

Children's Social Care Finance, Performance and Risk Meeting

Performance and Risk Report Quarter 1 2023/24



Achievements/ Successes

Positive Direction of Travel

Long-Term Challenges

Children's Strategy Discussion Timeliness

Timeliness of Children's Single Assessments

Initial Visits for Children following Referral

Repeat Child Protection Planning

Persistent Absence of Children in Care from School



93.0%

During last year's Ofsted inspection, the timeliness of Strategy Discussions was highlighted as in need of improvement. Performance continued to improve for the third quarter, up from 63% to 93% and was better than target for the first time in more than a year.



87.3%

Timeliness of assessments for children improved for the second quarter, from 73.6% to 84.1%. Performance was within tolerance of target for the first time in almost two years. Timely assessment aids swifter understanding as to whether there will be intervention for families and enables us to expedite putting appropriate support and protection in place.



75.4%

Overall, performance in Quarter 1 remained similar to the previous quarter. However, unlike during Quarter 4 when we saw improving timeliness during the quarter, performance reduced throughout Quarter 1 from 78.3% in April to 72.5% in June.



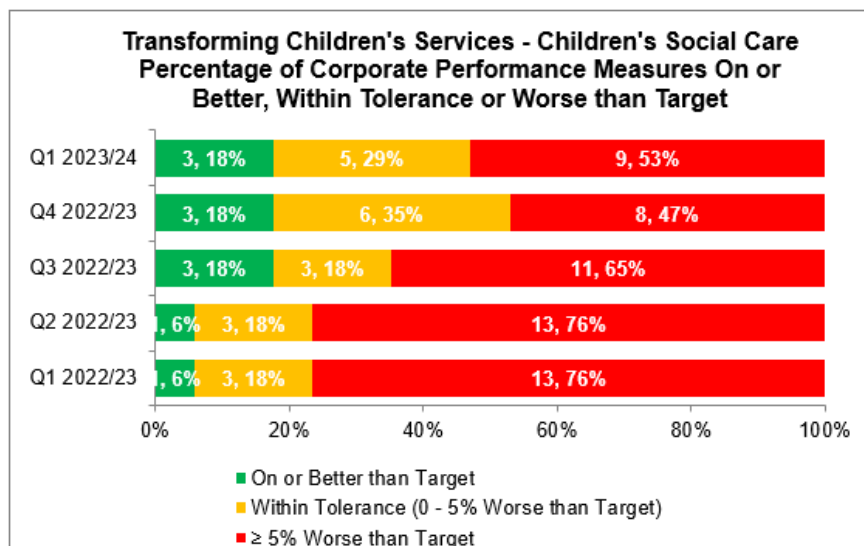
31.7%

Just under one-third of children made subject to a protection plan during Quarter 1 had had a previous plan (31.7%). This is an increase for the second quarter, from 20.5%, and is worse than target (25%). Performance over a 12-month period has increased to 29.4% and is worse than the preceding 12-month period (26.9%) and the peer group average (25.3%, 2021/22). A review is to be undertaken of children subject to multiple protection plans (3 or more).



27.9%

At the end of June, more than a quarter of the school aged children in care (27.9%) had been persistently absent this academic year (an attendance rate of 90% or more school days). This is the highest level of persistent absence over the last three academic years, which includes periods affected by the pandemic where absence was high due to sickness. Improvement is needed to reduce inequalities in attendance between children in care and their overall peer pupil group to support the achievement of positive educational outcomes.



1. Just under half of corporate performance measures were within tolerance or better than target (47%). This is a reduction compared with last quarter (53%). Key changes in performance against target include improvements in assessment and Strategy Discussion timeliness and a reduction in children returning to care. However, on the challenge side we saw an increase in children returning to protection plans, and the proportion of children subject to a protection plan for more than two years, as well as a decline in long-term stability of living arrangements for children in care and in the proportion of case audits judged good or outstanding, although this remains within tolerance of target.
2. Quarter 1 saw a number of workforce factors improve which should support performance to strengthen over time:

Around three-quarters of the workforce held target caseloads of 18 children or fewer per FTE (77%), with performance remaining steady although below target (90%). The greater majority of workers hold 23 children or fewer (96%) with performance within tolerance of target.

