



Northumberland

County Council

Families and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date: 4th July 2019

Safeguarding Activity Trends Report

Report of the Executive Director of Adult Social Care and Children's Services, Cath McEvoy-Carr

Lead Member for Children's Services, Councillor Wayne Daley

Purpose of report

To provide analysis of social work activity trends and case allocation as well as highlighting national developments regarding the Department for Education safeguarding indicators.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the Committee:

- 1) Identify any issues for further scrutiny.

Link to Corporate Plan

This report is relevant to the 'Living' and 'Learning' sections in the Corporate Plan.

Key issues

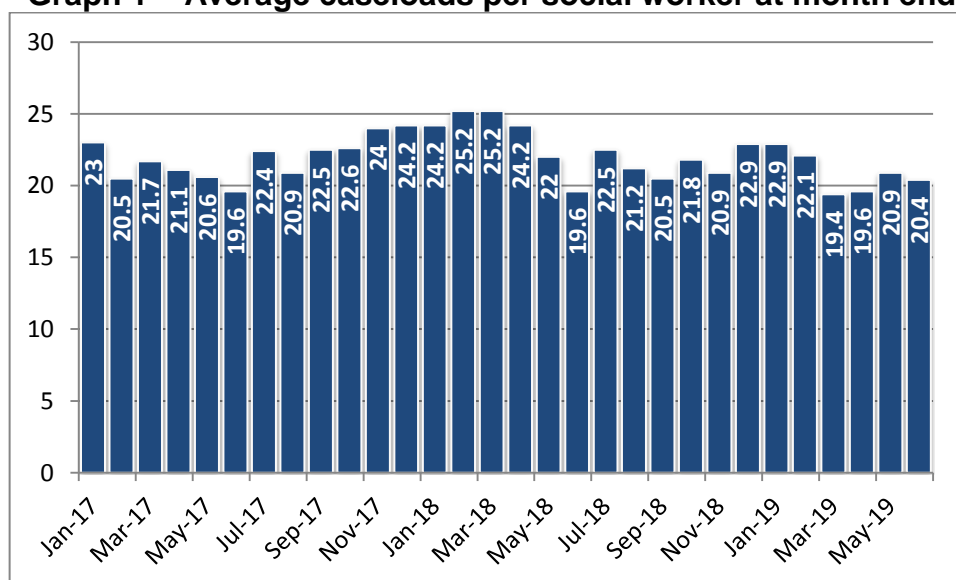
1. CASELOADS ANALYSIS

- 1.1 Systems are in place to closely monitor the Integrated Children's System (ICS) with regard to unallocated cases, and social care locality team caseloads. As part of this process, a list of all open cases was extracted on 17th June 2019.
- 1.2 Using the information from the caseload extract, there were 2,168 cases open to Children's Services on this date (compared to 2,519 in the last report). Of those open cases, 66% (1,423) were being held open on a child in need basis, 17% (372) were cases involving children looked after by the County Council (1 of which was also subject to a Child Protection Plan), and 17% (374) were cases of children subject to a Child Protection Plan (CPP). All cases needing social work

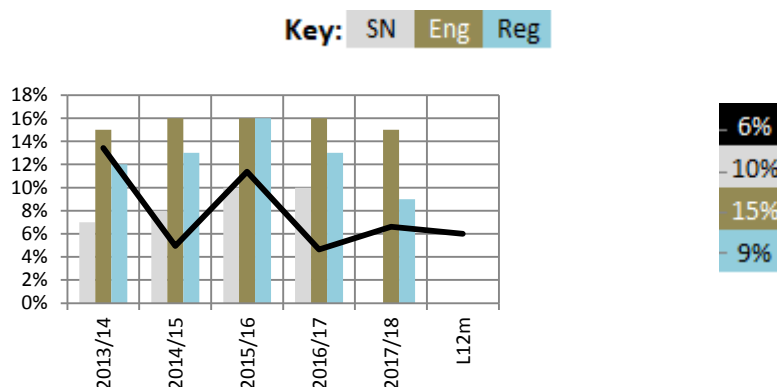
intervention are allocated to a named social worker.

