



Northumberland County Council

FAMILIES AND CHILDREN'S OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 8TH SEPTEMBER 2022

PERFORMANCE & FINANCE REPORT (CHILDREN'S SERVICES)

Report of Audrey Kingham and Graham Reiter, Joint Interim Directors of Children's Services.

Cabinet Member: Councillor Guy Renner-Thompson, Lead Member for Children's Services

1. Purpose of report

To consider current performance and the budgetary position as at June 2022 for services within the Committee's terms of reference.

2. Recommendations

It is recommended that the Committee notes the current performance, how it compares to benchmarks, and identifies any areas for further scrutiny.

3. Link to Corporate Plan

This report relates to the Living, Learning and Tackling Inequalities elements of the Corporate Plan.

4. Key issues

1. Children's Services continues to perform well against its targets, although within the field of Education and Skills, the picture is partially outdated due to there being no comparable achievement outcome results since 2019 (the next set will be available in September 2022).

2. Given the impact of the pandemic on education services in particular, benchmarking against previous years is provided not only for 2020/21, but also against 2018/19, which was the most recent “normal” academic year in terms of how services and education providers were operating.
3. There is a clear understanding of the underlying data for those indicators in need of improvement, and appropriate actions have been identified and communicated to the relevant parties.
4. Targets and amber tolerances for the key performance indicators have been reviewed.
5. The budgetary position continues to be challenging. The report provides the end of June data, although it is early within the financial year and care should be taken in drawing any conclusions about performance.

This report is for discussion.

5. Background

The Service Statements across the Council set out priorities for delivering the Corporate Plan together with a performance framework covering past performance levels and future targets. The performance measures are captured on a web-enabled system and current performance is updated regularly so that the most recent information is available to Members, officers and the public.

This report uses the performance data for the quarter ending June 2022 for Children's Social Care (CSC) and Education & Skills (E&S). The suite of indicators in both services were reviewed during 2021 and were rationalised to reflect priorities. In May 2022, the targets and amber tolerances were reviewed for each indicator taking into account our knowledge of the recent trends and demand levels in Northumberland, the latest national averages and where we most want to improve in light of corporate priorities.

This report provides analysis of performance on those indicators that can be benchmarked against the national average where available, as well as providing the direction of travel against previous years, and against the targets set. Where there is no national average, i.e., if the indicator is a local one, the June 2022 figures are benchmarked against the position for the previous year in the case of CSC and against the position 3 years ago in the case of E&S (i.e., prior to the impact of the pandemic). The report also provides the budgetary update for the period up to June 2022.

For details on how Children's Services performs against its targets within the context of the whole Council, please refer to the quarter 4 report produced by the Business and Intelligence team. Members should note that in addition to this report, the Corporate Parenting Advisory Group receives bi-monthly performance reports on data relating to children looked after children (CLA) and care leavers, and the Audit Committee receives a 6 monthly update on external inspection scrutiny that has taken place in Children's Services and Adult Social Care. Those reports are available on request.

5.1 Children's Social Care:

With reference to Appendix A, of the 8 CSC indicators where there is a national average, the department is currently performing better on 3, similar on 1, and poorer on 4. (The national averages are not contemporaneous with the local authority's more current data and in general are 12 months old.) The context behind this is that an increase in demand levels was seen in the quarter January – March 2022, which then stabilised in the following quarter, and this has manifested itself in higher numbers of contacts, referrals, numbers subject to a child protection plan and numbers needing to be in care during the last 2 quarters. Managers are also reporting that the work has increased in complexity. Coupled with this, we are still experiencing some challenges with home and school placement stability for children in care, and there are continued concerns over the

turnover of social workers, an issue this committee has previously received a report about.

Encouragingly, effective and creative early help and preventative work has ensured that statutory services have not been overwhelmed, manifesting itself in good outcomes for those involved with Early Help Family Workers, low rates of young people re-offending, social worker caseloads that are broadly equal to the latest national average, and improving outcomes for older care leavers in line with our corporate priorities.

Context and actions being taken for measures that are poorer than the national average are as follows:

Rate of children and young people subject to child protection (CP) plans per 10,000 (10K) population

Comments and actions:

The figure for quarter 1 of 66 is a reduction from the last quarter, it having increased through 2021-22. The figure of 66 is similar to the regional average, but higher than the national average of 41. Application of thresholds, decision-making, and case planning are all reviewed during practice days and audit activity that take place in Children's Social Care.

