



# Northumberland

County Council

## **FAMILIES AND CHILDREN'S OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** **DATE: 7 JANUARY 2021**

### **CURRENT PERFORMANCE**

**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 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 performs well against national averages.
- There is a clear understanding of the underlying data for those indicators in need of improvement, and appropriate actions have been identified.
- Key performance indicators and targets are under review.
- The budgetary position is 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 presents performance for Education and Skills (E&S) and Children's Social Care (CSC) up to the end of October 2020. The suite of indicators is under review as part of the enhanced service planning process taking place across the Council.

This report provides analysis of performance on those indicators that can be benchmarked against the national average, as well as details of the focused visits to schools, and the usual budgetary update. Members should note that in addition to this report, the Safeguarding and Corporate Parenting Advisory Group receives bi-monthly performance reports on data relating to looked after children and care leavers, and the Audit Committee recently received an update on external 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 well on the majority of these measures, being better than the national average (NA) on 9, or, where there is no NA, better than the corresponding previous period, equal on 3, and poorer on 6. However, there remain some significant challenges, particularly in relation to placement sufficiency, which have been exacerbated by COVID. LAC numbers increased last summer with a further increase early in lockdown, which has plateaued since May. We have seen challenges in September and October with home and school placement stability for LAC, and this is being scrutinised by the Stability Task and Finish group.

In spite of the restrictions with COVID, we remain in touch with the vast majority of our care leavers, nearly all of whom are living in suitable accommodation. Numbers of children subject to child protection plans have reduced following a significant spike between February and April 2020. Effective and creative early help and preventative work has ensured that statutory services have not been overwhelmed. Timescales from entering care to being adopted are poorer than the national average. Data on social worker caseloads from the recent annual DFE return indicate they are better than the latest national average (N.B. our local measure is calculated differently using additional criteria and can't be compared with other local authorities).

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 population** - Audit undertaken of cases coming off CP plan found decision making to be appropriate. Increased oversight by senior managers of decisions to go to child protection conference has been implemented.

**Average duration of care proceedings ending in the period (weeks)** - 10% of children have experienced delay that can be directly related to the Covid pandemic. Monthly legal monitoring meetings will continue to track progress, identify delays and barriers, and consider solutions.

**Rate of Looked After Children (LAC) per 10,000 population** - LAC numbers increased since last summer with a further increase since lockdown, exacerbated by difficulties in exiting children from care, although this is easing. The rate remains well below the regional average. A legal gateway panel ensures appropriate decisions are taken on individual cases; previous audit and the Ofsted ILACS found decision making appropriate and timely.

**% of looked after children placed in foster care** - The relatively high number of children placed at home with parents impacts on this result. An audit has assured us that those placements remain appropriate. We are looking to increase the number in foster care, both through increasing our in-house capacity and ensuring clear exit plans for all children in residential care.

**% of LAC who have had 3 or more placement moves in the last 12 months** – performance has declined in the last quarter, and analysis is underway through the stability task and finish group. We know this has been impacted on by some children moving into a permanent placement, which is positive. We will complete the analysis to see if that reveals further reasons for recent placement moves and issues that can be acted upon.

**Average time (days) between a child entering care & moving in with adoptive family** – Northumberland is now poorer than the national average on this measure. Adopt North East (ANE) are providing an annual report to the next Corporate Parenting meeting. Robust governance and oversight arrangements are in place to monitor the impact and effectiveness of ANE.

### **Focused monitoring visits to children's residential homes**

In September there was an assurance visit to Phoenix House, which was previously judged to be Requiring Improvement at its last inspection. This visit concluded that all requirements and recommendations made at the last inspection had been met, and no requirements or recommendations were made following the visit. There was also an Ofsted visit to Kyloe House secure unit following a whistle-blowing incident, which resulted in one recommendation. This was to increase health advisor/school nurse time in the Home. Action to increase the hours was taken immediately. A planned Ofsted

assurance visit to Kyloe House was deferred on the request of the local authority due to dealing with staffing following a positive Covid test on a staff member. An Ofsted assurance visit to Kyloe House then took place in November. Compliance requirements were made, but there were general positive findings in relation to child focused care

### **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 undertaken in 2020. However, all measures that could be updated, have been. Appendix B shows that of the updated measures, 10 out of 14 are better than the NA, or, where there is no NA, better than the corresponding previous period (1 is the same and 3 are poorer).