- 1.3 All child protection cases are allocated to suitably skilled, experienced and qualified social workers and the capacity in the teams is closely monitored with managers demonstrating good oversight of cases. Systems are in place to ensure that appropriate professionals from the full range of agencies are involved in planning and review meetings.
- 1.4 Team workloads are also regularly evaluated and information systems are in place so that figures can be regularly reviewed. At the time of writing, there were 20.2 cases per full-time equivalent social worker, which is a slightly better rate compared to the previous report (20.4 in November 2018). There are 3 social workers with caseloads of 30 or more (compared to 5 in November 2018).
- 1.5 In order to allocate new cases appropriately, individual social worker workloads are regularly evaluated. The workload weighting matrix factors in case complexity, numbers of families, ongoing assessments and car mileage. Currently, 68% of social workers have a caseload weighting score that was within the desired region for their level of experience and role. Each team's matrix is discussed at monthly performance clinics with the relevant senior managers and high caseload weightings are appropriately checked and challenged.

Graph 1 – Average caseloads per social worker at month end



Graph 2 – Children's Social Work Workforce Return Agency Rate

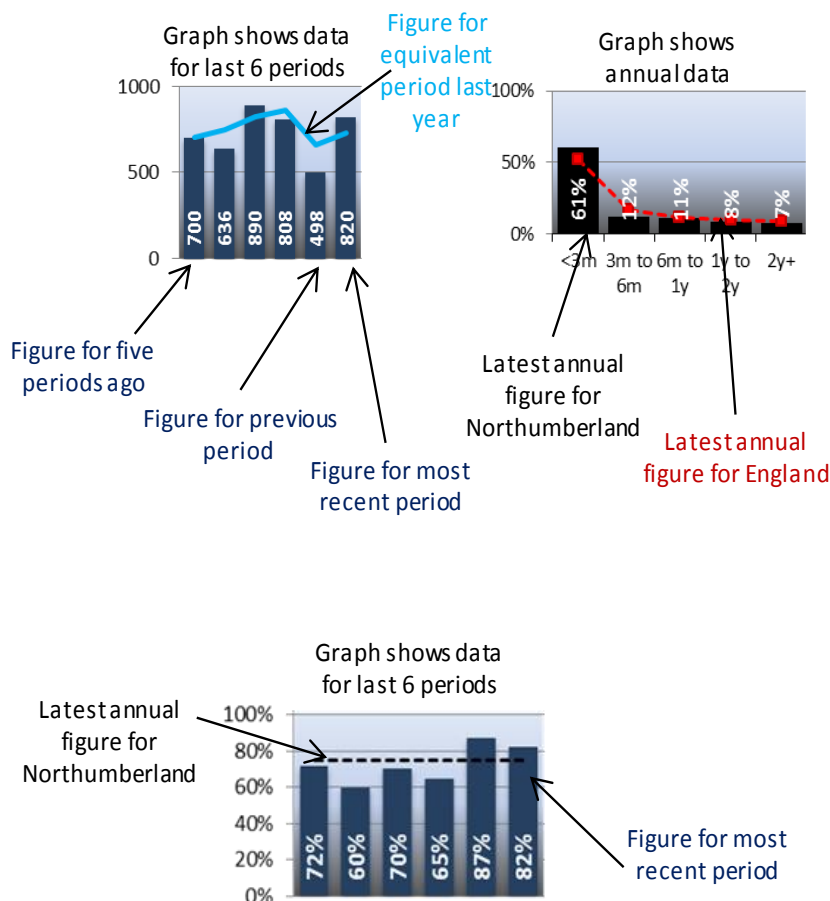


- 1.6 Northumberland's agency rate also continues to reduce and resides at 6% at the end of May 2019; compared to 7% at the end of September 2019. This is below the national rate (15%) and the regional average (9%). In order to recruit, retain and develop a stable workforce of social workers, there is a targeted recruitment campaign underway to attract newly qualified and experienced staff to Northumberland. Central to this is the ASYE Academy, which now has its second cohort of ASYE social workers. The first cohort of 8 workers moved into social work teams in February and the second cohort of eight are now in the Academy, with a further eight being recruited for the next tranche in August. As well as this, a Continuous and Professional Development (CPD) pathway has been developed and implemented for aspiring senior practitioners and managers.
- 1.7 Work with children in need is supported both by practical guidance and a policy framework. Assessments of children in need routinely record information, conclusions and decisions, and the vast majority are completed within the nationally-prescribed timescale and in June 2019 (so far), 100% of referrals had a decision made on them by a team manager within 1 working day.
- 1.8 Systems are in place to ensure that where staff are absent from work, their work trays (within ICS) can be picked up, checked and actioned, with the system generating alerts for workers to pick up tasks where necessary.

