

Title of report: Childrens performance report

Meeting: Children and young people scrutiny committee

Meeting date: Tuesday 22 February 2022

Report by: Interim Assistant Director for MASH CIN CP

Classification

Open

Decision type

This is not an executive decision

Wards affected

(All Wards);

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to provide members of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee with an overview of the range of performance and management information available to managers across the Children and Young People Directorate.

Recommendation

That:

- a) The Committee receive the report and indicate to officers any specific areas of performance that the Committee would wish to receive reports on within the current work programme.

Alternative options

1. The Committee could chose to not review the information provided in this report. The option is not recommended as the report is provided to ensure that the committee is sighted on a key data source, integral to the committee's ability to monitor progress against the Children's Improvement Plan. Reviewing this information will enable the Committee to determine any recommendations it wishes to make.

Key considerations

2. Children's Early Help and Social Care services have a wide range of performance and management information reports available to them which support decision-making and performance and practice development.

3. The majority of these reports are of a 'snapshot' variety i.e. fixed reporting of performance at a particular date or time, and are often presented as spreadsheets which can be made drilling down to relevant data a time-consuming exercise itself requiring skill and experience to do effectively.
4. Reports are produced by the Council's Performance Team and since December 2021 have been made available to managers across the service via a shared SharePoint site rather than as attachments to email.
5. In addition to reports generated corporately, the service makes use of the Children's Services Analysis Tool (ChAT) which is a tool available to services across the country which draws out some analysis of the wide ranging data that would be made available to Ofsted during an inspection (referred to as Annex A).
6. The Corporate Director has recently led a piece of work to develop and introduce an online performance and management information framework for managers which is presented using PowerBi as the reporting tool and which is refreshed overnight each day. Still early in development, this was rolled out to managers late in January and represents a significant development for the service and its use of performance information to drive improvement. A demonstration of the new tools can be provided via a workshop for members of the Scrutiny Committee.
7. The performance Early Help, Safeguarding and Family Support monthly scorecard for November is included with this report (Appendix A). This reflects the reporting cycle and sign-off of performance reports being out of alignment with the Scrutiny Committee forward work plan. In future, performance reporting will be no more than one month behind.
8. The November data indicates a continuing rise in the number of contacts and referrals being received in the service. We know that this dropped off a little in December (as typically happens in periods coinciding with a school holiday), and has picked up again in January and February.
9. What happens in the MASH impacts on volumes of work and workflow through the remainder of the service over time and as a result of management intervention to strengthen the decision-making and management capacity in the MASH in October and November, we have since seen not only improved performance in terms of the timeliness of decision-making but an increased pressure now emerging on the assessment and other teams.
10. The number of Early Help Assessments open has remained largely stable and consistent over the past year where the number of referrals into children's social care has risen.
11. The number of child and family assessments open to the service has been steadily increasing since the summer 2021 and gradually over time this has increased the pressure on the assessment teams, made more challenging by difficulties in recruitment. As the pressure increased, the timeliness of completion of the assessments fell but has been improving month-on-month since October 2021 (reported as being 58% in November, rising to 67% in December).
12. The service saw a reduction in the numbers of exploitation assessments received during the period August – November. There are no targets or few measures to compare against. There does not appear to be a specific reason for this and service managers continue to monitor this area of activity.
13. The number of Strategy discussions held has been rising significantly during 2021 and appears to be plateauing in recent months (we know that there was a similar number in December to

those in October and November). Timeliness of completion is challenged by capacity across a range of agencies and is a priority focus for improvement by service leaders.