The percentage of parents getting their first choice of school is significantly better than the national average in both primary and secondary sectors. The proportion of pupils in good or outstanding primary schools is now more in line with the national average, 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. Aspirational targets in this field are not yet being met, but the Working Group has identified priority groups, e.g., SEND pupils, there are clear actions in place, and challenges are set to schools where exclusion is being considered. Whilst better than the national average, preventing further increases of NEET (Not in employment, education and training) and Not Knowns is likely to be a challenge as the impact of COVID 19 is felt by employers and training providers. Context and actions being taken for PIs that are poorer than the national average are as follows:

**% of pupils who are in good or outstanding schools** - It is the prime responsibility of the governing bodies and head teachers of those schools to improve. The Council commissions School Improvement Partners (SIPs) to monitor and challenge them to improve, 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 that periods between inspections range from 18 months to 3 years therefore statistics of this nature are slow to change and short-term trend patterns difficult to identify. The multi academy trusts that have incorporated NCC grade 4 (i.e., Inadequate-rated) schools continue to put in place strategies to review performance of pupils.

**% of SEND EHCP pupils permanently excluded** - Officers meet on a monthly basis to analyse the exclusion data in relation to SEND learners. Schools who appear to exclude disproportionately will be contacted and challenged / supported as necessary. The

Working Group on exclusions is being re-established as normal business resumes following the period of lockdown.

### Focused monitoring visits to schools

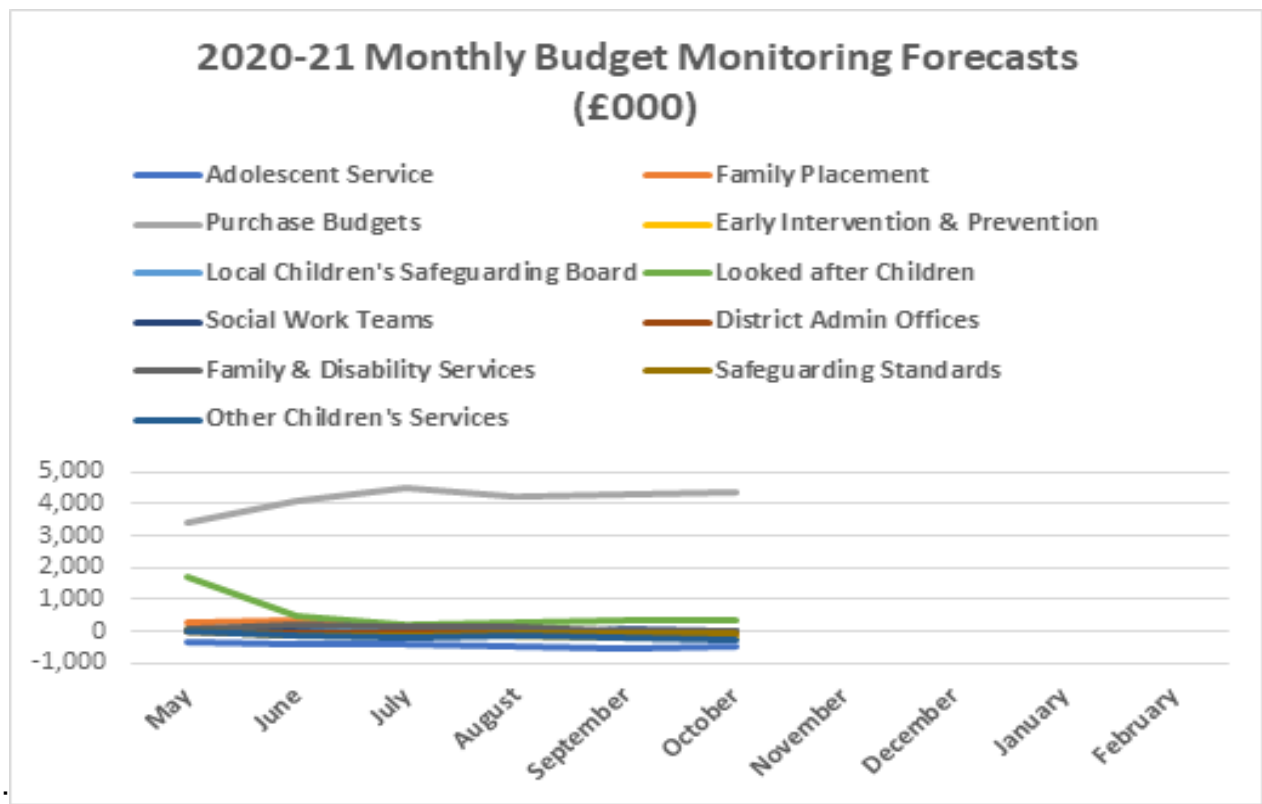
As of 7.12.20, there have been 13 Ofsted post Covid monitoring visits in Northumberland. Schools are informed the day before, 2 HMI inspectors visit, there are no outcome judgements, but a letter is written and published. The enquiry areas include attendance, behaviour, safeguarding and the quality of remote learning. The schools involved so far have found the experience 'intense' but 'manageable'. 1 Alternative provider has also been inspected, and Cramlington Learning Village have received a No Fixed Designation inspection to look at safeguarding.

