



# Northumberland

## County Council

### **FAMILY AND CHILDREN'S OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**DATE: 9 JANUARY, 2020**

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#### **CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE AND UNIVERSAL CREDIT**

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

**Cabinet Member: Councillor Wayne Daley, Executive Member for Children's Services**

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#### **1 Purpose of report**

To analyse activity trends within the social work system to evaluate if there is a link between increased need and the launch of universal credit, as well as reviewing the trends in the longer term.

#### **2 Recommendations**

To note the position regarding access to universal credit data and the ongoing work being undertaken within the local authority on this issue.

#### **3 Links to Corporate Plan**

The implementation of Universal Credit links to "we want you to feel safe, healthy and cared for" included in the NCC Corporate Plan 2018-2021.

#### **4 Key Issues**

- Universal credit was launched in Northumberland in November 2018 and December 2018.
- The local authority does not have access to the universal credit data at individual claimant level so we cannot analyse the data in sufficient detail to say if there is a causal link.
- Proxy measures show that since the launch of universal credit, there has not been a significant or sustained increase in referrals to early help, social work, child in need plans and requests for financial support, but there have been some increases in children being made subject to child protection plans and becoming looked after. However, we are not in a position to make any judgements about direct links between universal credit and demand on children's social care.

- Research to assess if there is evidence that poverty increases the amount of child abuse and neglect found that poverty is neither a necessary nor sufficient factor in its occurrence.
- Analysis of patterns over the last 10 years show that there has been an overall decrease in the number of referrals for social work services, and an increase in the numbers subject to CPPs and the numbers who are looked after, although this has been a fluctuating picture, not a sustained increase.

## **5 Background (also see Appendix A)**

The Family and Children’s Overview and Scrutiny Committee has heard about an increase over the last 2 years in the numbers of children and young people who are subject to child protection plans (CPPs). In response to queries about the background reasons, other trends within the social work system, and whether there are any links to the launch of universal credit, this briefing has been compiled for elected members.

The Committee heard that deprivation can contribute to increased need, and certainly it is the case that we have seen the greatest levels of increase in CPPs in the most deprived wards of the county. However, child abuse and neglect is caused by many interlocking factors. A research review by Joseph Rowntree Foundation to investigate to what extent there is evidence that poverty increases the amount of child abuse and neglect found that poverty is neither a necessary nor sufficient factor in its occurrence. Many children who are not from families in poverty will experience abuse or neglect in some form and most children in families who are living in poverty will not.

### **5.1 Analysis**

At the time of reporting, the local authority does not have access to universal credit data at the individual claimant level so it is not possible to identify if there is a causal link between the increase in child protection plans and the launch of universal credit. The local authority does have aggregated universal credit claimant data at locality “town” level (e.g. Blyth), but this is not detailed enough to allow for an analysis of a causal link. The individual claimant-level data is owned by the Department of Work and Pensions and a data protection conversation would be required to establish if there were grounds for it to be cross-referenced against the Children’s Social Care client level data.

In June, Informal Cabinet received a report on the implementation of Universal Credit Full Service and its impact since rollout. It analysed the impact on Housing, Financial Support, Employability, Council tax support and the Deputyship team, and an update is due before Christmas. The report did not analyse the impact on Children’s Social Care Services.

In the absence of individual claimant-level data, we have analysed proxy measures, as we may have expected to have seen an increase in referrals to early help and the social work service, and we may also have expected to have seen an increase in section 17 payments to financially support families. This analysis has not shown any significant or sustained increases in any of these areas.

The average number of children and young people subject to child protection plans (CPPs) was, however, higher in the months after the launch of universal credit in the county than it was in the period before. More recently (from August of this year), there has been a slight

increase seen in the number of care proceedings and the number of children coming into care, although this still remains well below the regional average. Whereas, during this period, the number subject to a CPP has reduced.

We have done some initial analysis based on child poverty levels per ward for 2017/18, looking at the % of the under 18 population with a CPP at the end of October 2018 (i.e. before Universal Credit) and the % who've received a CPP since then. The analysis showed that child poverty in Northumberland does have some impact on the number of CPPs, however, it appears to be less of a factor since Universal Credit was introduced (the statistical score was 56% before and 52% after). A score of 100% means that all variation in the number of CPPs are completely explained by child poverty and a score of below 70% is not that significant, i.e. child poverty, whilst having an affect, won't necessarily influence the number of CPPs in a ward). This is a fairly crude comparison, and to do it properly, the 2018/19 child poverty figures would need to be considered for the period when Universal Credit was introduced (but these have not been published yet).

With regards the longer term 10 year pattern, tables 1 and 2 below show that:

- Numbers of referrals for social work services have shown an overall decrease in Northumberland, yet an increase nationally. In Northumberland, the numbers have fluctuated more than they have nationally.
- Numbers of children and young people subject to a CPP have shown an overall increase in Northumberland, although that has not been a sustained increase, with the number at March 2017 being lower than the national one. Nationally, the numbers have also shown an overall increase.
- Numbers of children who are looked after have also increased in Northumberland as they have nationally. Whilst the level of increase in Northumberland has been more marked, the actual number at March 2019 was still below the overall national figure.

