



Northumberland

County Council

FAMILY AND CHILDREN'S OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

DATE: 4 NOVEMBER 2021

PERFORMANCE & FINANCE REPORT (CHILDREN'S SERVICES)

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

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

1. Purpose of report

To consider current performance and the budgetary position 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 Being Safe and Learning elements of the Corporate Plan.

4. Key issues

- Childrens' Services continues to perform well against national averages, although within the field of Education and Skills, the picture is partially outdated due to there being no comparable achievement outcome results for the last 2 academic years.
- There is a clear understanding of the underlying data for those indicators in need of improvement, and appropriate actions have been identified with a pandemic-sensitive lens.
- Key performance indicators and targets have been reviewed.

- The budgetary position continues to be challenging and a review of the delivery of savings has been undertaken.

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 was originally required to be submitted in early September 2021 and therefore would have used the quarter ending June data for Children's Social Care and Education & Skills; however, as it was rescheduled for the November meeting, updates from August's and September's data are also included where available. The suite of indicators in Education and Skills and the associated targets have been reviewed and the changes are being implemented for the quarter 2 report. Those for Children's Social Care (CSC) were reviewed in the last year.

This report provides analysis of performance on those indicators that can be benchmarked against the national average, and if not, against the position the previous year, as well as the usual budgetary update. For details on all of the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) in the Children's Social Care and Education service statements, please refer to the quarter 4 report covering the whole Council produced by the Corporate Performance and Business 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 recently received an update on external inspection scrutiny that has taken place during the COVID 19 restrictions. Those reports are available on request.

Children's Social Care:

With reference to Appendix A, the department is performing better than the national average (NA) on 9 of the indicators, and poorer on 6. Numbers of Children Looked After have reduced recently having been fairly static since June 2020, but we have seen challenges over the last year with home and school placement stability, and this continues to be scrutinised by the senior management team along with actions from a task and finish group.. Timescales from children entering care to being placed with their adoptive family are poorer than the national average but we have a good record of placing children who are harder to place which takes longer for them to be adopted and impacts on the timescales. Furthermore, far more children looked after are adopted than is the case nationally, and far more children looked after are placed close to their localities and within

the boundaries of the authority. In spite of the restrictions with COVID, we remain in touch with all of our care leavers, nearly all of whom are living in suitable accommodation.

Numbers of children subject to child protection plans have reduced further following a significant spike between February and April 2020, although they have fluctuated over the summer. Effective and creative early help and preventative work has ensured that statutory services have not been overwhelmed. Data on social worker caseloads from the last annual Department for Education (DFE) return indicate they are broadly equal to the latest national average of 16 per full time equivalent (FTE) social worker (in Northumberland they have ranged from 15 to 18 over the last 6 months).

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 – Northumberland's rate per 10K is higher than the NA. This figure had decreased in the quarter up to the end of June, but has increased since (June's figure was 59, and at the end of September it was 62). Visiting children subject to CP plans has been maintained during the Covid-19 restrictions. The vast majority of CP plans that have ceased have stepped down to Child in Need (CiN), rather than the children and young people becoming looked after. We are monitoring the figures in Quality Performance Assurance Group (QPAG) senior management meetings. Previous audit and Ofsted inspection have found multi-agency decision making to be appropriate.

Rate of Children Looked After (CLA) per 10,000 population - whilst Northumberland's rate per 10K is higher than the NA, it is the joint lowest in the north east region and has decreased significantly since the end of June (from 74 per 10K to 69 at the end of September). Up to the end of June, there had been a significant increase in the numbers of children placed at home under care orders, a feature regionally. An audit and subsequent action plan is ensuring that timely progress and discharge are in place appropriately, and this is reflected in the decrease seen since June. Overall, the number of children looked after is higher than two years ago, and we have managed the increase by flexibility and resilience of our in-house fostering service. Previous audit/Ofsted found decision making for children to become looked after to be appropriate and timely. We are monitoring the figures in QPAG senior management meetings.