14. Other areas of service activity where we have seen an increase in demand in recent months are in the number of open Child in Need (CIN) plans and in the numbers of children subject of a Child Protection Plan. This rise is a typical reaction when a service experiences a trauma (such as that of the high Court Judgement last year) which triggers the service and partner agencies to re-evaluate thresholds and risk. It is comment that responses become more averse to risk which again typically balances out over time. The assurance here is that more families are being offered statutory support.
15. Very few children have been the subject of a child protection plan for two years or more (the majority have been subject of a plan for fewer than 6 months).
16. The numbers of children in our care has risen significantly since March 2021, dropping slightly to 345 in November. Quality Assurance activity indicates that our threshold for entry is robust but fewer children and young people are leaving our care and there is a net increase. An Improvement Plan priority for 2022/23 is to further develop our edge of care resources, ensuring that we maximise our opportunities to prevent children coming into our care where this is safe and appropriate, and also working to return children to their family or extended family where this is safe and appropriate.
17. Placement stability remains generally good for the majority of children in our care and the majority are placed in family settings (foster care or with family/friends).
18. Visits to children and case supervision are the areas for increased focus and activity for the service. Timeliness of visits is improving but needs to be better, coupled with evidence that the visits are themselves 'purposeful', evidence of which we shall obtain from quality assurance activity going forward. Expectations regarding the frequency of visiting are changing with an expectation for example that children subject of a child protection plan are visited more frequently going forward. We are likely to see a worsening picture in the short term (as we change the reporting parameters) but moving to much better practice.
19. The service leadership has also raised the expectation regarding supervision for case holding workers, that they should now receive supervision each month. Management and supervisory capacity has been increased but it is likely to be another month or two before we start to see significant shifts in the performance data on supervision.
20. Ensuring that we deliver on our ambition that all workers have a manageable workload is one of the most significant challenges the service currently faces. Managing increasing demand, changing practice and greater expectations of practitioners and managers mean that there is a rapidly changing dynamic to manage. Whilst the average caseload looks healthy and comparable to other authorities, the range either side of that average has too great a variance with workers in the assessment teams in particular experiencing far higher caseloads than we would like to see, which impacts on morale, performance, and workflow. Service leaders will present an up-to-date picture of caseloads at the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee rather than rely of data from November.
21. Workforce and vacancies are not covered in this report. The Committee will receive a separate workforce report.

Community impact

22. Ensuring that there is a skilled and stable workforce and that performance is at least 'Good' (from an Ofsted grading perspective) in the future will further ensure delivery of the 'community' objectives set out in the County Plan 2020-2024.
23. Improving our offer for children in our care and for our care experienced young people will have a direct effect on the lives of children in our care and care experienced young people and is entirely consistent with our responsibilities as corporate parents.

Environmental Impact

24. Whilst the activity covered in this report will have minimal environmental impact the service gives consideration to further minimise waste and resource use in line with the council's environmental policy.

Equality duty

25. Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the 'general duty' on public authorities is set out as follows:

A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to –

- a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
- b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
- c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

16. The public sector equality duty (specific duty) requires us to consider how we can positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations, and demonstrate that we are paying 'due regard' in our decision making in the design of policies and in the delivery of services. As this report concerns performance in the service, we do not believe that it will have an impact on our equality duty.

Resource implications

17. There are no additional resource implications arising from this report that are not included in resources identified in support of our Improvement Plan.

Legal implications

There are no specific legal implications of the recommendation of this report.
Risk management

18. The Directorate and the Children's Services Improvement Board each maintain and monitor a Risk Register which have regard to the performance of the service and any risk associated with performance that needs to improve.

Consultees

19. Not applicable.

Appendices

Appendix A: Performance Scorecard November 2021.

Background papers

None identified.

Report Reviewers Used for appraising this report:

Please note this section must be completed before the report can be published

Governance	Joanna Morley	Date 10/02/2022
Finance	Louise Devlin	Date 08/02/2022
Legal	Ruth Whittingham	Date 11/02/2022
Communications	Alex Floyd	Date 10/02/2022
Equality Duty	Carol Trachonitis	Date 09/02/2022
Procurement	Click or tap here to enter text.	Date Click or tap to enter a date.
Risk	Click or tap here to enter text.	Date Click or tap to enter a date.

Approved by Click or tap here to enter text. Date Click or tap to enter a date.

[Note: Please remember to overwrite or delete the guidance highlighted in grey]

Please include a glossary of terms, abbreviations and acronyms used in this report.