

REPORT TITLE	Children's Services Performance Report
DATE OF MEETING	5th January 2023
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REASON FOR PRESENTING REPORT	<p>The purpose of this report is to provide Children's Services Leadership Team with an overview of performance against key metrics for November 2022. 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 regular web reporting. Oversight at directorate level is provided by the monthly Strategic Performance Meeting. This report will also form the basis of reporting to Corporate Leadership, Improvement Board and Overview and Scrutiny Committee.</p> <p>Note: Targets are reviewed annually. This reflects the leadership's objective of continuing to bring performance in line with comparators and increase the standards that we set for the children of Gloucestershire.</p>
REPORTING PERIOD	The data provided in this report represents a mature cut of performance data for November 2022 .
OVERVIEW	<p>Performance in November evidenced some positive signs of stability and improvement; however, it remains a very challenging operational landscape characterised by familial stress, increased demand and ongoing workforce pressures.</p> <p>November saw an upturn in the proportion of measures that are better than or within tolerance of target (38% up from 31% last month), which is the highest performance to date over the course of 2022/23. Performance measures in the Fair or Good categories (better than 80% and 90% respectively) remained steady in November (55%). This is an improvement on performance between June-August, although it remains lower than during 2021/22.</p> <p>There were also positive signs in terms of quality assurance. A better than target number of case audits were completed for the second month. The proportion of case audits rated as Inadequate reduced (7%) and was better than target. The proportion of case audits rated as Good or better met target for the first time in 2022/23 (50%), up from an average of 35% since April 2022. Case audits rated as Good or better in relation to management oversight and quality of assessment were also better than and within tolerance of target respectively. Improvement is still needed in terms of SMART planning which remains worse than target.</p> <p>Initial and end-end contact decision timeliness improved in November with the highest performance since February, although it remains significantly worse than target. Performance for children where risk is evident at contact remained within tolerance of target for the third month.</p> <p>There was a decline in initial visiting performance reaching a 12-month low, with significant disparities in performance for children depending on the locality they live in. Timeliness of initial visits for children progressing under Section 47 was better than target for only the second time in 12 months; this needs to be sustained.</p>

Timeliness needs to improve in a number of key areas including for Strategy Discussions, S47 Enquiries, Initial Child Protection Conferences, implementing Child in need plans following the completion of assessment or step down from a protection plan or care and initial reviews for Children in Need. November performance in all of these areas was at a 12-month low.

There has, however, been an improving trend in our response to risk following missing episodes, with return interviews completed following 80% of episodes in November, compared with 47% in June. The timeliness of return interview conversations with children continues to need improvement with 65% within timescales.

The recent focus on child protection work, through the strategic performance meeting and locality performance surgeries, appears to be having a positive impact. The proportion of children subject to a protection plan seen within timescale increased, with performance returning to a within tolerance of target position. A number of protection plans for children open for more than two years have concluded over recent months, with performance better than target for the first time in more than 12 months. There was also a reduction in children starting a second/subsequent CP plan in November, to better than target. More children subject to a protection plan had an up-to-date review. Performance was better than target, although this has fluctuated over the last 8 months and needs to stabilise.

There was improvement in the proportion of children in care accommodated under a Section 20 agreement, with performance within tolerance of target for the first time in 12 months. Readmissions to care were low in November, resulting in 4 of the latest 5 months being within tolerance or better than target after a period of increased readmissions between Dec-21 to Jun-22. Health assessment performance for children in care aged 5 years and over was also within tolerance of target for the first time in more than 12 months. Overall health assessment performance continues to be impacted by assessments for under 5's which is almost 20% points lower than for over 5's. We saw a higher proportion of children in care participating in their reviews in November, with performance improving to better than target.

Unannounced visits and supervisions for Foster Carers improved to within tolerance of target.

