school-aged children in care are education out of County (24.9%), down from 28.5% in May. 10% of children have had a school move since the start of the academic year and 4% have had a fixed-term exclusion. In October, there was a reduction in the proportion of children in care who had good attendance (more than 90% of school days attended) (82% to 79%). 6.6% of children have reduced attendance levels as the result of absence due to illness. However, performance would still be 10% points worse than target even taking this into account.

## **Children Leaving Care**

- ES.31 We have been in touch with the greater majority of our Care Leavers in the last 6 months and see our older Care Leavers in a timely way. There continues to be a significant disparity in contact performance for our younger care leavers aged 16-18 years (82%) compared with the almost universal levels of contact that we have had with care leavers aged 19 and above (98.2%). We also continue to need to see more of younger Care Leavers (74%). A small number of Care Leavers have not been seen since before the pandemic, with the last recorded visit between October 2018 and February 2020 (7 Care Leavers).
- ES.32 A good proportion of Care Leavers have an up-to-date pathway plan. For the first time in 12 months, performance is within tolerance of or better than target for all age groups, with performance for 16-18 year olds improving since April from 77% to 86%.
- ES.33 The greater majority of our care leavers live in suitable accommodation. However, performance for our younger Care Leavers is again lower than for older Care Leavers (82% compared 92% for Care Leavers aged 19 years and above).
- ES.34 More than half of our Care Leavers are in some form of education, employment or training but this is significantly below the aspirations of our Care Leavers (53% against a target of 75%). The proportion of our Care Leavers in Higher Education has improved by small increments over the last two months but remains lower than at the same time last year, our target and the peer group average.

## **Missing Children and Child Exploitation**

- ES.35 Despite pandemic restrictions having been lifted for the last 3 months, the number of children going missing and episodes of missing remain low (both down one-third compared to October 2019). The ratio of missing episodes per child has reduced marginally from 1.94 in 2019/20, to 1.91 in 2020/21 and 1.70 this financial year to date. It is not clear as yet whether this reduction relates to the quality of work being undertaken with young people following missing episodes or continues to indicate behaviour change linked to the pandemic. However, completion of return interviews has remained low throughout 2021/22 (71% down from 85% in March). Timeliness of return interviews is also under-performing (53%) and declines further when refreshed the following month indicating significant drift.
- ES.36 Timeliness of seeing children rated them as at Moderate or Significant risk of exploitation following an initial screening tool being completed continues to need improvement (45%). Of the 9 children reviewed in October, the risk remained moderate or significant for 4 children and had increased for 5 children raising questions about the effectiveness of work in this area.

## **Legal Proceedings**

- ES.37 Timeliness of completion of pre and court proceedings is low: 56% and 34% respectively completed within 26 weeks so far in 2021.

## **Workforce**

- ES.38 Caseload levels declined in October, with the proportion of Social Workers with a caseload in line with our target of 18 children or fewer reducing to 64.5%. This is down almost 15% points compared to the performance high of 79.2% in March. While we have 9% more workers holding cases than in March, there are 16% more children open to Social Care than at that time. The largest group of Social Workers held 19 children in October which is borderline to the ideal caseload level (25 workers).

The proportion of workers holding 25 children or fewer has followed a reducing trend since April (98.9% down to 94.1%), dropping to a worse than target position for the first time since January 2020. There were 24 workers responsible for 25 or more children, with the highest number of children allocated per FTE being 38 in the Cotswolds Assessment Team.

ES.39 At the end of October, the overwhelming majority of children had an allocated Social Worker (99.4%) and had had some activity recorded on their case file within relevant timescales (99.5%).

ES.40 Three-quarters of children had a timely supervision recorded, evidencing practice oversight. Performance has followed a declining trend since May and was at a 12-month low in October (77.2% down from 87.1% in April). This is significantly worse than target. This is a critical area of work for Team Managers to support progress and risk management for children and improvement is needed.

1000 children were overdue a case supervision or have had no supervision and were overdue at the end of October.

The supervision for 44 children was overdue by 6 months or more. These children were held by Cheltenham 11-25 Team 2, Cheltenham Safeguarding 4, TACS and FFAST.

ES.41 Around 85% of children had fewer than 3 Social Workers in the last 6 months. Stability of Social Worker for our children in care remains low and is worse than other authorities rated as Inadequate. Work to stabilise the workforce is currently being undertaken following an increase in turnover. In recognition of the Ambassador's assertion that the target for this measure should be higher, the target will be reviewed for April. This is in order to give current workforce strategies time to take effect, however, the labour market in this area is likely to remain challenging over time.