Overall, turnover in the 12 months to the end of June reduced for the fourth quarter to 11.5% from 14.9% in the 12 months to the end of June 2022. This is better than the majority of other Directorates and GCC overall. Turnover of Social Workers (includes newly qualified Social Workers, Social Workers and Senior Social Workers but excludes Agency workers) continued to reduce slightly to 23.4% in the 12 months to the end of June, down from 26.2% at the same time last year.

The vast majority of children had a Social Worker allocated in a timely way, with the number of children allocated to a Team Manager or with no allocated worker remaining low (44 children). The majority of children have experienced stability and continuity of Social Worker over time, with 87.3% having had two or fewer Social Workers in the last 6 months. Performance is within tolerance of target.

A key risk to our improvement journey remains *insufficient capacity and/or instability adversely impacting on pace and sustainability of improvement and contributing to discontinuity in social engagement with children and families (Moderate 12)*. In mitigation, we continue to make use of a wide range of routes into social work as part of our 'grow your own' strategy, including maximising our ASYE cohort.

Turnover and vacancies are showing signs of improvement however our agency proportion continues to be a challenge but should improve as we move our ASYE cohort into permanent positions. We are progressing with the implementation of systemic as our model of practice which will further increase practitioner confidence. The recent workforce health check is evidencing a greater confidence in leadership and the overall direction of travel.

3. Days lost to sickness absence per FTE were at the lowest level in two years in Quarter 1 (1.38 days). Performance was better than target and the organisation overall (1.77). Children's Services has a low level of long-term sickness absence (0.93 days lost per FTE compared with 1.17 for GCC overall).

Absence due to stress continued to follow a reducing trend (0.57 days lost per FTE compared with 1.15 days in March 2022). Performance is slightly better than the organisation overall.

4. Regular, good quality case supervision is essential to ensuring progress and risk management for children, as well as to provide practice guidance and support to Social Workers. 81% of children had a timely case supervision at the end of June. Performance has been static at an average of 83% over the last year and is worse than target (90%).
5. Seven out of every 10 staff in the service have had an appraisal discussion with their manager in the last 12 months (68% against a target of 85%). The appraisal process is intended to provide a clear link between the work of individuals to their business improvement plans and to the Council Strategy. It also supports the review of learning and development needed to ensure that GCC's workforce has the current skills and knowledge needed to deliver objectives. Appraisals form part of the framework of support for staff which aids retention.
6. There remains considerable variability underlying overall performance across teams and areas of work, as well as over time. This reflects current fragility within the system and introduces the potential for children to receive significantly different levels of service and inequity of response and support depending on where they live.

A further key risk to our improvement journey relates to *Ineffective social care practice, management oversight and review processes resulting in drift and delay for children and young people in situations of harm (Moderate 9)*. Central to our mitigation is the Continuous Improvement Plan which provides the framework for our improvement journey and was refreshed at year end (22/23) to reflect progress to date and focus on those areas yet to see tangible improvement. Our performance targets and QA framework have also been refreshed to align with our peer group averages. As this report sets out, our current data and QA activity evidences a mixed picture of improvement and variability and work is being undertaken to address this. Those teams that are stable and have completed systemic are showing the greater and more secure improvement.

7. Just under half of case file audits judged Social Care practice as Good or better in Quarter 1 (47%). This is a reduction from 53% in Quarter 4 but is within tolerance of target. Overall, the vast majority of cases were judged to be Requires Improvement or better (97%). This was better than target for the fourth quarter (90%) and was up from 93% last quarter.
8. Demand reduced slightly in Quarter 1 (down 3%) but remains high with almost 9,000 contacts received during the period. This will place pressure on the service with the potential for it to impact on performance.

Recent changes to multi agency practice within MASH have extended the length of time allowed to finalise the decision relating to the outcome and destination of contacts, increasing from 48 hours to 72 hours. This allows for purposeful work to be undertaken by practitioners within the MASH environment to ensure subsequent actions reflect the needs, risk and circumstances of the child. Decisions for two-thirds of children were made within 72 hours during Quarter 1 (66.9%); this remains significantly worse than target (90%).

All contacts undergo an initial risk assessment triage. All contacts rated as Red (risk to the child is evident and a 4-hour decision is required) were timely throughout Quarter 1 (100%).

9. The number of referrals reduced in Quarter 1 to around 1,600 from 1,750, with the monthly average down to a 6-year low. Re-referrals remain similar to the previous three quarters (26.3%), with performance over the rolling year at 27%. Performance is worse than target (21.5%) and the peer group average (20.1%, March 2022).
10. Overall, timeliness of initial visits remained similar to the previous quarter (76%) albeit against a declining trend, with performance reducing over the quarter from 78.3% in April to 72.5% in June. This is against a target of 85%. Performance continued to vary across localities, ranging between 69%-82%.