Rate of Children Looked After (CLA) per 10,000 population

Comments and actions:

The number of children in our care increased in the quarter after Christmas. Analysis showed that the number of children entering care had remained fairly constant, but the number exiting care had reduced, in particular via the adoption route. Also, fewer had turned 18 in that quarter, and thereby left care. Following this increase in quarter 4, quarter 1 saw the number of children needing to be looked after remain fairly stable. Northumberland's figure at the end of June of 73 per 10,000 remains one of the lowest in the region, is significantly below the regional average of 114, and slightly above the national average of 67. The legal gateway panel ensures that all safe and relevant options are considered and if care is needed, that clear plans are in place to proceed for the child.

% of Children Looked After who have been in care for 2.5 years or more, and who have been in the same placement for 2 years or more

Comments and actions:

There was a marked reduction in February 2022, from 68% to 60%, which has slowly increased to 63% by the end of June 2022. From our data analysis, we understand why the figure is lower than it traditionally has been and that is due to none of the children or

young people who are in adoptive placements having been in care for over 2.5 years. Typically there have been between 9 and 12, adding between 6-10% to the figure. Other factors include some young people who had been in stable placements either turning 16 or being adopted and therefore dropping out of the cohort. We are progressing the project to develop further support for foster carers and have further developed our monitoring to support timely achievement of long-term placements where this is the plan for our Children Looked After.

% of CLA who have had 3 or more placement moves in the last 12 months

Comments and actions:

Performance in this area has dipped slightly during quarter 1 following improvement in the previous quarter. The latest figure of 12% is short of the national and regional average of 9%. The difference from the previous quarter in real terms is that 11 more children / young people had 3 or more placements in the last year. Whilst the latest figure for the end of June is more than we would wish, we are not seeing the high percentages that were being reported a year ago, and more integrated working between the Family Placement service, Virtual School and foster carers has been a significant factor in bringing that about. A sufficiency strategy setting out high level objectives has been to the scrutiny committee and placement stability is a priority within the corporate parenting strategy with a range of actions in place to increase sufficiency and further develop resilience and support for carers.

5.2 Education and Skills:

With reference to the Education and Skills data in Appendix B, due to Covid 19, some of the usual measures do not have an update as pupil attainment data was not validated and therefore not comparable with previous years. However, all measures that could be updated, have been. The next data on key stage texts / exams will be available from September 2022.

There are 7 indicators for which there are national averages (NA), and the table shows that of the updated measures, 4 are better than the NA, 1 is poorer, and 2 are similar. Consistently very strong performance compared to the NA is being seen in the areas of: offering parents their first choice of school; take up of the statutory entitlement to free education for 2 year olds; and the proportion of schools with less than Good Ofsted gradings who are judged to be Taking Effective Action.

Those who need an Education, Health and Care Plan usually receive one quicker than is the case nationally, and whilst the timeliness fluctuates during the year, the overall picture is over 20% better than the national average. The quality of those plans is subject to audit and has improved in the last 2 years. Achievement of the 20 weeks time scale is expected to become increasingly challenging as demand for EHCPs increases, a phenomenon also seen nationally. This is reflected in the figures for June 2022, which were 53%, whereas they had ranged between 80-90+% over the previous 3 months.

Significant pressures on the Education Psychology (EP) team due to high demand are impacting on timeliness and a further recruitment drive and review of internal processes within the EP team is underway, and we are considering building capacity elsewhere in the system to increase support in schools for learners without EHCPs to try and manage demand.

With reference to appendix B, the proportion of pupils in good or outstanding primary schools is now more in line with the NA than was the case in 2018/19. The position in secondary schools also shows a significant improvement, is above the local target, but it is below the NA.

A higher number of pupils have been permanently excluded from secondary schools than was the case last year, and the figure at the end of June was higher than the corresponding period in 2018/19 (prior to the pandemic). Not all of the aspirational targets in this field are being met, but a working group has identified priority groups to focus on such as Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) pupils and certain schools / academies. Positively, there has been an improvement in the proportion of permanently excluded pupils who are quickly back into another form of education following a permanent exclusion compared to the position in 2018/19, although the end of June figure was short of the 95% target.