Table 1

	Northumberland										
	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19
Referrals per 10k	672	719	730	758	857	558	983	844	557	608	609
CP plans @31/03 per 10k	36	42	28	33	47	58	59	61	40	66	70
LAC @ 31/03 per 10k	44	47	44	46	52	54	62	65	69	66	63

Table 2

	England										
	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19
Referrals per 10k	497	548	557	534	521	573	548	532	548	553	545
CP plans @31/03 per 10k	34	36	39	38	38	42	43	43	43	45	44
LAC @ 31/03 per 10k	55	58	59	59	60	60	60	60	62	64	64

While financial pressures, including receipt of universal credit, may increase stress for families, it is difficult to directly link this to the increase in numbers subject to a child protection plan, or looked after children. There are a variety of reasons why a child or young person may become subject to a CPP, or be placed in care (LAC). When we have audited such cases, the key question has been, was the decision the most appropriate one for that individual, and in the large majority of cases, the audits judged that it was.

## 5.2 Interventions

These statutory interventions often take place after Children's Social Care has already been working with families on a less intensive footing, for example, through social workers on a child in need basis or at an early help level. It would always be the aim to work with families on the least intrusive level possible whilst ensuring that risk is managed, but in some circumstances, concerns are escalated to the level where agencies decide a multi agency child protection plan is necessary to protect children and young people from significant harm. Where risk to the child is not felt to be manageable on a child protection plan, the intervention will then escalate to care proceedings and, ultimately, removal of the child into the care system.

A range of services that support families in need are provided by Children's Social Care. Some examples are:

- Northumberland Families First - provides intensive support to families where children are on the edge of the looked after system to prevent them from needing to go into care, or to support rehabilitation home after they have left care.
- Children's Centres - as well as providing universal services, they provide the Freedom programme and the Recovery Programme for women who have experienced domestic abuse. Children's Centres also run the Incredible Years programme for strengthening parent/ child interactions and attachment, reducing harsh discipline and fostering parents' ability to promote children's social and emotional and learning development.
- Operation Encompass, which aims to safeguard and support children and young people who are involved in or affected by incidents involving domestic abuse by ensuring that appropriate school staff are made aware early enough to support children in the best way possible.
- Operation Endeavour, cited as good practice in the recent JTAI, which involved the police, the LA and schools sharing information securely regarding children and young people who go missing, or are at risk of such.
- Our multi agency front door also ensures that the right service is provided at the right time for families.

## 5.3 Outcomes of interventions

There are various indicators that tell us about the outcomes of our interventions. Whilst there are a small number of cases where 'stepping down' after a period of intervention has not led to sustained progress, our evidence shows that in the majority of cases, families benefit from our interventions. For example:

- When we contact families whose cases have been audited to gather their feedback on what it was like for them to experience intervention by a social worker, 86% of respondents said that the social worker had made a positive difference (48 out of 56 responses) and 92% said that if anything happened in the future, they would feel confident about receiving services again (49 out of 53 responses).
- It is very rare that a child protection plan is needed for more than 2 years, a good indication that sufficient progress has been made with the family. 4 years ago, 10% of children and young people's child protection plans lasted more than 2 years, but now, encouragingly, it is zero. This means that risk has been reduced for these

children, either by effective support and working with the family, or an escalation of interventions leading to the child becoming looked after.

- Northumberland’s Supporting Families (aka Troubled Families) programme has been amongst the top performing in the region in achieving the locally-set outcomes for the families identified. The feedback from the MHCLG (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government) is that Northumberland is projected to have the 3rd highest percentage of ‘turned around’ families in the region by April 2020.

## 5.4. Conclusion

As we do not have access to the individual claimant-level data on universal credit, we cannot say that there is a link between it and these increases in need. However, it is clear that since the date when universal credit was launched, we have seen some increase in the number of cases that are being managed using the higher levels of intervention, ie CPPs and LAC. This was not as apparent in the summer as it is now. However, we are not in a position to make a judgement about causation, or any direct links between universal credit and demand on children’s social care. That is also the case when we analyse the longer term pattern. Whilst there has been an increase in need over the last 10 years, as there has been nationally, it has fluctuated, and therefore a direct causal link cannot be made.

## 6. Implications

<b>Policy</b>	Reference is made to the Council’s reports to Informal Cabinet on how Universal Credit is being implemented in Northumberland.
<b>Finance and value for money</b>	The report refers to the amount spent on s17 payments that are made to prevent children and young people coming into care. There has been a decrease in the amount of s17 monies paid to families following the introduction of universal credit and additional funding is not required.
<b>Legal</b>	The report refers to the volume of care proceedings.
<b>Procurement</b>	n/a
<b>Human Resources</b>	n/a
<b>Property</b>	n/a
<b>Equalities</b> (Impact Assessment attached) Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No x N/A <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Whilst the report refers to deprivation, it does not make any recommendations that would result in changes to services, so an impact assessment is not required.
<b>Risk Assessment</b>	n/a
<b>Crime &amp; Disorder</b>	n/a
<b>Customer Consideration</b>	Reference is made to the Council’s reports to Informal Cabinet on how Universal Credit is being implemented and how customer needs are being considered.