11. Timeliness of assessments for children improved for the second quarter, from 73.6% to 84.1%. Performance was within tolerance of target for the first time in almost two years. Timely assessment aids swifter understanding as to whether there will be intervention for families and enables us to expedite putting appropriate support and protection in place.
12. There were just under 2,250 Children in Need at the end of June. There was a reduction in seeing these children in a timely way at the end of Quarter 1 (85% down from 89% at the end of last quarter). Performance moved from within tolerance to worse than target. Timeliness of seeing children in two localities is impacting overall performance.
13. During the 6 months prior to Quarter 1, around one-third of Children in Need have had a plan implemented in a timely way following assessment or step down. This improved to 37% during Quarter 1 and by the end of the quarter was at 45%. However, this remains at half the target level (90%).
14. In June, we saw a significant improvement in the timeliness of reviews for Children in Need. Initial reviews timeliness has been a long-term challenge, however performance increased from 55% to 90% throughout the quarter and was better than target for the first time since reporting began for this measure in January 2021. Performance of subsequent reviews completed in the quarter has sustained a positive trend over time (97%). However, there is a legacy backlog of overdue reviews which needs to be addressed, with two-thirds of Children in Need overall having an up-to-date review.
15. During last year's Ofsted inspection, the timeliness of Strategy Discussions was highlighted as in need of improvement. Performance continued to improve for the third quarter, up from 63% to 93% and was better than target for the first time in more than a year.
16. Timeliness of initial child protection conferences had followed a declining trend for a year since Quarter 1 2022/23. However, this quarter saw an increase in performance of over 15% points to 82% and was within tolerance of target. Within the quarter timeliness fluctuated, performance therefore needs to be stabilised in order to maintain improvement.
17. The number of children subject to a protection plan rose slightly in Quarter 1 from 545 children to 565 children. However, this remains around the lowest level in 6 years and equates to a rate of 44.4 per 10,000 0-17 year olds; slightly above the rate in England (42.1) and our comparator group (36.2).

22 children have been subject to a protection plan for more than two years (3.9%). This is worse than target and the peer group average (1.6%, March 2022). Just over three-quarters of these children are in pre or court proceedings (17 children). Of the 7 children who are not open to proceedings, 5 are held by the FoD and are subject to their third protection plan.

18. The majority of children subject to a protection plan had been seen in a timely way at the end of Quarter 1 (89%) and performance was within tolerance of target (90%). With the exception of one locality, performance was within tolerance of or better than target for children across the County. Tewkesbury had seen 79% of its children in a timely way; a reduction throughout the quarter from 91% in April.

Most children subject to a protection plan aged 5 years and over had been seen alone in a timely way at the end of Quarter 1 (89%). This is the highest performance since reporting for this measure began almost 4 years ago and is fractionally lower than tolerance of target.

19. Just under one-third of children made subject to a protection plan during Quarter 1 had had a previous plan (31.7%). This is an increase for the second quarter, from 20.5%, and is worse than target (25%).

As a result of the rise in repeat protection planning in Quarter 1, performance over a 12-month period has increased to 29.4% and is worse than the preceding 12-month period (26.9%) and the peer group average (25.3%, 2021/22).

20. Around one-third of all children subject to a protection plan have had a previous plan (32.4%, 183 children), while 10.1% have had 3-5 protection plans (57 children). Of the children subject to 3-5 protection plans, one-third are in pre-proceedings or court proceedings (35%, 20 children).

21. At the end of June, there were 858 children in care, which is a marginal reduction over the last two quarters, from 875 children at the end of December (down 2%). This equates to a rate of 67.4 per 10,000 0-17 year olds, which is higher than our peer group (59.8) but slightly lower than England (70.0). There remain challenges with overall demand for care (including due to asylum seeking), the number of children in out of County placements and short-term and long-term placement stability.

Our ability to place children within County continues to be a challenge (71.1%). A quarter of children placed out of county live more than 20 miles from home (25.4%). This has been worse than target for two quarters as well as the peer group average of 22.4% (March 2022).

