

Appendix B.

Additional resources required.

1 Overview

1.1 Core transformation of the service is expected to take three years and is intended to:

- Improve outcomes for children, young people and their families
- Make working in Herefordshire an attractive and rewarding career choice
- Embed systemic partnership approaches and exploring alternative models of delivery.
- Address legacy resource needs and make the service financially viable for the future across a range of services the Council delivers

All underpinned and driven by improvement across the system of practice, management, and leadership. Improvement activity, and the expected improved outcomes for children and young people will continue beyond the three years.

1.2 Further and ongoing resources are required to support transformation and the improvement plan to ensure:

- The retention and recruitment of the workforce
- That there are adequate staffing levels to ensure statutory guidance and legislation is complied with
- That there is sufficient capacity of suitably skilled and experienced professionals to work effectively with children and families, whilst maintaining a manageable workload
- That there is sufficient capacity for effective management oversight and supervision
- That Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSWs) are supported appropriately during their Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE)
- That there is sufficient capacity to deliver high-quality and ongoing quality assurance activity, providing assurance of continuous improvement and impact
- That there is sufficient resources to deliver necessary changes to the development of our practice standards, and associated IT and systems support
- That support for our Foster Carers is further developed and maintained

2 Additional resources required and rationale.

Retention and recruitment

2.1 Following the High Court judgement, Herefordshire has experienced significant challenges in the retention of existing permanent colleagues for a period and the recruitment of experienced Social Workers and Managers who are central to workforce stability and improved practice.

2.2 A sustainable staffing structure needs to be developed whilst improvement is ongoing and is characterised by sufficiency of capacity; manageable caseloads; stable and effective leadership and management; good learning and development opportunities; competitive pay and conditions; and a realistic but ambitious plan to 'grow our own' for the future.

Sufficiency of capacity

2.3 High caseloads were noted in the most recent Ofsted Inspection and in the two most recent Ofsted focused visits. Ofsted noted that high caseloads impact adversely on the ability to respond effectively to children in need and protection. In addition to this in the two most recent Ofsted focused visits (December 2019 and June 2021) Newly Qualified Social Workers were seen to have a caseloads which were too high.

- 2.4 In addition to the capacity added to the service since April 2021, the sufficiency of our workforce is further promoted by the activity of our Improvement Plan and a forthcoming recruitment campaign (with Community Care, a leading Social Care platform). “Our Ambitions for Our People” a key workforce framework document sets out how we aim to move to a permanent workforce which enables us to comply with statutory services and supports us to continue on our improvement journey.

Social Work Teams: Assessment / CP & Court/ Fostering

- 2.6 The Local Authority has seen a significant increase in demand over the past year and most significantly in the past six months (see section 3 of this Appendix). To effectively respond to and manage caseloads, workflow and currently high demands on the service a number of additional Social Work (Project) Teams have been deployed and are currently in place:

- Assessment Team (x1)
- Child in Need Teams (x2)
- Child Protection & Court Team (x1)
- Corporate Parenting / Permanence Team (x1)

- 2.7 It is proposed that the additional capacity currently in place remains in place for the duration of the next financial year 2022/23 and a review is conducted in October 2022 to determine whether further deployment would be warranted.

- 2.8 A withdrawal of the teams prior to this has the potential to reverse the improvements made thus far, and will slow the pace of improvement, increase caseloads and have a detrimental impact on the outcomes for children and families. Not continuing with teams at present would pose a significant risk to the Local Authority in terms of meeting its statutory duties.

Sufficiency of management oversight and supervision

- 2.9 The frequency and effectiveness of case supervision is currently one of the Priority Actions set by Ofsted during the most recent Focussed Visit (June 2021); indeed a critique of management oversight and supervision has been a consistent feature at every Ofsted Inspection and visit since 2012 (Inspection July 2012, Inspection May 2014, Inspection June 2018, Visit January 2019, Visit December 2019, Visit June 2021).