2. RECENT TRENDS WITHIN THE CHILD PROTECTION PROCESS

2.1 STANDARD DATASET

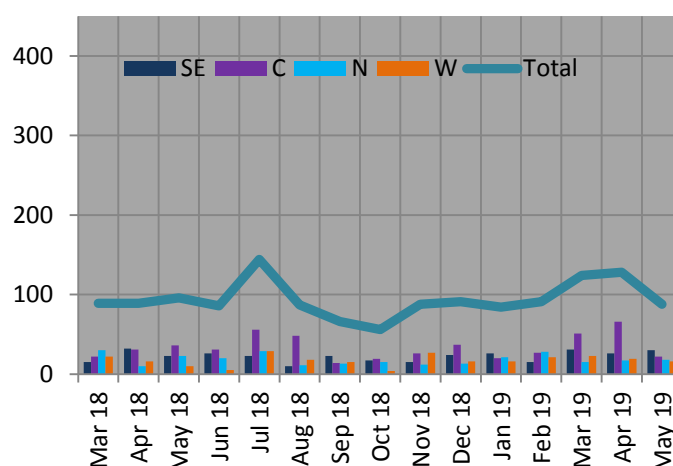
Guide to the graphs:



2.2 EARLY HELP

- 2.2.1 The Early Intervention Foundation (EIF) states that “early intervention involves identifying children and families that may be at risk of running into difficulties and providing timely and effective support”. The terms ‘early intervention’ and ‘early help’ are often used interchangeably, and describe a range of services, programmes or interventions to help children and families resolve problems before they become more difficult to reverse or require more interventionist support (such as social work).
- 2.2.2 The number of Early Help Assessments (EHAs) undertaken each month in Northumberland is outlined in Graph 3. The most recent EHA registration figures are for the 12 months leading up to the end of May 2019. Across this period, there were a total of 1,133 EHAs initiated – which when equated to the under eighteen population gives a figure of 192 per 10,000 – higher than the latest national rate reported by the Association of Directors of Children’s Services (ADCS) of 191 per 10,000.
- 2.2.3 The number of EHA's done across the county has remained fairly consistent, when compared to the previous year. Numbers in the Central and South East areas have slightly fallen whilst those in the North and West have increased. Extensive work has been carried out to improve the quality of data within the Early Help Module (performance management system), and this will allow data to be reported at agency level in future, and in turn be able to target those agencies where referrals may have dipped.
- 2.2.4 Referrals made into the early help hubs have significantly increased across all areas of the county as the service has become more established. The expectation is that this will continue to rise as the new ‘front door’ processes are introduced.

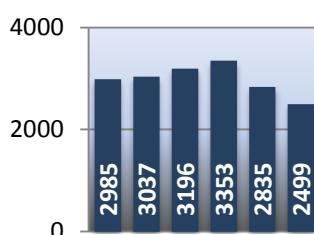
Graph 3 – number of EHAs undertaken per month



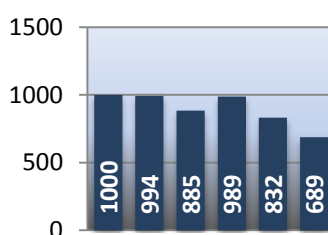
2.3 RECENT TRENDS WITHIN THE CHILD PROTECTION PROCESS

- 2.3.1 It is generally accepted that an initial contact is one received by children's services about a child where there is a request for general advice, information or a service¹. It may, or may not be accepted as a referral. A referral (as defined by Department for Education) is 'a request for services to be provided by local authority children's social care and is either in respect of a child not previously known to the local authority, or one where the case was previously open but is now closed'.
- 2.3.2 The number of initial contacts received in Northumberland looked to be decreasing. There were 2,499 contacts received in the quarter ending May 2019 (compared to 2,835 in the previous quarter). 689 of these were accepted as a referral within the social care teams in the most recent quarter - a 28% conversion rate (the latest national rate is 28%).
- 2.3.3 Over the past twelve months there have been a total of 3,395 referrals accepted by Northumberland's social care teams, which when equated to the most recent child population figures gives a rate of 575 per 10,000 – higher than the latest (2017/18) national rate (of 553), but lower than the regional rate (of 602). This figure represents a 5% increase compared to last year (549). Graphs 4a and 4b show the number of contacts and referrals received by Children's Services in each of the past six quarters.