The proportion of young people in years 12 and 13 who are either NEET (Not in employment, education or training) or whose destination is unknown has decreased recently, is equal to the position at June 2021, and only slightly higher than in 2018/19. Northumberland's latest figure of 4.9% is similar to the latest NA of 4.8%, and is significantly lower and therefore better than the latest regional average of 6.1%. The numbers whose destination is unknown continues to be encouragingly low. We know that those with SEND are disproportionately more likely to be NEET if they live in Northumberland than is the case elsewhere in the region and nationally and tackling it is a key focus for E&S and its partners. Actions are: Specific action plan related to Preparation for Adulthood; Health Education England supported internships and interns given opportunity to take work placement in NCC; Level 1 Welding Course offer at new Port of Blyth Training Centre with appropriate marketing campaign; a commitment to develop an offer in Construction and in particular have a campaign that targets a NEET audience in SE Northumberland.

Context and actions being taken for measures that are poorer than the national average are as follows:

% of pupils who are in good or outstanding secondary schools -

Comments and actions:

The figures in the last 2 quarters have improved as a result of a middle school moving from Requires Improvement to Good and a high school achieving a Good judgement.

Despite this improvement, the latest figure of 73% remains lower than the national average of 82%. The actual proportion of secondary schools judged as Good or Outstanding was 77% at the end of June 2022, which equates to 23 / 30 schools, and this is just below the national average of 78%. A report on the impact of the local authority School Improvement team recently went to the Family and Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee (FACS) and it demonstrated the improvements that have been made in supporting school performance since the focused visit in 2013. The presentation that accompanied that report can be found [here](#). Where there are concerns that schools may drop below Good, an appropriate level of support is provided by the LA's improvement partners.

6. Children's Services Forecast Outturn 2022-23 Position

Members should note that it is early in the year and caution should be exercised in drawing any firm conclusions about budgetary performance at this point.

6.1 Children's Social Care

The Projected Revenue Outturn 2022-23 for Children's Social Care shows that the position at the end of June is £0.373 million forecast overspend. There is a detailed report that provides information on where within the service the projected under and overspends are, and this is primarily due to increased costs of external residential placements.

6.2 Education and Skills Service

The Projected Revenue Outturn 2022-23 for Education and Skills shows that the position at the end of June is a £1.186 million forecast overspend. The key factor is increases relating to SEN home to school transport, with increased fuel costs and driver availability being major challenges, with some operators being unable to fulfil contracts, and the need to re-tender resulting in increased costs. A detailed report has been prepared on this issue for Executive recommendations and Cabinet decisions.

The forecast position regarding the Capital programme in Education and Skills is shown below.

	Current 2022-23 Budget	2022-23 Actual Exp.	Forecast Exp.	Net Variance	Over / (Under) spend	Forecast Reprofiling
	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m
Total	31.861	1.242	20.393	(11.468)	0.104	(11.572)

The Director is provided with details of the position on each scheme, actions being taken within the year and plans for re-profiling the budget.

Savings of £0.150m relating to transfer of funds to the DSG and reduction in enhanced pensions are expected to be achieved in full.

7. Implications

Policy	Indicators in this report relate to the Living, Learning and Tackling Inequalities elements of the Corporate Plan.
Finance and value for money	Many of the measures included in the framework have a value for money component. At the end of June 2022, Children's Social Care has a provisional forecast of a £0.373 million overspend; while Education and Skills had a provisional forecast of a £1.186 million overspend relating to SEN home to school transport and a detailed report has been prepared in relation to this issue for Executive recommendations and Cabinet decisions.
Legal	The report refers to children and young people in the care system and to re-offending rates.
Procurement	n/a
Human Resources	Having enough experienced social workers is essential for a high performing Children's Social Care service.
Property	n/a
Equalities (Impact Assessment attached) Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A <input type="checkbox"/>	n/a
Risk Assessment	n/a
Crime & Disorder	The performance framework includes measures on offending.
Customer Consideration	The framework includes a number of measures relevant to providing services to customers
Carbon reduction	n/a
Health and Wellbeing	Indicators referenced in the report impact on the health and wellbeing of children, young people and families.
Wards	All

8. Background papers:

Details of the County Council's performance management arrangements including access to the Northumberland web-enabled performance system can be found at:

<http://www.northumberland.gov.uk/About/Policy/Performance.aspx#corporateperformancemanagementarrangements>

9. Report sign off

Monitoring Officer	Suki Binjal
Executive Director of Finance and Section 151 Officer	Jan Willis
Relevant Executive Director	Audrey Kingham and Graham Reiter, Joint Interim Directors of Children's Services
Interim Chief Executive	Rick O'Farrell
Portfolio Holder(s)	Guy Renner-Thompson

10. Author and Contact Details

This report has been prepared on behalf of Audrey Kingham and Graham Reiter, Joint Interim Directors of Children's Services. For further information, contact Alan Hartwell at Alan.Hartwell@northumberland.gov.uk.