% of Children Looked After placed in foster care - The relatively high number of children placed at home with parents impacts on this figure, and this is reflected in the revised target which strikes a balance between reality and challenge. Overall, approximately 85% of CLA placements are in family situations. We have undertaken a project to consider ways of further increasing the numbers of children in foster care and continue to refine and target our foster carer recruitment. A senior management restructure has aligned the management oversight of in-house residential and foster care.

% of Children Looked After who have had 3 or more placements in the last 12 months

This figure has improved slightly in the context of placement pressures during the pandemic, but we would want it to be lower still, and it remains 2% poorer than the NA. Some of these placement changes are a positive move to a permanent placement. An analysis has been undertaken and we are progressing actions linked to the aforementioned project.

% 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 – There had been a slight decline in June, and the figure of 66% was 2% poorer than the national average. Since the end of June, the position has improved and by the end of August, it had improved to 71%, which is now 3% better than the national average. Our record in finding suitable and stable placements in a family environment is good overall. We continue to place a high number of children in our provision. We are progressing the business case and actions from the above project to develop further support for foster carers and we have further developed our monitoring to support timely achievement of long-term placements where this is the plan for our CLA.

Average time (days) between a child entering care & moving in with adoptive family

– While the figure had recently increased to the end of June (and has remained stable since), the cohort includes harder to place children and as the process takes a longer time for them, this impacts on the figure. The cohort size is small so one child moving in with their adoptive family can significantly influence the figure. Robust governance and oversight arrangements are in place to monitor the impact and effectiveness of the Regional Adoption Agency, ADOPT North East, in maintaining and improving our performance in relation to adoption since going live in December 2018.

Care leavers in employment, education or training (EET)

Covid 19 has had an impact on appropriate EET opportunities. There is a clear link to mental/physical health that means that some young people are not in EET due to their disability. We continue to try and engage those young people in meaningful education options. Further developing the Council corporate parenting and opportunities for our care leavers not in EET is a corporate and member priority. Our figure for the 2020/21 year was equal to the national average of 53%, although we are ambitious for it to be 60% or more.

Education:

With reference to Appendix B, due to Covid 19, some of the usual measures for Education do not have an update as key stage tests / exams were not comparable with previous years. However, all measures that could be updated, have been.

Appendix B shows that of the updated measures: 8 out of 14 are better than the NA, or, where there is no NA, better than the corresponding previous period; 3 are the same and 3 are poorer.

Consistently very strong performance is being seen in the areas of: first choice of school; permanent exclusions of primary pupils and of Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) learners; and EHCP timeliness.

The percentage of children getting first choice school places is consistently over 97% for both primary and secondary and significantly exceeds the NA. The proportion of pupils in good or outstanding primary schools is now more in line with the NA and on target, but the position in secondary schools is below the NA; where there are concerns that schools may drop below good, an appropriate level of support is provided by the LA's improvement partners.

A small number of pupils are still being permanently excluded from schools, although fewer have been than over the corresponding previous period. Not all of the aspirational targets in this field are yet being met, but the Working Group has identified priority groups, e.g. Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) pupils, and there have been no permanent exclusions of a pupil with an EHCP for 2 years. The main area of concern regarding exclusions relates to fixed term exclusions of SEN Support learners, where there has been a significant increase in the last 4 months of the school year. The position from September will be closely monitored. There are clear actions in place, and challenges are set to schools where exclusion is being considered. Positively, there has been a major improvement in the proportion of permanently excluded pupils who are quickly back into another form of education following a permanent exclusion.

Whilst better than the national average, preventing further increases in NEET and Not Knowns is likely to be a challenge as the impact of COVID 19 is felt by employers and training providers, and this is reflected in the slightly poorer figure for qtr 1.

For further details on the work done in this year of unprecedented impact on education services, please see the [Education Annual Report for 2020](#).

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 -

Although Northumberland's figure has recently increased, it remains poorer than the national average. It is the prime responsibility of the governing boards and head teachers of those schools to improve. The Council commissions School Improvement Partners (SIPs) to monitor and challenge those schools, one of the products being a termly SIP visit report which includes what judgement they conclude the school would receive if they were inspected at that point. Members should note the task of turning round this pattern of under-achievement usually takes at least 3 years based upon Ofsted inspection schedules, but as the inspection schedule has been put back 18 months by the Covid pandemic any full inspection could be up to 4 and a half years after the initial inspection.