Service Managers

- 2.10 The re-introduction of a layer of Service Managers has been identified as being key to service and practice improvement, freeing up Heads of Service to be able to focus on strategic management, service development, quality assurance, and partner engagement. The Service Managers provide vital day-to-day support and supervision to Team Managers and are better placed to drive performance and practice improvement.
- 2.11 Service Managers are required to create the optimal conditions for enabling good social work practice to flourish and will contribute to key decision-making processes in case work, such as threshold decisions for legal proceedings, and whether or not to bring children into our care.
- 2.12 Service Managers will be available to discuss complex cases and provide supervision to Managers but in general they should be less involved on a day to day basis in case work

and much more involved in creating a culture which supports and develops the social work teams and other staff in the organisation. Service Managers will support Managers by dealing with matters that would otherwise reduce the availability of frontline managers to focus on the quality of practice within their team.

- 2.13 It is proposed that Service Manager posts will be retained beyond the 2022/23 financial year and added to the base budget in due course.

Managing Practitioners.

- 2.14 These are posts that sit between the Team Manager and Advanced Practitioners. The primary purpose of the Managing Practitioner is to add supervisory capacity and to assist with decision-making and the timely progress of interventions.
- 2.15 There are already a small number of Managing Practitioner posts in various teams across the service, where there are high volumes of work, or higher than normal case decisions to be made, including one in the MASH.
- 2.16 Increasing the number of Managing Practitioners will enable better quality and more timely decision making and to provide additional management support in area of high throughput such as the MASH and the Assessment Teams. The speed and quality of decision and the quality of assessments making in these areas was considered to be inadequate by the Service-wide Case Audit (completed in 2021).
- 2.17 Managing Practitioners provide professional support oversight and guidance to children's social work/social care staff on a day-to-day basis. This will enable better quality decision making and ensure that children's voices and lived experiences are evident within social work assessments and plans. Managing Practitioners help to ensure that there is a good throughput of work and that cases are progressed without any drift and delay.
- 2.18 The additional Managing Practitioner posts are required throughout 2022/23 and their impact and any future need will be considered as a part of the capacity review to be conducted in October 2022.

Support for Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSWs)

- 2.19 Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSWs) are an important segment of the Social Care workforce and the strategy for 'growing our own'. NQSWs are required to complete an Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) where they should benefit from a "protected" caseload (i.e. considerably less of a caseload than a fully qualified Social Worker initially, building throughout the year); additional learning and development opportunities; and an increased frequency of supervision. They also complete a portfolio of evidence throughout the year.
- 2.20 NQSWs are currently part of the establishment and this has made it impossible for Team Managers to ensure that their caseload has been protected; this is exacerbated at times of high demand such as at present. In the most recent visit Ofsted noted that caseloads for NQSWs were too high.
- 2.21 To ensure that NQSWs are well supported and have an appropriate and protected caseload it is proposed that 15 NQSWs become supernumerary to the core establishment (calculated as being the most that we are able to support within the current organisational structure in 2022/2023).

- 2.22 This will ensure that NQSW's have a protected caseload (whilst at the same time adding capacity that increases over the year of their ASYE) and are able to receive, through the activity of the Social Work Academy the higher levels of support and supervision.
- 2.23 Under this proposal, once a NQSW successfully completes their ASYE, they then become a part of the core establishment, joining a team and either replacing a locum social worker, or filling a vacant post.

Quality Assurance and quality of practice

- 2.24 The most recent Ofsted visit marked the inconsistency of Social Work practice as a key priority action for the Local Authority to address. Additionally, the service-wide Audit project which audited in excess of 1,100 cases in 2021 graded 43% of cases as being Inadequate.

Signs of Safety Leads and IT Support

- 2.25 Signs of Safety is our Social Work Practice Model and this was implemented approximately one year ago (2020/21). However, the initial implementation was not sufficiently considered and was disrupted by the timing and impact of the High Court Judgement. At present Signs of Safety is not the enabler of best practice that it was intended to be.
- 2.26 Staff feedback and the service-wide Audit Project have noted that a number of the current Signs of Safety templates in use are not easily understood by parents and are cumbersome to complete. On occasions a number of different versions of the same document are completed resulting in duplication of effort.
- 2.27 The Signs of Safety Leads and dedicated IT Support will review, revise and relaunch the Signs of Safety documentation in use to promote better practice and a closer alignment to the Signs of Safety practice model. This will make the forms more easily used and completed by practitioners (reducing the burden of recording on them) and able to be more easily understood by families.
- 2.28 Increased training will be provided to our workforce on how to use the revised templates and partner agencies will be invited to training to ensure that the approach across our partnership is consistent and that the same language in respect of risk is used.