<b>Carbon reduction</b>	n/a
<b>Wards</b>	All

## 7. Background papers

Research by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation: "The evidence between poverty, child abuse and neglect: an evidence review  
Reports to Informal Cabinet

## 8. Report sign off

***Authors must ensure that officers and members have agreed the content of the report:***

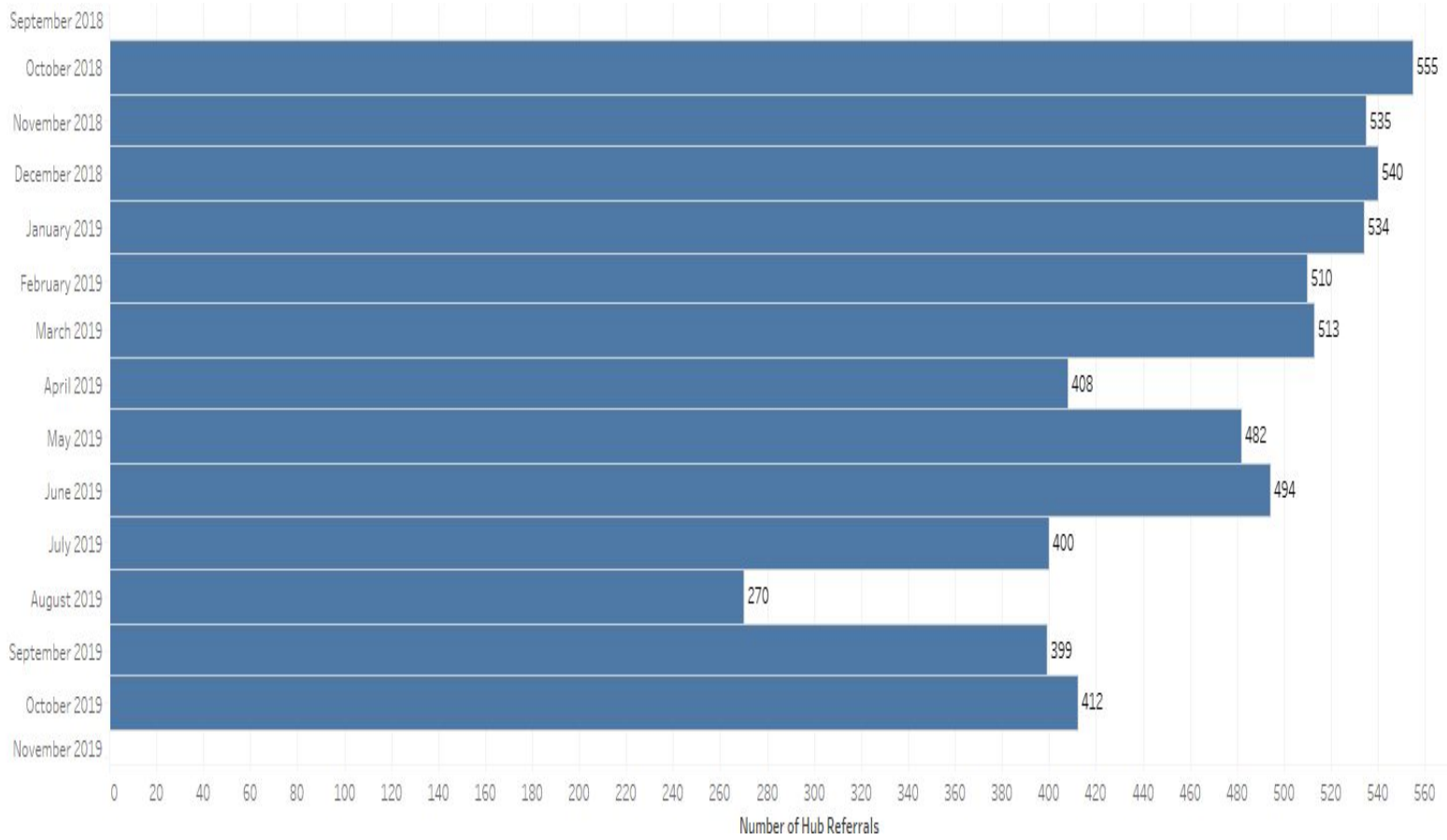
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Executive Director of Finance	CH
Relevant Executive Director	CM-C
Chief Executive	DL
Portfolio Holder(s)	WD