Fixed term exclusions for EHCP and SEN Support learners

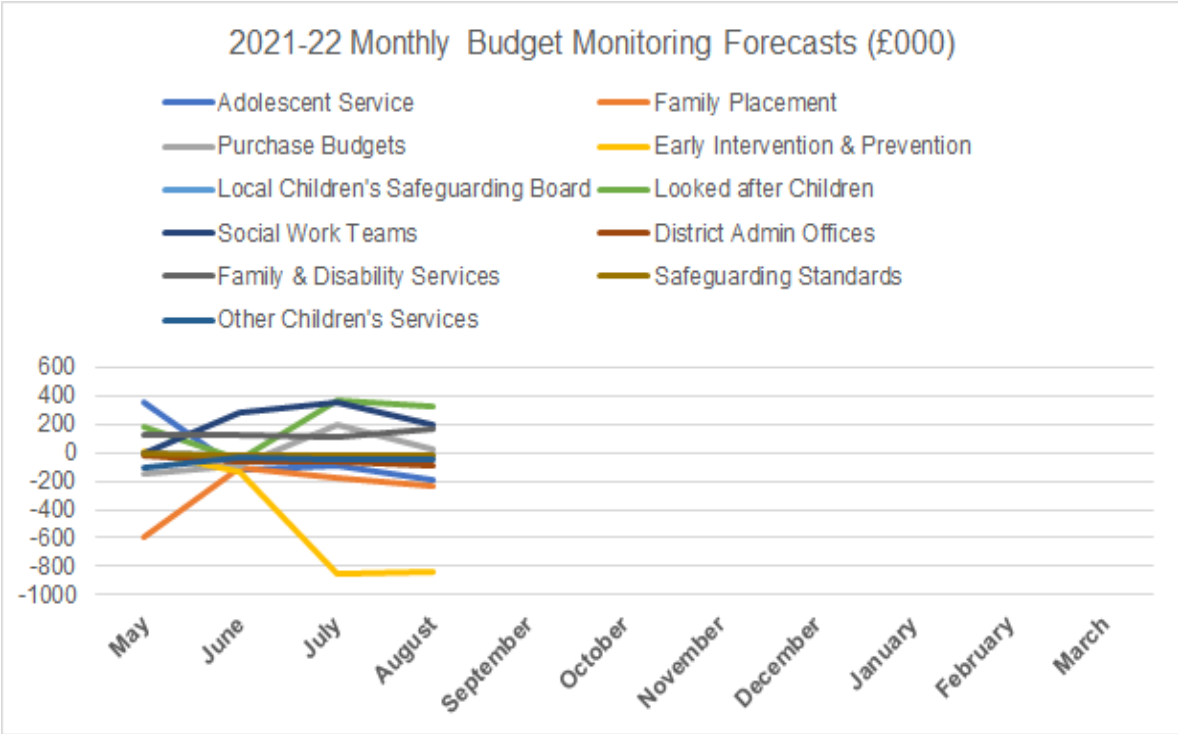
The number of fixed term exclusions (ftes) of learners with an EHCP or SEN Support increased in the 2020/21 school year compared to 2019/20. This is within the context that schools were fully open for longer in 2020/21. Nonetheless, the level of increase is disproportionately high with over 300 ftes of SEN Support learners occurring since schools fully reopened in March 2021.

Officers regularly meet to analyse this data, and schools who appear to disproportionately exclude are contacted and challenged. Overall, however, the long term trend for exclusions is encouragingly a downward one compared to the position three years ago.