Appendix A – Children’s Social Care benchmarking against national averages / previous year *

	Measure	Current Target	Current Performance Jun 2022	Direction of Travel vs Jun 2021	Current Performance vs target	Current Performance vs National Average
1	% of EHFV cases closed because desired outcomes have been met *	75	77	77 vs 80	77 vs 75	Not applicable
2	% Staff turnover within the social work workforce (annual DFE return)	15.4	15.8	15.8 vs 14.7	15.8 vs 15.0	15.8 vs 15.4
3	Rate of proven re-offending by young offenders	25	16.7	16.7 vs 23.5	16.7 vs 25.0	16.7 vs 32.3
4	Rate of children and young people subject to child protection plans per 10,000 popn	67	66	66 vs 59	66 vs 67	66 vs 41
5	Rate of Looked After Children (LAC) per 10,000 popn	74.0	73	73 vs 74	73 vs 74	73 vs 67
6	% of LAC who have had 3 or more placement moves in the last 12 months	9	12	12 vs 13	12 vs 9	12 vs 9
7	% long term LAC in same placement for past 2 years	67	63	63 vs 66	63 vs 67	63 vs 70
8	% of 19-21 yr old care leavers living in suitable accommodation	95	96	96 vs 97	96 vs 95	96 vs 88
9	% of 19-21 yr old care leavers in education, employment or training	60	54.5	54.5 vs 50.0	54.5 vs 60	54.5 vs 52
10	% of social workers where caseload weighting is within desired points level *	70	69	69 vs 82	69 vs 70	Not applicable

Appendix B - Education & Skills benchmarking against national averages / previous years * - Note: There have been no comparable updates for achievement outcomes since 2019, the next update being due in the autumn, so those KPIs are not reported here.

	Measure	Current Target	Current Performance Jun 2022	Direction of Travel vs 2018/19	Direction of Travel vs June 21	Current Performance Jun 2022 vs target	Comparison with national average
1	% children taking up the Statutory entitlement to early education for all eligible 2 year olds	80	93	93 vs 90	93 vs 78	93 vs 80	93 vs 62
2	% getting their first choice of primary school	95	97.3	97.3 vs 98.2	97.3 vs 98.1	97.3 vs 95	97.3 vs 92.2
3	% of pupils in primary schools judged by Ofsted to be good or outstanding	89	Annual update due 9/22	87.4 vs 84.9	87.4 vs 86.7	87.4 vs 89.0	87.4 vs 89
7	Number of permanent exclusions from primary schools in academic year *	0	1	1 vs 5	1 vs 0	1 vs 0	Not Applicable
10	% getting their first choice of secondary school	95	97.2	97.2 vs 98.4	97.2 vs 97.6	97.2 vs 95.0	97.2 vs 83.3
11	Number of permanent exclusions from secondary schools in academic year *	84	95	95 vs 82	95 vs 38	95 vs 84	Not Applicable
12	% permanently excluded pupils receiving full-time education by 6th day following exclusion *	95	85.3	85.3 vs 77.9	85.3 vs 97.6	85.3 vs 95.0	Not Applicable
13	% of 16-17 year olds NEET and Not Known	5.3	4.9	4.9 vs 4.6	4.9 vs 4.9	4.9 vs 5.3	4.9 vs 4.8
14	% of pupils in secondary schools judged by Ofsted to be good or outstanding	75	Annual update due 9/22	72.7 vs 65.9	72.7 vs 66.6	72.7 vs 75	72.7 vs 82
15	% of new Education Health and Care Plans successfully completed within statutory 20 week time scale (mthly avg to date in 2022)	70	79	79 vs 90	79 vs 100	79 vs 70	79 vs 58
16	% of Schools taking effective actions following a less than good Ofsted judgement	100	100	N.A.	N.A.	100 vs 100	Not Applicable