### Children's Services provisional year-end financial position

#### Children's Social Care

The forecast position at the end of October is £3.722 million forecast overspend, of which £2.710 million is a result of Covid-19 and £1.012 million is business as usual.

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 outlined below:

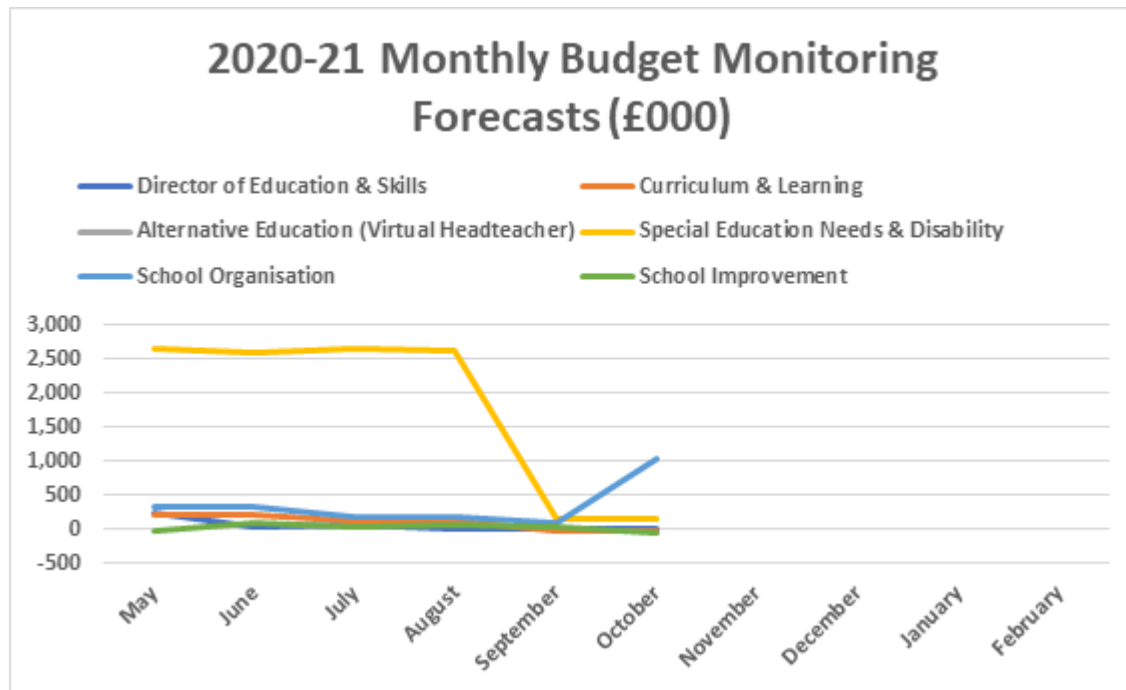
- a. Purchase Budgets - forecast overspend £4.343 million. External residential care placements are forecast to overspend by £3.279 million. There are currently 39 placements. The estimated overspend attributable to Covid-19 is £1.698 million and this is as a result of the increase in the number of Looked after Children and a shortage in suitable accommodation.
- b. The overspend on Purchase budgets also includes unachieved income of £1.100 million from Northumberland Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) in respect of jointly funded clients.

There are plans to develop two children’s homes within the County to accommodate up to 4 young people. Two sites at Pegswood and Hadston have been identified. Planning permission has been granted for the Hadston application and the Pegswood application is due to be considered in January 2021. Therefore, it is anticipated that the schemes will now overrun into 2021-22 and budget has been re-profiled accordingly. There are several ongoing schemes at Kylloe 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 October is £1.093 million forecast overspend, of which £0.947 million is a result of Covid-19 and £0.146 million is business as usual.

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 £1.044 million in School Organisation. This is due to the additional cost of hiring mobile classrooms at Hillcrest Special School and Ponteland Secondary School. This is following delays to the capital programme due to the Covid-19 outbreak and the re tendering exercise required during 2019-20. These costs are to be met by the Covid-19 grant income

### **Dedicated Schools Grant**

The forecast position is £0.325 million underspend.

### **Capital Programme**

There is a forecast of £3.891 million of budget required to be re-profiled from 2021-22 into this current year relating to the following schemes: Hexham Schools Outline Business Case; Schools Refurbishment Ashington Academy.

There is a forecast overspend of £0.311 million, primarily due to the Special Provisions Capital Fund. It is anticipated that the overspend will be funded from S106 monies.

### **Department-wide**

A recent review of the delivery of savings, and those identified for the remainder of the Medium-Term Financial Plan, has been conducted and reported to the Executive Director of Adults Social Care and Children's Services.

## 6. 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 October 2020, Children's Social Care has a forecast overspend of £3.722 million and Education and Skills a forecast overspend of £1.093 million for the financial year 2020-21.