Quality Assurance Manager and Audit Team

- 2.29 As we progress through our improvement journey it is imperative that there is a strong quality assurance function to allow for thematic and deep-dive audits to measure progress and make ongoing judgements on the quality of Social Work practice.
- 2.30 From June 2021 onwards, all audits within children's Social Care were undertaken by the service-wide Audit Project which was staffed by Independent (interim) Auditors. This function needs to be transferred back to the Local Authority in order that we build and sustain robust programmes of quality assurance activity which in turn help to drive performance and practice improvement. This proposal creates a small Quality Assurance team which will be required beyond 2022/23. The QA Team will assist in the training and development of audit and quality assurance capacity within our managers; they will moderate audits completed by managers; and will provide an important role in ensuring that actions recommended within audits are completed

Quality of data and system

- 2.31 The drive to improve, the additional management oversight, and a better understanding of our services have led to an increased need for accurate performance data to enable a more pro-active style of management using data and information intelligently. The recent introduction of PowerBI has started to allow managers to undertake more self-serve analysis and get better insight into the cohort of children that we support and safeguard. This work needs to continue at pace to ensure that PowerBI captures all areas of Children's Services and in the short term there is insufficient specialist capacity.
- 2.32 In addition to the above, there has been a recognition that some of the forms and templates in Mosaic (Social Care recording system) do not promote best practice. Changes have been made and new templates, aligned to the Signs of Safety practice model, have been created. Workflow issues within Mosaic have also been improved. It is vital that this work continues to ensure that Social Workers and Managers have the tools which best support them in their job; at present there is a backlog in Mosaic changes needed.
- 2.33 An additional Data Analyst and an additional Systems Analyst both a period of 12 months will build capacity for system changes and reporting and will assist with the full roll-out of PowerBI.

Support for Foster Carers

- 2.34 Foster Carers can be faced with young people in their care who display challenging behaviours. Whilst support can be available, for instance from the Children and Adolescent Mental Health, to better support Foster Carers we want to develop a therapeutic service staffed by a Clinical Psychologist to provide advice, guidance and support to Foster Carers and Supervising Social Workers.
- 2.35 A Clinical Psychologist will ensure that there is a more consistent approach in responding to such challenging behaviours. This will strengthen the foster placement, preventing the placement from breaking down and will be a better outcome for the young person, potentially reduce costs (subsequent placements of young people with challenging behaviours are often more expensive) and will assist in the retention of Local Authority Foster Carers.

Business Support

- 2.36 This proposal includes the addition of 15 Business Support posts. As indicated there have been significant changes in demand which have placed pressures on Business Support and indirectly on Social Work Practitioners. These increased pressures have resulted in practitioners having to increasingly undertake administrative tasks. To re-align the business support capacity following the increase in demand will allow Social Workers and their Managers to concentrate on carrying out statutory duties achieving better outcomes for children.

3 Changes in Demand

- 3.1 Children's social care and early help services are demand-led services. Changes in the population, changes in legislation, societal factors and many other influences can each dramatically affect demand (and pressures on services) both in the short and longer-term.

3.2 Herefordshire children's services have experienced a significant rise in contacts and referrals leading to increased numbers of assessments required, and in the number of open cases. The increased demand has far out-stripped the established capacity in the service and necessitated additional capacity being added in 2021/22 which this proposal seeks to continue during 2022/23.