Stability of Social Worker for our children in care has followed an improving trend since April with 68.4% having 2 or fewer workers in 12 months (up from 57.5%). This is the highest level since recording began, against an increasing number of children in care and is narrowing the gap with Local Authorities rated Requires Improvement or better. 61.4% of Social Workers have a caseload in line with our target of 18 children or fewer. This is the lowest level since the same time last year. Most Social Workers are responsible for 23 children or fewer (90.4%).

Contents Page

Overview	1
Performance Summary	4
Performance Dashboard - Thematic	See Appendix 1

Performance Summary

Contact, Referral and Assessment

1. The average number of contacts being received each month (FYtD) is 3% lower than in 2021/22 but remains significantly higher than pre-pandemic (up 29% compared with 2019/20).
2. Timeliness of initial and end-to-end decision making continues to underperform (78% and 74% respectively against a target of 90%). However, this is the best performance in more than 12 months. Decisions were timely for the majority of children where potential risk was evident at contact (89%). This is within tolerance of target. While it is important that we make timely decisions for children where risk has been identified, this group made up only 2% of contacts in November. Significant improvement is therefore needed in order to ensure pace of response for all children.
3. 909 contacts progressed to assessment teams as a referral in November.
4. Around 10% of children referred in November have had their referral closed without them being seen to date (95 children). Decisions not to visit the child were timely for half of referrals closed (55%).
5. For children who have been seen following referral, just under two-thirds received a timely initial visit (64%). Performance remains significantly worse than target (85%). Gloucester was the only locality to perform within tolerance of target at 83.5%. Performance across the other localities was particularly low ranging from 34.5% in Tewkesbury to 69% in FoD. Performance for children progressing under Section 47 continues to fluctuate and was better than target in November (86%). Overall, visits for 168 children referred in November were undertaken late, while 123 children were awaiting an initial visit which was outside of timescale at the time of reporting. In addition, there was 1 child referred in August and 1 in September and 30 children referred in October who have also not yet been seen.
6. Of the referrals received in November, 28.2% were re-referrals within 12 months. This is worse than target (21.5%) and the peer group average (20.1%, Mar-22).
7. All of the localities are performing worse than target in terms of the re-referrals received in the last 12 months.
8. In November, three-quarters of completed single assessments were timely (75%) and remains worse than target (90%). Cheltenham was the only locality to perform within tolerance of target (87% against a target of 90%), while timeliness in the remainder of localities was worse than target. Tewkesbury was the lowest performer, although timeliness had improved compared to last quarter (49% up from 37%).

Just under half of case audits rate assessments as 'Good' quality or better (48%). This is within tolerance of target.

9. We are seeing increasing pressures around assessment work. There were 1,653 children undergoing assessment at the end of November. This is a significant increase compared to last month (1,435, up 15%) and up 32% overall since July (1,257). 274 assessments are overdue. This has followed an increasing trend, up from 72 in June. A growing number of overdue assessments have been ongoing for more than 60 working days, 157 up from 27 in May.

Children in Need

10. The number of Children in Need either undergoing assessment or on a CiN plan has increased over the last three months from around a steady 2,400 children in the 12 months between September 2021 to August 2022 to almost 2,750 at the end of November.
11. There is drift and delay in putting a CiN plan in place following assessment or step down for a significant proportion of children. Timeliness of planning has underperformed over time. One-third of children had a plan in place in a timely way in November (33%). Performance is significantly worse than target (95%).
12. The majority of Children in Need had been seen in timescale in November (84%). However, performance has been static for five months and remains worse than target (93%). Cheltenham and Stroud performed better than and within tolerance of target respectively; visiting in all other localities was worse than target. Timeliness for children held by Tewkesbury was the lowest, although there had been improvement compared with the previous month (69% up from 62%).
13. Two-thirds of Children in Need have an up-to-date review or are not yet due one (68% against a target of 90%). Performance has remained static for four months. All localities are performing worse than target. Again, timeliness of reviews for children in Tewkesbury is lowest but had improved compared with last month (56% up from 46%). Of the reviews completed in November, 49% of initial reviews were timely compared with 93% of subsequent reviews.