### 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  No  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



## **7. 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>

## **8. Report sign off**

Monitoring Officer/Legal	Liam Henry
Executive Director of Finance and Section 151 Officer	Chris Hand
Relevant Executive Director	Cath McEvoy-Carr
Chief Executive	Daljit Lally
Portfolio Holder(s)	Guy Renner-Thompson

## **9. Author and Contact Details**

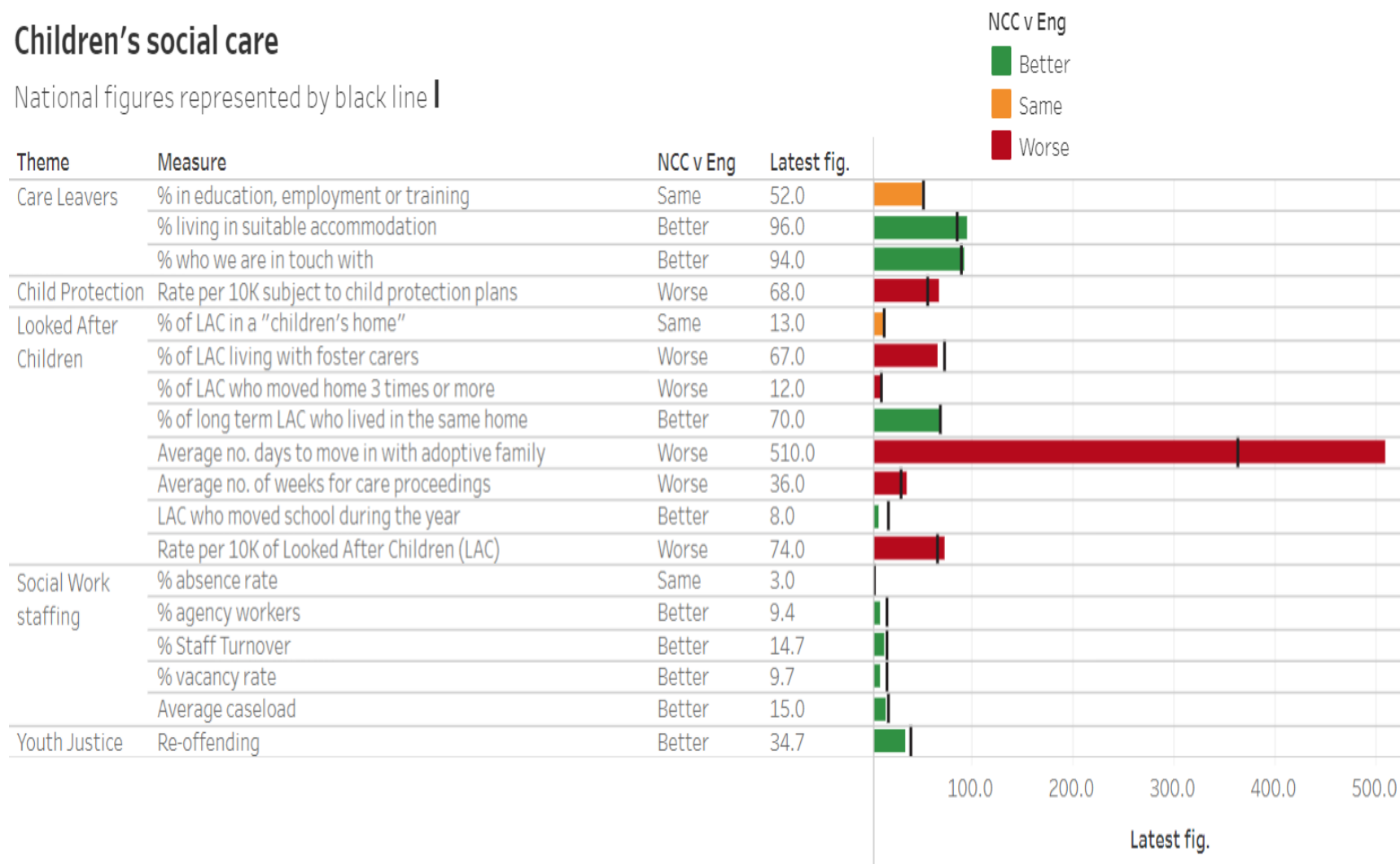
This report has been prepared on behalf of Cath McEvoy-Carr, Executive Director of Adult Social Care and Children's Services. For further information, contact Alan Hartwell at [Alan.Hartwell@northumberland.gov.uk](mailto:Alan.Hartwell@northumberland.gov.uk).

## Appendix A - Children's Social Care:

### Comparison of latest NCC performance figures (Oct 2020) with national averages

#### Children's social care

National figures represented by black line |





## Appendix B – Education:

### Comparison of latest NCC performance figures (Oct 2020) with national averages

National figures represented by black line |