The proportion of children in care experiencing three or more changes to their living arrangements within 12 months remained similar to last quarter (14.6%, 125 children). This was worse than target for the fourth quarter (12%) and the peer group average (9.7%, March 2022).

Living in a settled home is a key factor in achieving positive outcomes for children in care. Performance reduced slightly compared with last quarter, with just under two-thirds of children who have been in care for more than 2 ½ years living in a settled home for more than two years (63.8%, down from 66.1%). Performance moved from within tolerance to worse than target (68%) and remains worse than the peer group average (71.1%, March 2022).

22. Two-thirds of children in foster placements are looked after by in-house Foster Carers (68%); this has remained similar for the last year. The majority of in-house foster care capacity is being utilised (86% of available placements).

23. A strategic risk to our ability to meet the needs of children relates to a *failure to develop sufficient placement capacity to meet the needs of looked after children (Moderate 12)*. The provider market continues to be challenging in terms of both capacity and quality. Our Sufficiency Strategy is key to mitigating this risk. This has been revised and initial work is now underway to develop our own capacity which will begin to become available in the final quarter of 2023/24. Alongside this, there has been a change in leadership within Commissioning and a dedicated team working on placement capacity, unit costs and progressing step down/return home. Taken together these are providing a greater grip on placement commissioning, costs and quality although the impacts will take some time to realise.

24. At the end of Quarter 1, one-fifth of children in care were accommodated under a Section 20 agreement (by consent of the parent where consent can be withdrawn at any time; the parent retains parental responsibility for the child) (19.5%, 167 children). Performance is within tolerance of target. We continue to have slightly higher than national levels of children accommodated under a Section 20 agreement (17%, March 2022). There are 37 children who have been accommodated under a Section 20 agreement for more than one year and who are not unaccompanied asylum seekers. Of these, 4 children are in pre or court proceedings to secure a permanent arrangement for them.

Unaccompanied asylum seekers account for 5.7% of children in care (50 children, aged 13-17 years) and almost one-third of young people accommodated under Section 20 (29.9%).

25. In Quarter 1, 87 children were admitted to care. Of these, 3 children had been in care within the previous 12 months (3.4%); this is better than target (7%). Over the rolling year, 6.3% of children have been readmitted to care within 12 months (21 children).

26. Timeliness of visits to children in care remained high at the end of June (96%) and has been better than target position throughout the last three quarters.

27. Reviews were timely for the majority of children in care (98%), this is better than target. Around three-quarters of children in care have an up-to-date pathway plan (77%) which is an improvement compared with the last 12 months (averaging 72%), but remains worse than target (90%)..
28. Just over 10% of children in care had a missing episode within the last 12 months at the end of Quarter 1 (11.7%, 105 children). This remains slightly worse than target (10.0%) and the comparator average (10.1%, March 2022).
29. At the end of June, more than a quarter of the school aged children in care (27.9%) had been persistently absent this academic year (an attendance rate of 90% or more school days). This is the highest level of persistent absence over the last three academic years, which includes periods affected by the pandemic where absence was high due to sickness. Significant improvement is needed to reduce inequalities in attendance between children in care and their overall peer pupil group to support the achievement of positive educational outcomes.
30. At the end of Quarter 1, the majority of care experienced adults were considered to be living in suitable accommodation (all age groups). Performance was within tolerance of target. We performed best for our 19-21 year olds (94%), while performance for care experienced young adults aged 16-18 has declined from 94% at the end of last quarter to 87% and is worse than target.
31. Half of care experienced people are in education, employment or training (EET) (50.5%). Performance is lower than at the same time last year overall (57.5%) and for each age group (16-18 years olds 48.6% compared with 60.7%, 19-21's 52% compared with 55.7% and Over 21's 47.4% compared with 53.3%).

The number of care experienced adults are in Higher Education declined from 28 at the end of last quarter to 24 young people (4.4%). This is worse than target (6.0%) and the peer group average (5.0%).

32. Just under 80% of care experienced adults had an up-to-date pathway plan at the end of Quarter 1. This has been worse than target for more than a year (90%). Improvement is needed to assure that care experienced adults are receiving the appropriate support to help them to achieve their goals.
33. We had seen the majority of older care experienced adults (over 21's) within timescale at the end of Quarter 1 (92%), although this has reduced from 96% last quarter and moved to a within tolerance of target position. There has been an improvement in performance for younger care experienced adults (16-20 years) (83.6% against a target of 90%). This remains worse than target but increased to the highest level in more than two years.