3.3 In September 2021, the service strengthened the management oversight and decision making in the MASH. This resulted in more consistent and appropriate application of threshold and increased the confidence of referrers in the MASH. As a consequence the number of referrals rose significantly, exacerbated by the emergence of legacy unmet need in a significant number of cases. It is likely that the impact of Covid-19 on families and communities, and society's response to high-profile cases such as those concerning the deaths of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and Star Hobson will have also contributed to the rise in referrals

Referrals

3.4 Historically, the rate of Referrals (number per 10,000 children) in Herefordshire has been lower than both England and our statistical neighbours and England. Due to changes in the application of threshold and national events (such as the news of the conviction of murder of the parents of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and Star Hobson) there has been a significant increase in Referrals.

3.5 The increase of referrals leads to an increased need for rapid management decisions which will be alleviated by the proposed additional Managing Practitioners and Service Manager.

3.6 The chart below (figure 1) shows how the rate of referrals per 10,000 children had more than tripled from 300 referrals per 10,000 children (2020/21) to 1192 per 10,000 at the peak in November 2021 and a 986 (annualised rate as at the end of December 2021).

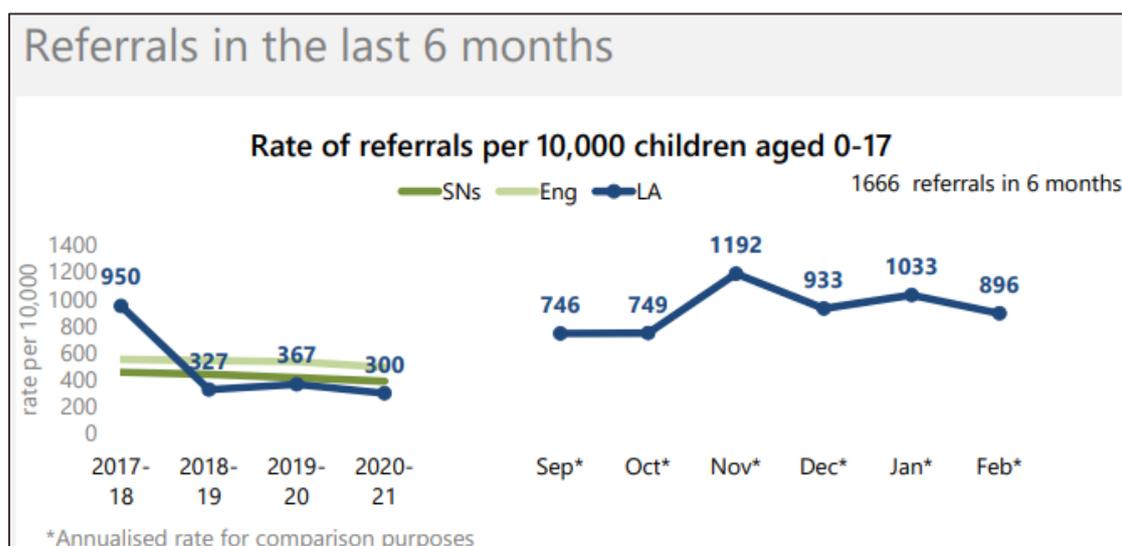


Figure 1 Rate of referrals per 10,000 children aged 0-17yrs. Source: ChAT report 20220228

3.7 Whilst the rate has reduced slightly at the start of 2022 it remains at a rate significantly higher than the service had capacity for at the start of the year 2021/22 and will be closely monitored and responded to by service leaders.

Assessments

- 3.8 Historically, the rate of completed Assessments per 10,000 children aged 0-17yrs in Herefordshire has been below statistical neighbours and England. Following an Audit report noting the application of threshold was inconsistently applied and was at times too high changes have been implemented which has contributed to an increase of Referrals and subsequently Assessments.
- 3.9 The chart below (figure 2) shows that the rate of completed assessments has doubled from 374 assessments per 10,000 children (2020/21) to 973 at the recent peak in December 2021 and 949 (annualised rate as at the end of December).