Graph 4a – Contacts per quarter



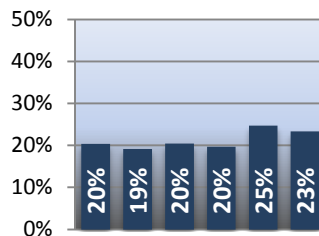
Graph 4b – Referrals per quarter



- 2.3.4 Around one quarter (25%) of referrals received in the last year were from the police, with 15% received from health agencies, 20% from services within Early Years and Schools and 21% from LA services.
- 2.3.5 A re-referral is defined as a second referral on a closed case within 12 months of a previous referral starting. In Northumberland, 23% of referrals received in the quarter ending May 2019 were counted as re-referrals, with this being lower than the previous quarter (25%). This figure is slightly above the national figure (22%), and above the regional average (18%).

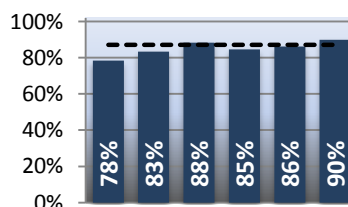
¹ ADCS Safeguarding Pressures Phase 5 Report, p20

Graph 5 – Re-referrals within 12 months



- 2.3.6 In the most recent quarter the proportion of re-referrals within 3 months of the previous referral was 5% (note this figure includes the percentage re-referred within 1 month). This figure is higher than the previous quarter (2%).
- 2.3.7 For the children and family (C & F) assessment, managers make a judgement about whether it should be completed within 10, 25 or 45 working days of the referral to children's services, depending on the needs of the child. Graph 6 (below) shows the proportion of assessments completed by the deadline set by the team manager.
- 2.3.8 Performance is now better than the service target of 80%, with 90% being completed in timescale (compared to 86% in the previous quarter). Whilst this isn't measured nationally, Northumberland completes a higher proportion of assessments in 45 working days (93%) compared to other local authorities in England and the North East (83% and 82% respectively). The improvement in performance has been due to senior and team managers embedding their expectations with regards to when assessments are submitted, as well as the level of quality that is expected within the assessment. Whilst some assessments are still completed outside of the timescales, the overall number has reduced. At the time of writing, 7 assessments were overdue.

Graph 6 - % assessments completed in timescale

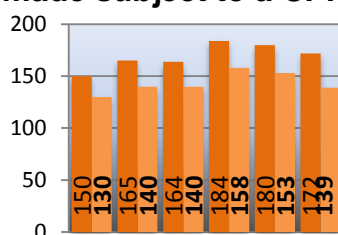


2.4 Child Protection

- 2.4.1 A Section 47 (S47) enquiry refers to enquiries conducted under the provisions of Section 47 of the Children Act 1989 where there are reasonable grounds to suspect that a child is suffering or is likely to suffer significant harm.
- 2.4.2 In the year ending May 2019, there were 1,360 S47 enquiries completed, equating to 231 per 10,000; higher than the latest national average of 167. This rate represents an increase compared to last year where the S47 rate was 183 per 10,000.
- 2.4.3 In the most recent quarter, 50% of all S47s led to an initial child protection conference (ICPC) – which is above the latest annual figure of 48%, and also above the latest national average (2017/18) of 40%. The most recent quarterly figure is in line with the figure from the previous quarter (50%).

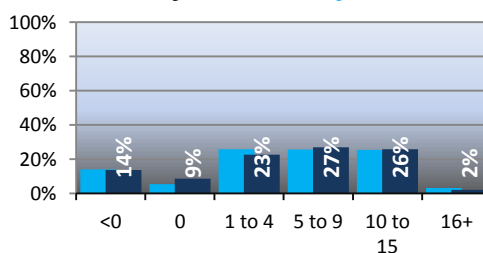
- 2.4.4 Over the previous year, 700 children were the subject of an ICPC, equating to 119 per 10,000 - above the national average (2017/18) of 67. Of these, 590 children were then made subject to a Child Protection Plan – equating to 100 per 10,000 – again, above the national rate of 58 and the regional rate of 88. This equates to 84% of children made subject to an ICPC went on to start a CPP.
- 2.4.5 In the most recent quarter ending May 2019, there were 172 children subject to an initial child protection conference (see graph 7) which represents a decrease from the previous quarter; with 139 being made subject to a child protection plan (CPP) – an 81% conversion rate.