6. Children's Services August 2021 position

Children's Social Care

The forecast position at the end of August is £0.727 million forecast underspend, of which £0.867 million overspend is a result of Covid-19. The following graph provides a trend analysis of the forecast outturn, over the year to date:



The main reasons for the forecast position for Children’s Services are as follows:

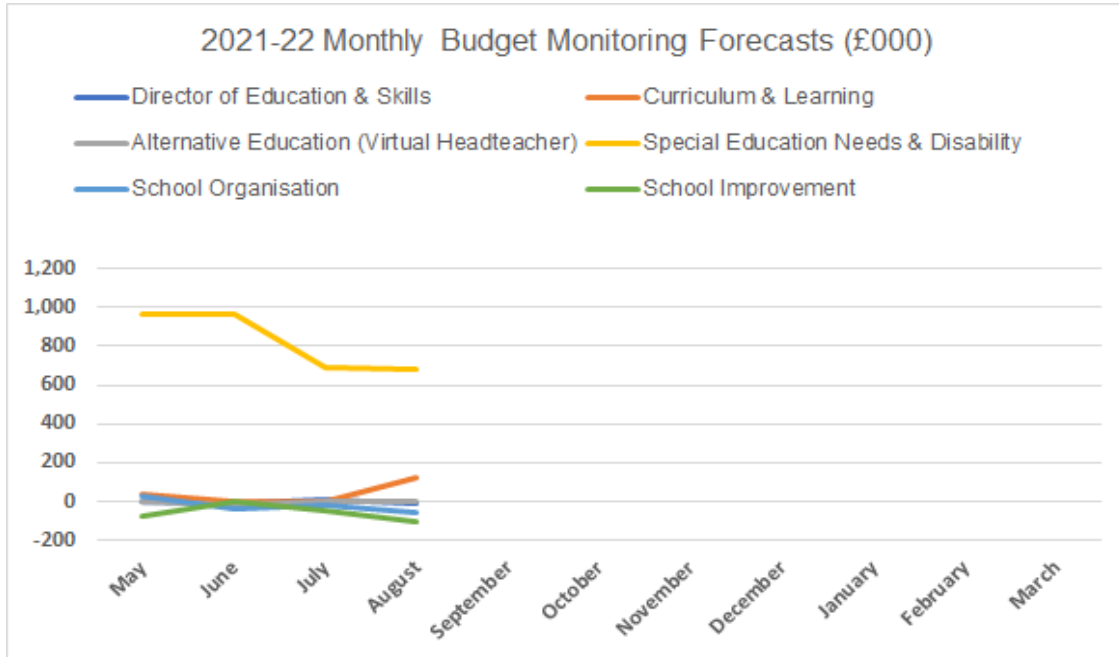
Placement costs are the major expenditure in CSC and have been supported by growth in this year's budget. Rigorous management decision making, and oversight ensures external placements are used only where this best meets the children's needs and for the time required. The service is on target to achieve the identified savings for this year 2021/22.

There are plans in place to increase in-house children's home residential capacity within the County both to increase local provision and to reduce the use and cost of external placements. We have submitted a match funding bid to DfE to further support this work and we will be informed of the outcome in November. There are several ongoing schemes at Kyloe House which are all funded by external grant, including the development of a new administration building.

Education and Skills Service

The forecast position at the end of August is £0.637 million forecast overspend, of which £0.513 million is categorised as business as usual and £0.124 million due to Covid-19.

The graph below provides an analysis of the forecast outturn, over the year to date:



The reasons for the forecast position for Education and Skills are primarily due to a forecast overspend of £0.683 million in Special Educational Needs and Disability.

Dedicated Schools Grant

The forecast position at the end of August is a £0.965 million underspend across the High Needs block (£0.795 million) and Schools Block (£0.217 million) due to:

- a. Several high-cost placements at Independent Special Schools have ended in the Summer 2021 term reducing the forecast position by £0.434 million.
- b. Contain Management Outbreak Grant of £0.450 million is being utilised instead of High Needs Block funding to meet the costs of SEN Support Services as they support vulnerable learners on their return to school.
- c. Funding of £0.191 million has been returned to the authority relating to overfunding of school places at two Middle Schools turned Primary Schools as estimated pupil numbers were overstated.

Capital Programme

Education and Skills' capital programme for 2021-22 was approved by full Council in February 2021. This now includes any budget re-profiling required from 2020-21 year end. There is currently no forecast variance.

Department-wide

A recent review of the delivery of those savings for Education and Skills has been conducted and whilst the savings related to the Skills service and the School Meals service were not deemed a council saving, alternative savings have been identified and are expected to be achieved in full.