## 9. Authors and Contact Details

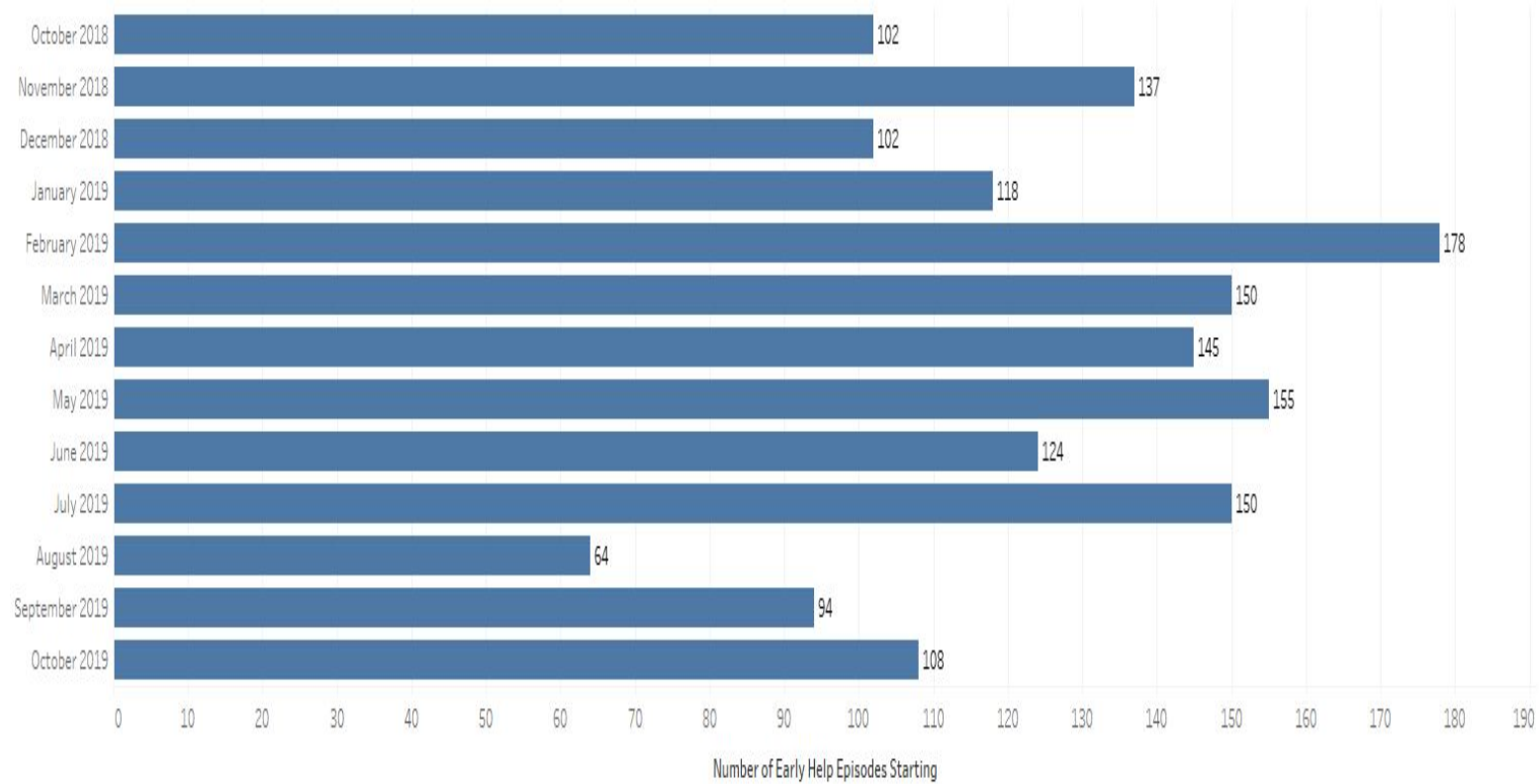
This report has been prepared on behalf of Cath McEvoy-Carr, Executive Director of Adult Social Care and Children's Services. For further information, contact Alan Hartwell on 01670 623589 or at Alan.Hartwell@northumberland.gov.uk