Graph 7 – number of children subject to ICPCs and numbers subsequently made subject to a CPP



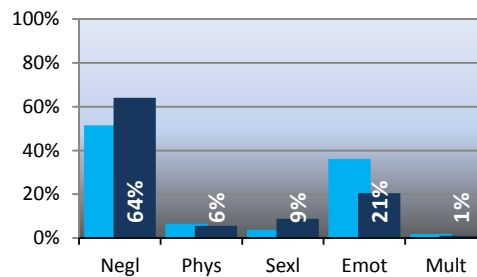
- 2.4.6 In the publication “Working Together to Safeguard Children”², it recommends that social work managers convene ICPCs within 15 working days of the most recent strategy discussion that triggered the Section 47 enquiry. In the year ending May 2019, 90% of ICPCs were held within this standard – better than the previous year’s figure (of 84%), the national average (2017/18) of 77%, and the regional average (of 83%).
- 2.4.7 Graph 8a shows the age groups of children starting CPPs in the year ending May 2019 (compared to year ending May 2018). 81 cases (14% of all CPPs started in the year) were unborn babies, with 51 (9%) being babies. 134 children (23%) were aged between 1 and 4 years old, with 159 (27%) being aged between 5 and 9. A further 153 children (26%) starting CPPs were aged between 10 and 15 years old, with 12 (2%) aged 16 or over.
- 2.4.8 Graph 8b shows the breakdown of the category of abuse for all CPPs started in the year ending May 2019. 381 children (65% of CPPs) were allocated the category of ‘neglect’ (compared to 47% nationally), with 33 cases (6%) labelled as physical abuse (8% nationally), 52 (9%) being due to sexual abuse (4% nationally), 122 children (21%) considered emotional abuse (35% nationally) and 6 (1%) being labelled with multiple abuse types (5% nationally).

Graph 8a – number of CPPs started in the year by age group
This year v last year



² Working Together to Safeguard Children, March 2015, page 38

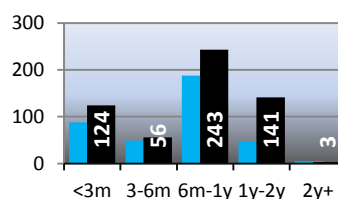
Graph 8b – number of CPPs started in the year by category of abuse
This year v last year



2.4.9 Of the 590 CPPs that started across the year ending May 2019, 101 children (17%) had previously had a CPP (compared to 20% nationally), with 31 children (5%) having had a CPP started within two years of a previous CPP ending.

2.4.10 Of the 567 CPPs ending in the year (see Graph 9), 124 (22%) ended within up to three months of the plan starting (compared to 20% nationally), 56 (10%) ended between three and six months (11% nationally), 243 (43%) ended between six and twelve months (42% nationally), 141 (25%) ended between one year and two years (24% nationally), and 3 (0.5%) of those ending started over two years before (3% nationally).

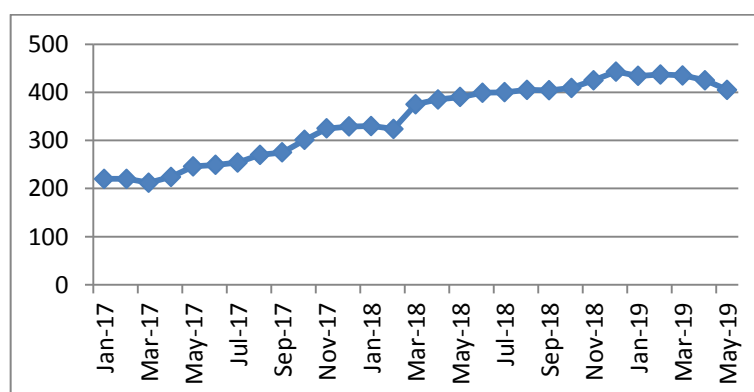
Graph 9 – number of CPPs ended by duration



2.4.11 At the end of May 2019, 405 children were subject to a CPP (see Graph 10), which when equated to the most recent population estimates equates to 69 per 10,000 of the under 18 population; above the national rate of 45 and regional average of 66 per 10,000.