Child Protection

14. Timeliness of Strategy Discussions reduced by 10% points in November to 59% against a target of 90% and down from 92% at the same time last year. S47 enquiry timeliness has followed a declining trend from 85% in August to 79% in November, against a target of 90%. Pace of initial child protection conferences (ICPCs) reduced by more than 20% points in November to 61.5% and was worse than target (85%). Performance against all three measures represented a 12-month low in November. Drift and delay across S47 activity remains a concern in terms of timely protection being put into place.
15. The proportion of S47 enquiries proceeding to an initial child protection conference (ICPC) and ICPCs progressing to a child protection plan have followed a reducing trend over time (excludes 2020/21 and 2021/22 during which trends were affected by the pandemic). This has resulted in the throughput of S47 activity reducing from 25% in 2019/20 to 18% in 2022/23 FYtD.
16. The reduction in the number of children subject to a protection plan continued, from a peak of 897 in May to 677 at the end of November (down 25%). This follows targeted work to review cases and ensure that the level of intervention is the right one for the child, as well as placing increased rigour around children starting plans. This is now 5% lower than prior to the pandemic (715 children in March 2020).
17. Since July, there has been a reduction in the number of children who have been subject to a plan for more than 2 years (13 children, 1.9% down from 33 children, 3.9%). This is a 12-month best and is better than target. Performance is similar to the peer group average (1.7%). Pre or court proceedings are underway for just over three-fifths of these children (62%).
18. Just under one-fifth of the children made subject to a second or subsequent protection plan in November had had a previous plan (19.2%). Over the 12 months to the end of November, 28.4% of children were made subject to repeat protection planning; this is higher than the peer group average (23.8%). 11.5% of children have been subject to 3 or more protection plans (78 children).

19. The proportion of case audits where SMART planning was rated Good or better continues to fluctuate and is low of 36% against a target of 50%.
20. In November, there was an improvement in children subject to a protection plan seen in a timely way (88.5% up from 83%), with performance moving in a positive direction to within tolerance of target. Visiting performance increased across all localities. Cheltenham, FoD and Tewkesbury performed within tolerance of or better than target. In Cotswolds, Gloucester and Stroud performance remained worse than target but saw improvements of 4-9% points.
21. Timeliness of children who are aged 5 years and over who are subject to a protection plan and had been seen alone declined slightly for the second month (85.5% against a target of 95%). This means that some children are not receiving a regular opportunity to have a voice or to disclose risk. The FoD was the only locality performing within tolerance of target. While performance in Cotswolds, Gloucester and Stroud remained worse than target, all saw a slight improvement. Performance in Tewkesbury remained static and had the lowest proportion of children seen alone in a timely way (77%). Cheltenham saw a drop of 10% points in their performance from 99% to 89%.
22. In November, the views of around three-quarters of children undergoing an initial or review conference were available for consideration during the conference (73%).
23. Most children subject to a protection plan had an up-to-date review (98%). Performance improved for the second month and was better than target.

Children in Care

24. There were 877 children in care at the end of November. Demand remains high and equates to a growth of 19% compared with the 2019/20 monthly average.
25. One-fifth of our children in care are accommodated under a Section 20 agreement (19.7%, 173 children). This is within tolerance of target (19%) and is slightly higher than nationally (17% Mar-22).
26. 29% of our children in our care are living in placements out of County. A quarter of children in care accommodated out of County and more than 20 miles from home (23.7%, 208 children). This is an increasing trend, up from 19.7% in January 2022 (167 children) and remains worse than target (20%), although it's broadly in line with the peer group average (22.4% Mar-22).
27. There were 32 children who became cared for in November. Of these, 1 child had been in care within the previous 12 months (3.1%); this is better than the stretch target that was set based on the readmissions over the 12-month period of 2021/22 (7%). Over a rolling 12-month period readmissions were at 9.5%. This remains better than national levels (11.4%, Mar-20).
28. The vast majority of our children in care had a timely statutory visit (96%) and review (94%) and had their views represented at their review either by attending or via an Advocate, IRO or other media (99%). A high proportion of children also have evidence of the IROs footprint on their case notes in the last 6 months (88%), although this has declined over the last 3 months from 95% and moved from a better than to worse than target position.