7. Implications

Policy	n/a
Finance and value for money	Many of the measures included in the framework have a value for money component. At the end of August 2021, Children's Social Care has a forecast of an £0.727 million underspend, of which £0.867 million overspend is a result of Covid-19; while Education and Skills forecast £0.637 million overspend, of which £0.513 million is categorised as business as usual and £0.124 million due to Covid-19.
Legal	The report refers to the time scales for care proceedings.
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	n/a
(Impact Assessment attached)	
Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A <input type="checkbox"/>	
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
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

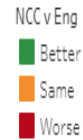
Monitoring Officer	Neil Masson
Executive Director of Finance and Section 151 Officer	Jan Willis
Relevant Executive Director	Cath McEvoy-Carr
Chief Executive	Daljit Lally
Portfolio Holder(s)	Guy Renner-Thompson

10. Author 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 at Alan.Hartwell@northumberland.gov.uk.

Appendix A - Children's Social Care

June-September 2021 benchmarking



Children's social care

Latest National Average (NA) represented by black bar | with the actual NA figures to the right of the bars

Where the Short Term Trend is blank, there is no Short Term Trend available

Theme	Measure	NCC v Eng	Latest NCC fig.	Short Term Trend	Long Term Trend	Actual NA
Care Leavers	% care leavers in higher ed (beyond A level)	Better	10.7		↑	6.0
	% in education, employment or training	Worse	50.0	↓	↓	53.0
	% living in suitable accommodation	Better	97.0	+	+	85.0
	% who we are in touch with	Better	100.0	+	+	80.0
Child Protection	Rate per 10K subject to child protection plans	Worse	62.0	↓	↑	43.0
Children Looked After (CLA)	% of CLA in a "children's home"	Better	12.0	+	+	13.0
	% of CLA living with foster carers	Worse	65.0	+	↓	72.0
	% of CLA who moved placement 3 times or more	Worse	13.0	↑	↓	11.0
	% of long term CLA who lived in the same placement for the previous 2 years	Better	71.0	↑	↑	68.0
	% of new placements under 20 miles and inside LA boundary	Better	64.4		↑	50.0
	% who left care to be adopted	Better	19.0		↑	12.0
	Average no. days to move in with adoptive family	Worse	490.0	↑	+	363.0
	Average no. of weeks for care proceedings	Better	40.0	↑	↓	43.0
	Rate per 10K of Children Looked After	Worse	69.0	↑	↑	67.0
Youth Justice	Re-offending	Better	15.1	↑	↑	33.0

Appendix B – Education June / July 2021 benchmarking:

Latest National Average (NA) represented by black bar | with the actual NA figures to the right of the bars

For indicators with an asterisk* the black line is the previous year's figure, as there is no national average to compare against.

Theme	Measure	NCC v Eng	Latest NCC fig.	Short Term Trend	Long Term Trend	Actual NA
Early Years	% take up of early education for eligible 2 yr olds	Better	87.0	↑	↑	69.0
Post-16	% of 16-17 year olds NEET or Not Known	Better	4.9	↔	↔	5.5
Primary	% of pupils in good or outstanding primary schools	Same	87.3	↔	↔	87.3
	Number of permanent exclusions in academic year*	Better	0.0		↑	3.0
School Organisation	% getting their first choice of primary school	Better	98.4	↔	↔	90.2
	% getting their first choice secondary school	Better	97.6	↔	↔	82.2
	Permanently excluded pupils back in education within 6 days*	Better	97.6	↔	↑	72.2
Secondary	% of pupils in good or outstanding sec. schools	Worse	66.1	↔	↔	79.0
	Number of permanent exclusions in academic year*	Better	44.0		↑	47.0
SEND	% of EHCPs completed in 20 weeks (monthly fig)	Better	100.0	↔	↑	58.0
	Number of fixed term exclusions for SEND support pupils*	Worse	592.0	↓	↑	391.0
	Number of fixed term excursions for SEND EHCP pupils*	Worse	158.0	↓	↑	111.0
	Number of SEND EHCP pupils permanently excluded*	Same	0.0	↔	↑	0.0
	Number of SEND Support pupils permanently excluded*	Same	12.0	↔	↑	12.0