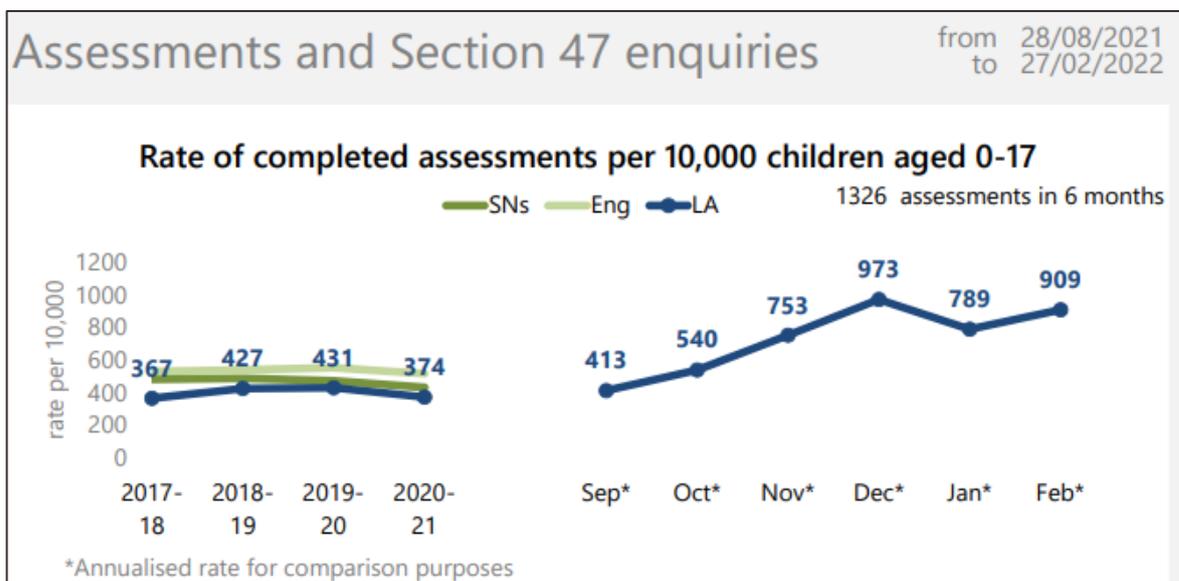


Figure 2 Rate of completed assessments per 10,000 children aged 0-17yrs. Source: ChAT report 20220228

Child in Need Plans

- 3.10 The rate (per 10,000) of children subject to a Child in Need Plan has risen year on year since 2018/19. Whilst the rise in 2021/22 has not risen as sharply in the previous year it has risen and combined with the rises in referrals and assessments adds to a picture of increased pressure and limited capacity.
- 3.11 The chart below (figure 3) shows that the rate of children with an open episode of need per 10,000 children aged 0-17yrs has increased by 14% from 402 children per 10,000 children (2020/21) to 454 in December and 457 (annualised rate as at the end of December).

Rate of children with an open episode of need per 10,000 children aged 0-17

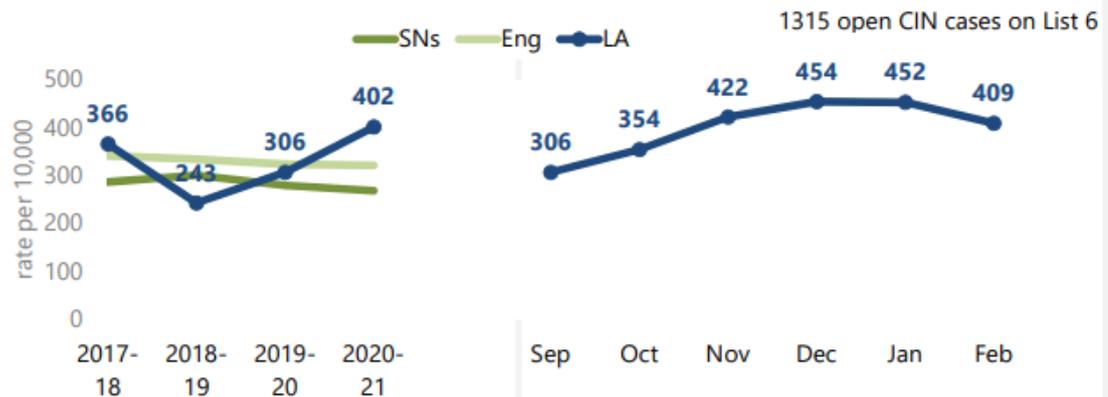


Figure 3 Rate of children with an open episode of need per 10,000 children aged 0-17yrs. Source: ChAT report 20220228