## Appendix A

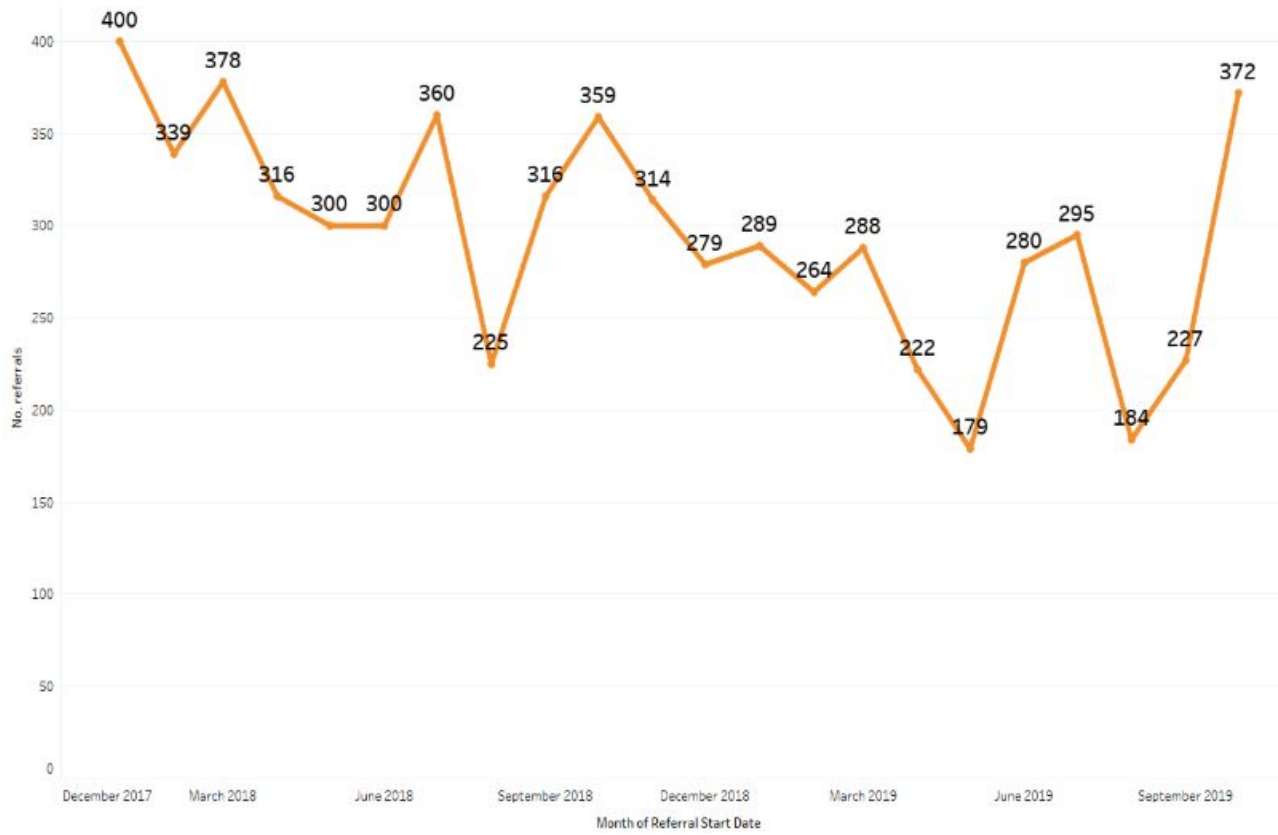
### Early Help Hub Referrals



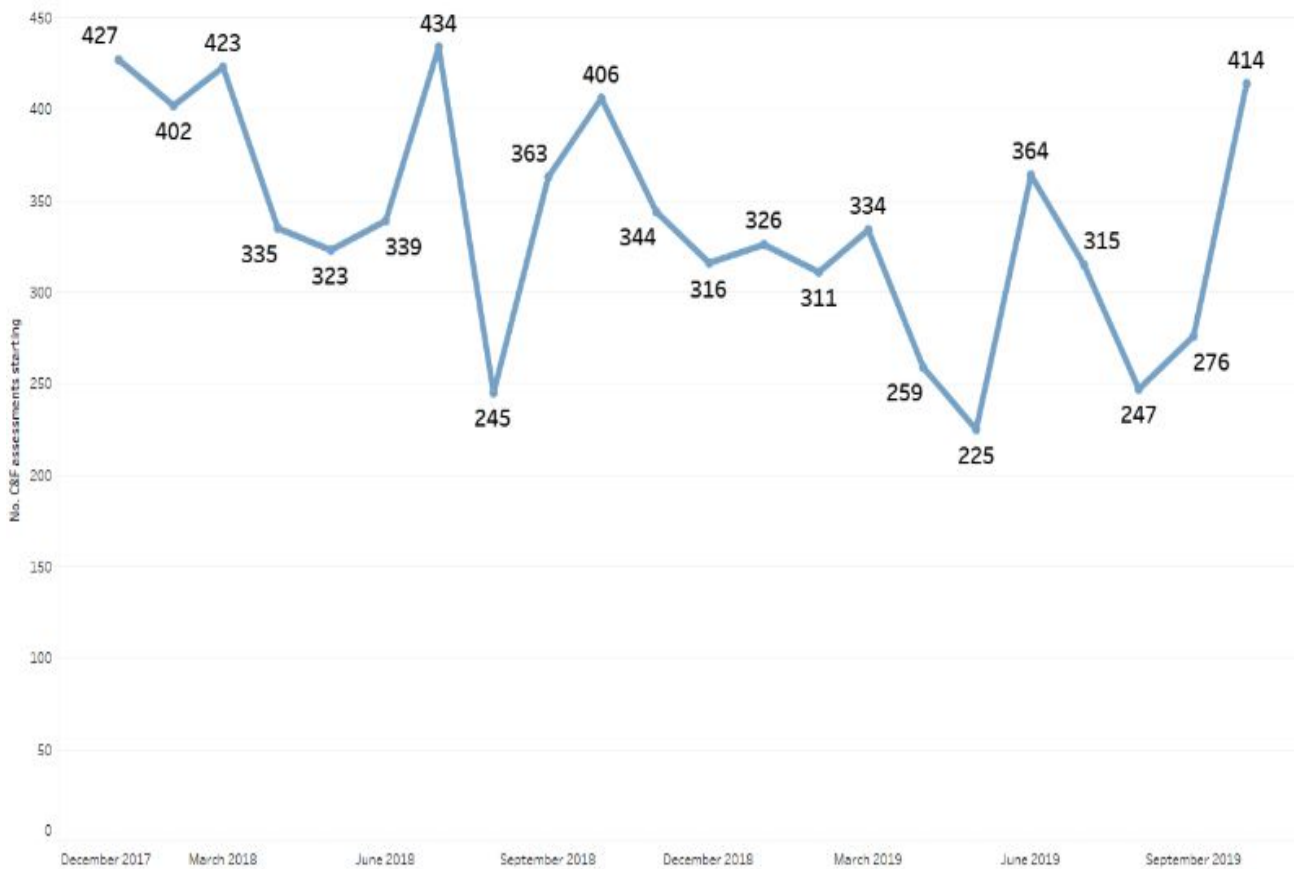
### Early Help Assessments Starting



## Referrals into Children's Social Work by month

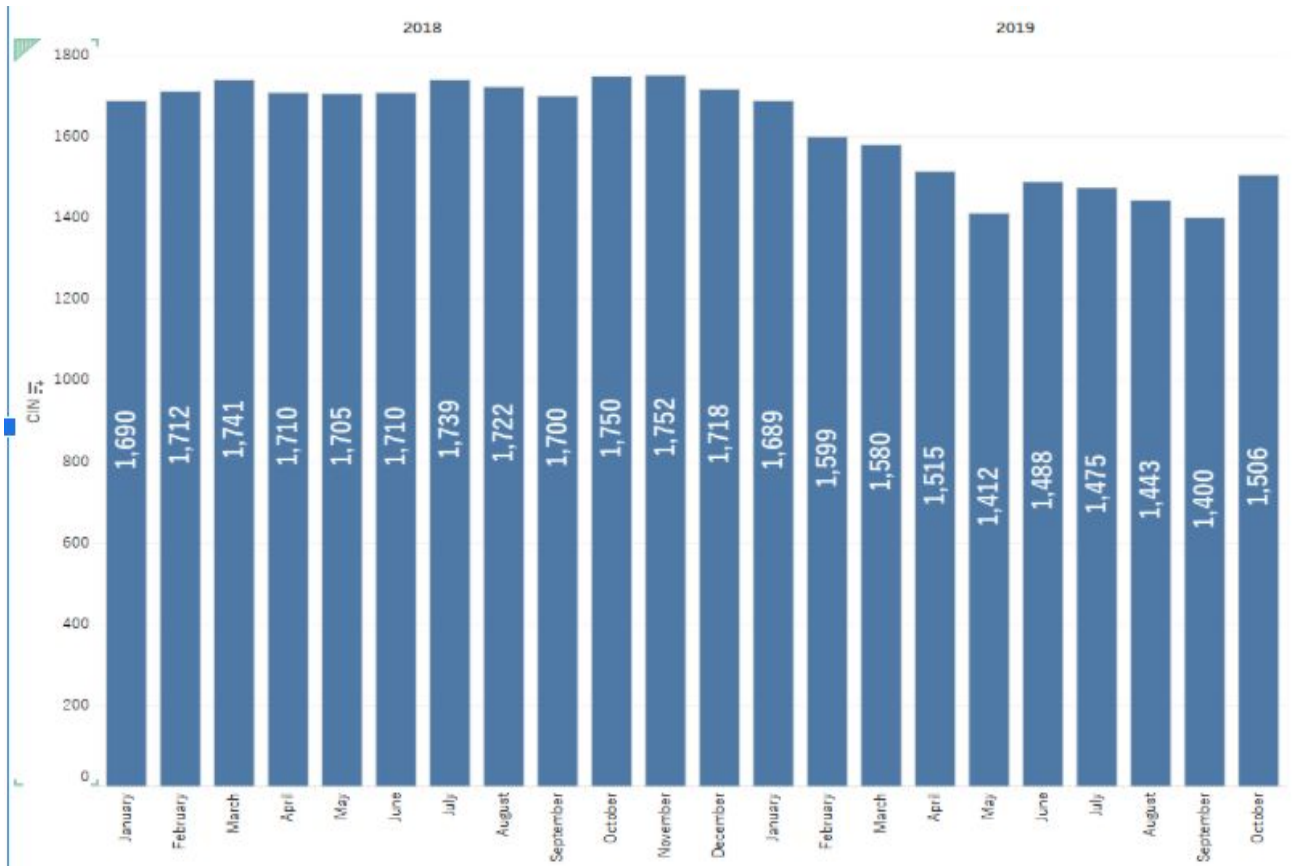


