



Northumberland

County Council

FAMILIES AND CHILDREN'S OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

DATE: 7 MARCH 2019

CURRENT PERFORMANCE

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

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

Purpose of report

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

Recommendations

It is recommended that the Committee notes the current performance and identifies any areas for further scrutiny.

Link to Corporate Plan

The performance management information covers services in Education and Skills and Children's Social Care and is available via the Council's website. The Council's performance management arrangements overall are particularly relevant to 'Developing the Organisation'.

Key issues

This report is for discussion.

Background

1. The Council approved its current Corporate Plan in February 2018. Each year, Service Directors prepare a Service Statement which sets out priorities for their service in delivering the Corporate Plan over the coming twelve months 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. All performance information is available via the Council's website to promote openness and accountability.

2. The Appendices to this report show the current performance information for services within the Committee's terms of reference and is summarised briefly below. Members should note that this committee has recently received additional information about performance in the form of the Safeguarding Activity Trends, Children's Social Care self assessment and the Director of Education's Annual Report, whilst the Safeguarding and Corporate Parenting Advisory Group receives bi-monthly performance reports on data relating to looked after children and care leavers.

3. **Education and Skills:** With reference to Appendix A, performance is good and above the national average, in relation to all measures on primary school achievement (numbers 3-8), and particularly pleasing is the improvement at key stage 4 (nos 10 and 11). Take up of early education entitlement (no. 1) has improved and remains above target and better than the national average. Although still a concern, the rate of permanent exclusions from schools (nos 9 and 14) has abated and, in the first half of this academic year, is better than target, and the record of no Looked After Child being permanently excluded continues (no. 16). Destinations of 16 and 17 year olds (nos. 17 & 18) and apprenticeship outcomes (no. 19 & 20) continue to be good overall. The percentage of primary school pupils who attend a school judged by Ofsted to be good or outstanding (no. 2) appears to have dipped from the start of 2018/19 but this is due to the previous inspection grades of recent academy converters now being included in Ofsted's figures - the overall trajectory continues to be an improving one.

Securing full time education for permanently excluded children within six days of the exclusion (no. 15) remains a challenge, as does improving the proportion of learners in secondary schools that are judged Good or Outstanding (no. 12). The timeliness of education and health care plans (no. 21) has varied significantly in the last 3 months and is being closely monitored.

Detailed comments, and the actions being taken for PIs that are short of target can be seen in Appendix A. Members are also urged to refer to the Annual report for the additional context.

4. **Children's Social Care:** With reference to Appendix B, performance is good in relation to placing children with NCC carers (no. 2) and inspections of residential children's homes (no. 3), all of which are judged to be good or better with Outstanding leadership. In terms of time scales, children are being adopted quicker (no. 4 & 5); care proceedings are swifter (no. 6); almost all decisions on referrals at the front door (no. 8) take less than a day; and less than 1% of ceased child protection plans lasted more than 2 years (no. 9). With regards to young offenders, there continues to be a much reduced number becoming involved with the youth

offending system (no. 11), very few in custody (no. 13) and all but one in suitable accommodation (no. 14).

The number of young offenders in employment, education or training (no. 16) fluctuates above and below the target set and is monitored quarterly at the YOT Management Board, and the number re-offending (no. 12) remains high, but has reduced since the start of 2018/19. Although much improved, performance remains short of target in relation to the balance of social worker caseloads (no. 21) due to pressures in one locality. This issue is monitored at senior manager level on a weekly basis so the need for intervention can be highlighted and acted upon swiftly.

The volume of early help assessments initiated (no. 17) remains low although our understanding of the reasons behind this is better now and we are more positive about how the early help agenda is being implemented by partners. Fewer long term LAC have been with the same carer for 2 years or more (no. 7) and this is high on the agenda for scrutiny by the Multi agency Looked After Partnership (MALAP) and the Safeguarding and Corporate Parenting Advisory Group (S&CPAG). Whilst the Supporting Families programme (nos. 18) continues to achieve positive outcomes, we need to increase the number of claims where there has been significant and sustained progress or continuous employment (no. 19). Lastly, there has been an increase in the volume of second or subsequent child protection plans (no. 10), but this is at a lower rate than the region as a whole.