Child Protection Plans

- 3.12 With the exception of 2017/18, historically the rate (number per 10,000 children) of children subject to a Child Protection Plan (CP Plan) in Herefordshire has been below statistical neighbours and England. Corrections have been made in the application of threshold which has resulted in an increased number of children being made subject to a Child Protection Plan
- 3.13 With the exception of 2017/18, historically the rate (number per 10,000 children) of children subject
- 3.14 The chart below shows that the rate of children subject to a Child Protection Plan has increased by 250% from 30 children being subject to a CP Plan per 10,000 children (2020/21) to 76 as at the end of February 2022. The increased numbers of children subject of a child protection plan place additional pressures on case holding workers in the relevant teams and on the team of child protection conference chairs.

Rate of open Child Protection plans (per 10k aged 0-17)

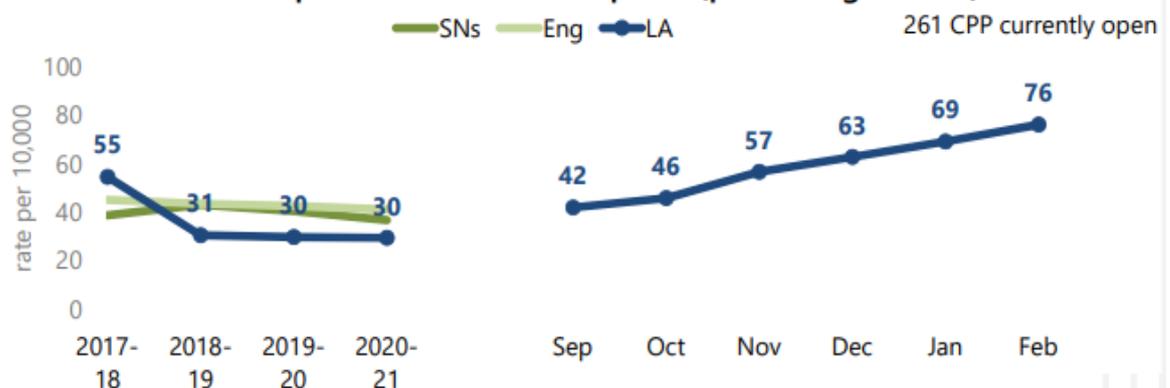


Figure 4 Rate of open Child Protection plans per 10,000 children aged 0-17yrs. Source: ChAT report 20220228

Average caseloads for social workers

- 3.15 Average caseloads vary across the service. Indicative caseloads as at the end of February 2022 are outlined in the table below:

Team name*	Average caseload
Assessment Team 1	25
Assessment Team 2	28
Assessment Team 3	35
Assessment Team 4	31
Assessment Team 5	23
Average across the Assessment Teams	28
Child in Need Team 1	22
Child in Need Team 2	22
Average across the Child in Need Teams	22
Child Protection and Court Team 1	17
Child Protection and Court Team 2	25
Child Protection and Court Team 3	19
Child Protection and Court Team 4	18
Average across the CP and Court Teams	20
Children Looked After Team 1	18
Children Looked After Team 2	17
Children Looked After Team 3	18
Average across the CLA Teams	18
*The 16+ and Children with Disability teams are not included in this chart as case allocation is managed differently.	

- 3.16 It is our intent that all case holding social workers have a manageable caseload which when comparing to services in other areas of the country that are rated as good or outstanding is typically a caseload of between 15-18 children or young people. Our caseloads are reducing, as a consequence of improved management oversight and better workflow and despite the increased demand outlined elsewhere in this report but remain higher than we aspire to. These caseloads reflect the increased capacity added in 2021/22 and that we propose to retain during 2022/23.