## Children and Families Assessments Starting within Children's Social Work by month (incl. those on open cases)

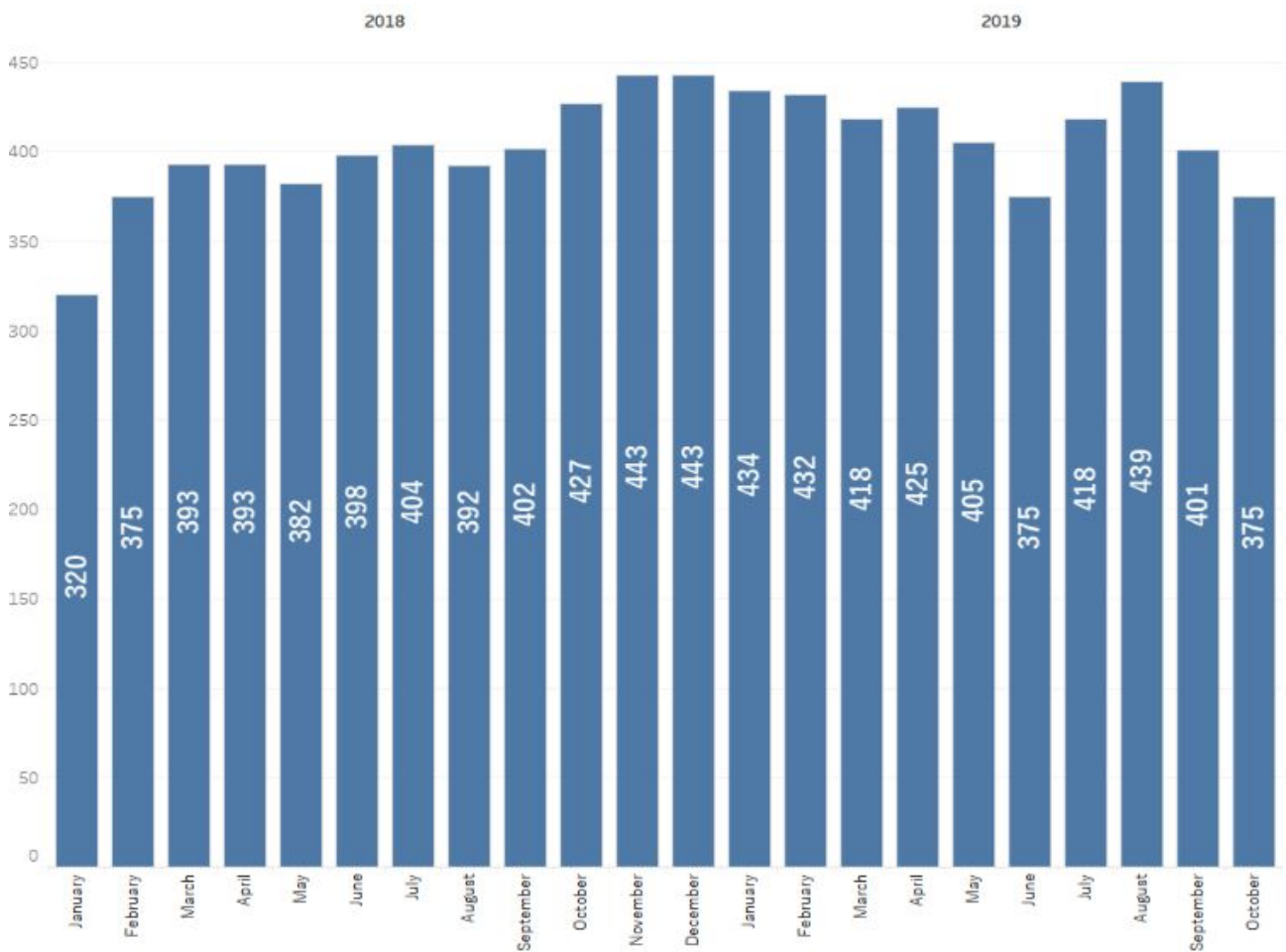




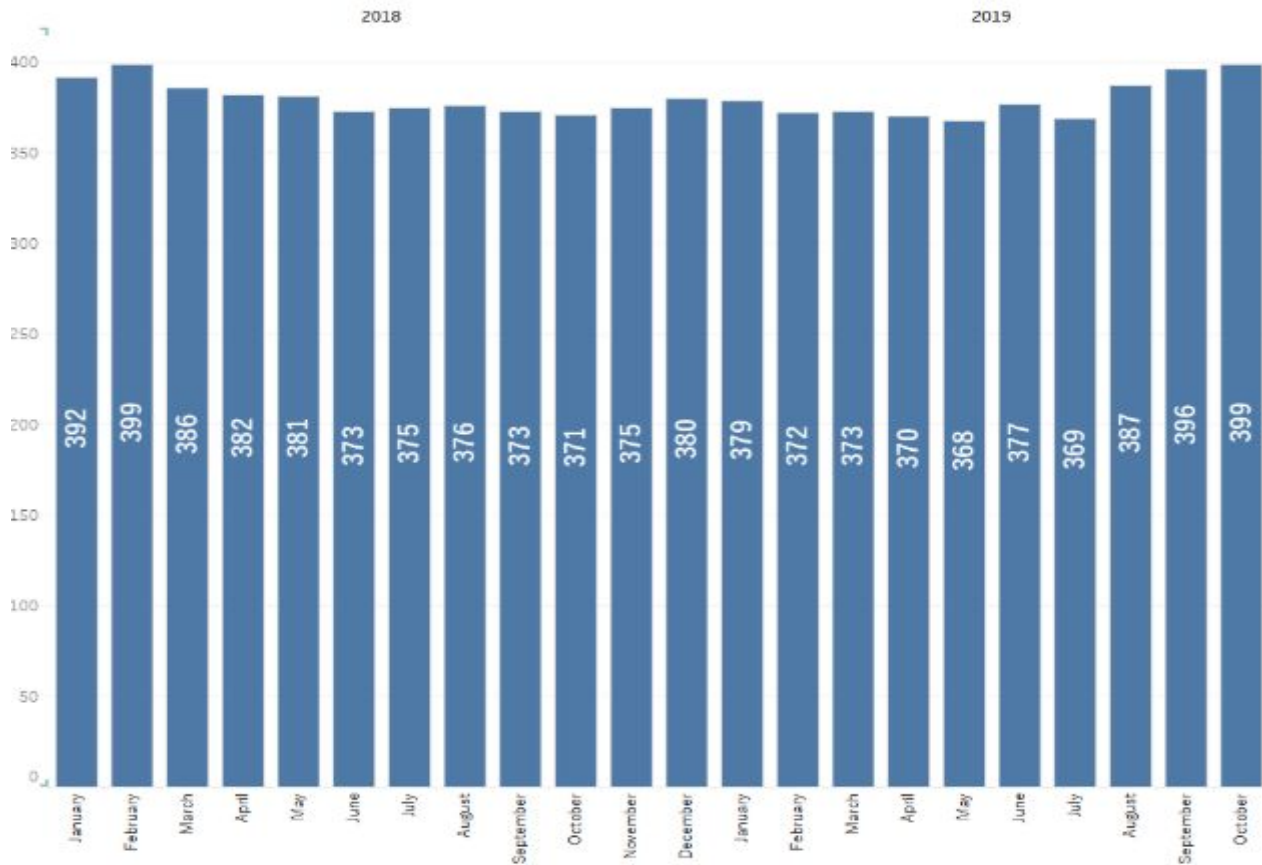