Our independent reviewing officers have been in touch with just over two-thirds of children in care aged 5 or over in the last 6 months (69%). This is a decline over the last three months from 80% and is worse than target. For 5–11-year-olds, it is considered particularly important that contact with their IRO is face to face. Performance for these children has also declined slightly and remains worse than the phased improvement target (50% down from 56% in July, against a target of 60%).

29. Pathway planning for children in care has been below target for more than a year (73% against a target of 90%); improvement is needed.
30. The majority of children in care who have an up-to-date health check (87.5%). This remains worse than target (95%) but is better than the peer group average (83.2%).
31. Three-quarters of children in care aged 2 or older have an up-to-date dental assessment (75%, down from 79% last month). Pressures on dental provision are high nationally and performance has therefore not recovered to pre-pandemic levels (84-86%). However, we are one of the top performers in our comparator group with other authorities ranging from 19%-77%, with a peer group average of 59.6% (Mar-22).
32. 85% of children in care aged 4-17 had an up-to-date Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ). This is a decline for the second month from 88% and performance moved to within tolerance of target in November.
33. The proportion of children in care experiencing 3 or more placements in 12 months increased slightly for the third month, from a low of 12.1% (105 children) to 14.4% (126 children) (against a target of 12%). This is worse than the peer group average (9.7%, Mar-22).
34. Just under two-thirds of children who have been in care for two and a half years or more have had a settled home for more than two years (63.1%). This is worse than target (68%) and the peer group average (71.1%, Mar-22).
35. Most of our Foster Carers had an up-to-date DBS (94%), although this declined for the second month from 97% and moved to a worse than target position. Timeliness of Foster Carer reviews and medical checks is worse than target (85% and 87% respectively).
36. The greater majority of Foster Carers have had a timely unannounced visit (93%) and supervision (92%); performance for these measures is within tolerance of target.
37. 5% of school-aged children in care have had a school move this academic year; this is better than at the same time last year (23 children compared with 46 children, 9.6%). There have been marginally more children suspended one or more times since the start of the academic year (6.6% compared with 6.1% between September to November 2021).
38. School-aged children in care (educated both in and outside of Gloucestershire) have an average attendance of 91.5%, with slightly higher attendance in primary settings compared with secondary schools (95.6% compared with 88.9%). However, underneath this overall average attendance, one-fifth of these children are persistently absent (attending less than 90% of school days, 21.9%).

Care Experienced Adults

39. There has been a small reduction in the number of care experienced adults requiring support in the last 3 months, down from 502 to 492 people (2%).
40. We continued to see the greater majority of older care experienced adults in the last 6 months (21 years and over, 92%); this is better than target. Performance is based on a reducing group, down 17% since June.
41. There continues to be a disparity in performance for our 16–20-year-olds, with 78% seen in a timely way (every two months). Visits for this group have been persistently worse than target (90%). 80% of care experienced adults receiving support fall within the 16–20-year-old group and there are a growing number of 16-20 year olds receiving support (up 9% compared with the same time last year, 354 to 387 people).

The absence of regular meaningful face to face visiting with our younger care experienced people may impact their access to support and achieving positive outcomes, as well as sight of emerging concerns and risk. However, performance has improved compared with last month, up from 72% in spite of the increasing number of children requiring more frequent visiting than the older care experienced adults.