Detailed comments, and the actions being taken for PIs that are short of target can be seen in Appendix B. Members should note the self assessment reported to this committee in February provides further evaluation of the effectiveness of practice in Children's Social Care.

5. Finance position

5.1 Forecast Out-turn: Education and Skills £173,000 underspend.

The Education and Skills service budget has received growth of £932k towards the Special Educational Needs (SEN) transport demand, which continues to increase in line with the demand for special school places. With additional special school places at Hexham Priory and The Dales Special schools, future growth has been built into the medium term financial plan and this will be reviewed annually.

The Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) has carried forward a deficit of £2 million from 2017-18 and continues to face a significant challenge to balance the budget by 2020-21 when the National Funding Formula is implemented in full. There was a transfer of £1.8 million from the Schools block to the High Needs block for 2018-19

which was agreed by the Department of Education and will contribute to reducing the deficit, however, the creation of additional special school places has also increased costs in the short term. The additional in-house SEN places should reduce the longer term demand for more costly places at Independent Special Schools which has been an area of growth in recent years.

The most significant pressure on the DSG budget has been the demand for SEN Top-ups. There is an ongoing review into the top-up band levels that we currently pay as they have not been reviewed since implementation of the SEN banding system and this may bring additional financial cost pressures. A transfer of 1% from the Schools Block (£1.7m) to the High Needs Block was agreed in 2017-18 and has been agreed again for 2019-20.

A review of all budgets, statutory responsibilities and staffing structures across the Education and Skills Division is being carried out. We are seeking efficiencies in those areas that are funded from both the core budget and the Dedicated Schools Grant. Overall, there is a predicted year end overspend of around £1.3 million across the Dedicated Schools Grant.

5.2 Children's Social Care

The revenue position for Children's Social Care at the end of December 2018 is as follows: Forecast Out-turn: Children's Social Care £2.173 million overspend.

Position: The forecast position is currently a £2.2 million overspend. This is largely due to the continuing cost pressures around external residential placements, Special Guardianship Orders and the use of supported accommodation for care leavers.

There has been growth of £3 million added to the Children's Social Care budget for 2018-19, this is in addition to the £2.5 million of growth added in 2017-18. Around £2.2 million of the growth was used to meet existing cost pressures including the rising cost of external residential placements and special guardianship orders, whilst the remaining £0.8 million was used to create the social work academy and to support a staffing restructure across various teams.

The number of Looked after Children was 380 at the time of the December budget report, and this is the driver behind the continued financial pressures across the service. While enhanced scrutiny and challenge for decisions for children to become looked after has contributed to a reduction in the total numbers of children in care, there remains a cohort of children and young people with complex needs who require high cost and specialist residential placements. There is senior management scrutiny, challenge and review of these placements over and above the routine management oversight and independent reviewing of these placements.

As in 2017-18, the main areas of pressure continue to be the number of historical Special Guardianship Order payments which are expected to increase as the court uses this disposal more regularly. There is a relatively high number of out of county residential placements. This is a picture being seen throughout the region and is a national concern. This is partly linked to a shortage of special school places in Northumberland, although the creation of additional capacity at Hexham Priory and The Dales Special Schools could help to alleviate the situation. There has also been a shortage of suitable residential accommodation which has resulted in an increased use of short term bespoke care packages and the associated staffing costs. There are plans to develop additional in-house residential homes, however, they are unlikely to be ready before 2020/21. There continues to be a reduction in the use of Independent Fostering Agencies.

There is a savings target for 2018-19 of £124k across the Northumberland Adolescent Service, which has undergone a restructure and this looks likely to be achieved.

Additional growth of £1.2 has been provided for 2019-20 as the existing pressures look set to continue.

Appendices - Scorecards for services within the Committee's terms of reference:

- A. Education and Skills
- B. Children's Social Care

Implications

Policy	n/a
Finance and value for money	Many of the measures included in the framework have a value for money component
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 (Impact Assessment attached) Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No x 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
Wards	All

Background papers:

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

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

Report sign off.

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

	Initials
Monitoring Officer/Legal	LH
Executive Director of Finance & S151 Officer	AE
Relevant Executive Director	CM-C
Chief Executive	DL
Portfolio Holder(s)	WD

Author and Contact Details

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