## Children in need at month end



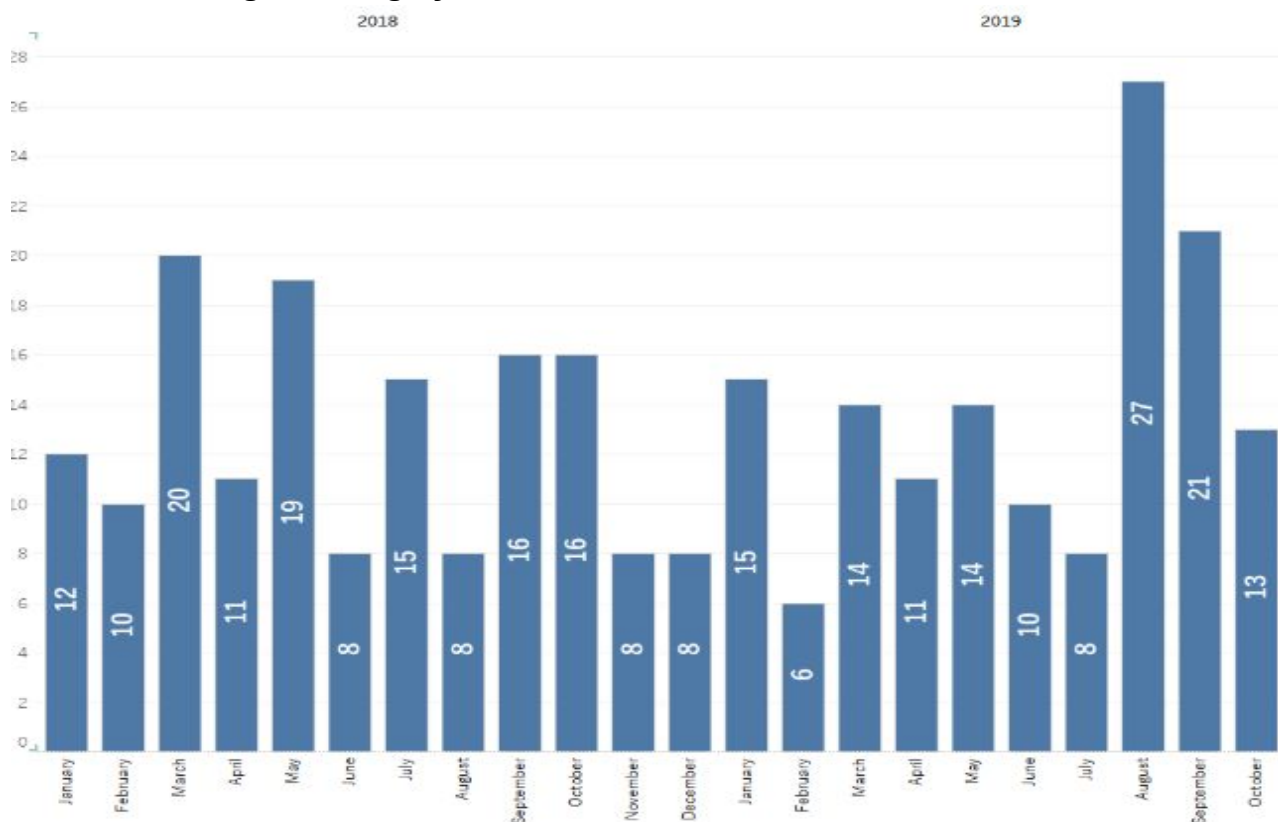
## Children subject to child protection plans at month end



## Looked After Children at month end



## Care Proceedings starting by month



## Section 17 payments

Jul-18	Aug-18	Sep-18	Oct-18	Nov-18	Dec-18	Jan-19	Feb-19	Mar-19	Apr-19	May-19	Jun-19	Jul-19	Aug-19	Sep-19	Oct-19
17,058	14,396	11,987	16,896	10,930	5,120	11,612	6,808	7,667	4,408	10,253	4,420	7,511	18,583	5,273	7,956