42. 84% of care experienced young people have an up-to-date pathway plan. Performance remains worse than target (90%) and is being impacted by performance for the 16-18 year old group. Although performance for our 16-18 year olds continues to be worse than target, there has been improvement in November (78% up from 69%). The majority of 19-21 year olds (86.5%) and over 21's (91%) have an up-to-date pathway plan with performance within tolerance of and better than target respectively.
43. Most care experienced young people live in homes categorised as 'suitable' (91%); this is within tolerance of target overall and for the 16-18 and 19-21 year old age groups. Performance for people aged 21 and over reduced slightly (89%) and was worse than target for the first time since December 2021.
44. There has been a slight reduction in the proportion of 16-18 and over 21 year old care experienced people in education, employment or training (EET) (down from 63% to 61% and 61% to 58% respectively). Performance for 19-21 year olds remained static at 55%. Performance is worse than target for all age groups (75%).
45. There were 29 care experienced adults in higher education at the end of November, down from 30 the previous month. Performance is within tolerance of target and slightly better than the peer group average (5%).

Missing Children

46. Following two years of reduced levels of missing children during 2020/21 and 2021/22, we have seen an increase in both missing children and missing episodes with the monthly average increasing by 9% and 17% respectively compared with last year. However, the number of children missing and episodes of missing remain lower than in 2019/20 (down 15% and 22% respectively). In November, 57 children went missing a total of 96 times.

A return interview was completed for 80% of episodes where children went missing. Performance is worse than target but has been following an improving trend since June (47%) and is the highest since January. 65% of return interviews were completed in a timely way. Improvement is needed in this area to ensure risk is well-sighted and managed.

47. 12.6% of children in care have been reported as missing in the last 12 months. This remains slightly worse than target (10%) and the peer comparator average (10.1%).

Legal Proceedings

48. Pre-proceedings are ongoing for 153 children, of which proceedings are currently within the 16-week timescale for 54 children (35%). Timeliness of ongoing pre-proceedings has followed a declining trend since April (68%) and saw a steep reduction compared with last month, down from 56%. Court proceedings are underway for 285 children. Proceedings are currently timely for 128 children (45%).

49. Over the last 12 months, pre-proceedings were completed in a timely way for just over a quarter of children (28% against a target of 80%). Court cases were timely for under one-fifth of children (16% against a target of 60%), down from almost one-third in the 12 months to the end of April (31%). Performance is significantly below target for both pre and court proceedings, leading to delays in securing permanence for children.

Workforce

50. At the end of November, 4,780 children were open to social care. This continues to follow an increasing trend and is 16% higher than the monthly average prior to the pandemic (4,114).
51. There has been a timely supervision to check on the progress of 86% of children's cases, evidencing practice oversight. This remains worse than target (95%). Just over 650 children were overdue a case supervision or have had no supervision since being referred and were overdue.
52. Just over half of case audits were rated as 'Good' or better in relation to management oversight in November. This is better than target, but performance fluctuates month-month and needs to stabilise to ensure consistent rigour.
53. 61.4% of Social Workers have a caseload in line with our target of 18 children or fewer. This is the lowest level since the same time last year. Most Social Workers are responsible for 23 children or fewer (90.4%).
54. The overwhelming majority of children have and allocated Social Worker in a timely way (97.3%) There were 127 children without an allocated Social Worker at the end of November (including children who continued to be allocated to a worker who had left). In total, this equates to 2.7% of children open to Social Care.
55. The vast majority of children had some activity recorded on their case file within relevant timescales (99.7%).
56. 86% of children had 2 or fewer Social Workers in the last 6 months. Performance is within tolerance of target (90%). Performance continues to remain positive against an increasing number of children open to Social Care overall. Stability of Social Worker for our children in care has followed an improving trend since April with 68.4% having 2 or fewer workers in 12 months (up from 57.5%). This is the highest level since recording began, against an increasing number of children in care and is better than Local Authorities rated as Inadequate. We continue to narrow the gap towards tolerance of Local Authorities rated Requires Improvement or better.