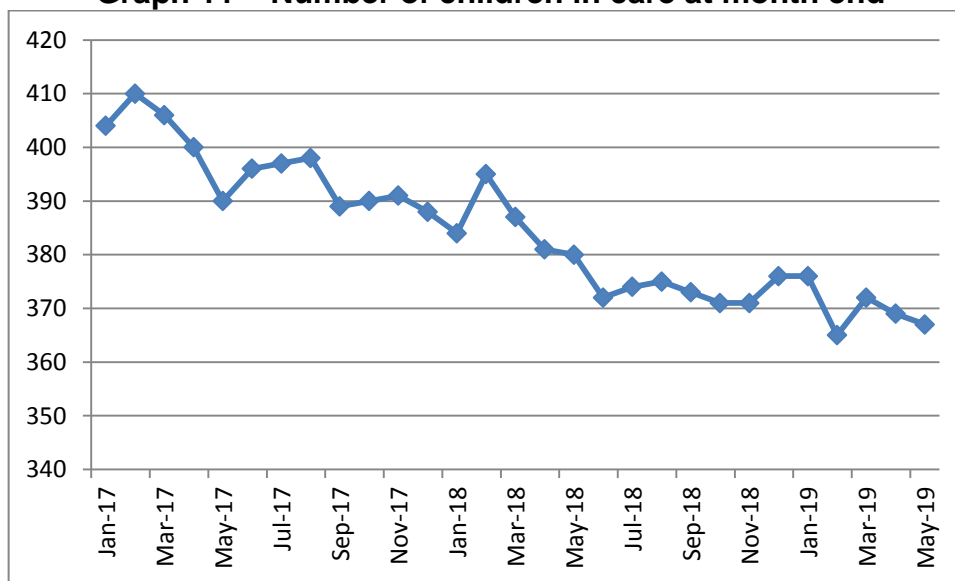
2.4.12 Overall, we have undertaken significant work analysing and auditing our child protection trends and work to ensure that our practice is safe and proportionate and we have put in measures including increased senior management oversight which has supported the recent downward trend in overall numbers.

Graph 10 – Number of children with Child Protection Plans at month end



2.4.12 At the end of May 2019 2017, 367 children were in care (LAC) (see Graph 11), which when equated to the most recent population estimates equates to 62 per 10,000 of the under 18 population; in line with the national rate of 64, and below the regional rate of 95 per 10,000.

Graph 11 – Number of children in care at month end



2.4.13 Recent regional analysis shows that Northumberland has the lowest LAC rate in the North East, with this being as a result of a more robust process around the decision making for children becoming looked after. A legal gateway panel meets each week to discuss children who may need to enter care, with previous decisions made at previous meetings also reviewed at the appropriate period. Further to this, we have enhanced and focused services to support children who are at risk of entering care to ensure that they can be supported safely at home where possible. This has resulted in LAC numbers reducing recently, which is in contrast to the regional picture.

IMPLICATIONS ARISING OUT OF THE REPORT

Policy:	Management of caseload allocation is a key part of safeguarding children.
Finance and value for money:	Figures provided in this report will allow managers to monitor the level of caseloads and activity on a quarterly basis in order to ensure resources are being allocated appropriately.
Legal:	The report includes information on Looked After Children cases, with a number of these being subject to care proceedings.
Procurement:	None.
Human Resources:	The council should continue to monitor the impact of resource investments with regards to workloads to ensure effective targeting to support staff and to improve performance. At present, there is a national focus on supervision, training and stress-levels of social workers.
Property:	None.
Equalities: (Impact Assessment attached) Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Risk Assessment:	The Laming Recommendations require that Directors must ensure that all cases of children assessed as needing a service have an allocated social worker and that Children's Services continues to prioritise and allocate the most at risk cases. This is the core element of the Ofsted inspection framework.
Crime & Disorder:	The prevalence of domestic violence and substance misuse are monitored during case reviews, and influence workload management decisions.
Customer Considerations:	The data in the report indicates the extent to which service user's needs are being met in the early stages of a case.
Carbon Reduction:	None
Wards:	None

CONSULTATION

The following have been consulted: Executive Director of Adult Social Care and Children's Services; Service Director – Children's Social Care; Acting Head of Safeguarding.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Lord Laming – The Victoria Climbié Inquiry.

Lord Laming – The Protection of Children in England: A Progress Report

Social Work Task Force – Building a safe, confident future

HM Government - Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation

Wood Report – Review of the role and functions of local safeguarding children boards

ADCS Safeguarding Pressures Report Phase 5

ADCS Safeguarding Pressures Report Phase 6

Report sign off

	Full name of officer
Monitoring Officer/Legal	
Interim Executive Director of Finance & S151 Officer	
Relevant Executive Director	Cath McEvoy-Carr
Chief Executive	
Portfolio Holder(s)	Wayne Daley

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