

Meeting:	Safeguarding Private Member Briefing
Date of meeting:	
Report Title:	Children's Social Care Monthly Report – February 2021
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1. Background

Members of the Committee will be aware that the People Directorate has a monthly children's social care report, which contains an overview of the major performance indicators for children's safeguarding and social care.

The February 2021 edition of the children's social care report is attached. It includes a summary section with an overview of performance, using RAG (Red, Amber, Green) ratings and direction of travel for most indicators. Barnsley's historical performance and comparisons with other local authorities are also included.

More detailed information against most indicators can be found in the main body of the report, where members will find graphs, tables and a management performance analysis at the top of each page, which highlights areas of performance considered good and areas where improvement is required.

2. Summary

Below is a summary of key performance issues highlighted in the report.

Early Help Assessments

Trends in previous years show seasonal variations in the numbers of Early Help Assessments (EHAs) completed, 128 EHAs had been completed at the end of February which is 75 less than in January (203). The number of interventions closed in February (46) was also lower than that of the previous month (66) as well as the same point in the previous year (64).

Contacts

Contacts during February (295) show a decrease from January's performance (322) but an increase from February 2020 (270). The percentage of contacts proceeding to referral decreased slightly from 75.8% in January to 74.6% in February.

Referrals

The number of referrals decreased in February to 227, 11 lower than January but slightly above the average of the last 12 months (223). Expressed as a rate per 10,000 under 18 year olds, the year to date figure at the end of February was 527.3; below the 2019/20 statistical neighbour (769.6) average and the national (534.8) average. We continue to see a high proportion of referrals going to assessment, with 98.2% in February.

Re-referrals reduced from 23.5% in January to 15.9% in February – however this is higher than February 2020 (10.7%). Our year to date performance of 15.7% is currently below the 2019/20 Statistical Neighbour average (20.6%), as well as the national (21.3%) and regional (22.6%) averages.

Assessments

The number of assessments undertaken has decreased slightly from 290 in January to 280 in February. However the number of assessments in February have increased by 34.6% compared to February 2020 (208). The rate of assessments for the year to date of 597.4 per 10,000 0-18 population is below the 2019/20 statistical neighbour average (909.2) but above the national (553.6) average.

The percentage of assessments completed within 45 working days of referral remained high at 100% in February, rising from 99.6% in January and well above the 2019/20 national (83.9%) and statistical neighbour (81.6%) averages.

Performance for the percentage of assessments undertaken in under 20 working days has dropped from 31.2% in January to 22.5% in February and is 5.5% lower than the same point in 2020. Year to date performance of 35.8% is above target (35%) and above the 2019/20 statistical neighbour (28.6%) and national (30.7%) averages.

The proportion of assessments ending in no further action has decreased from 32.2% in January to 22% in February.

Section 47 Investigations

The number of S47 investigations undertaken reduced to 72 in February from 82 in January and is lower than February 2020 (80). When expressed as a rate per 10,000, the year to date figure (215.2) is above the 2019/20 national benchmark (167.2) but below our statistical neighbour average (283.1).

Percentage of S47s converting to child protection conferences decreased from 27% in January to 13% in February and remains below the 2019/20 statistical neighbour (38.1%) and national (38.5%) averages. The proportion of Section 47 investigations ending in no further action decreased in February to 12.9% from 19.2% in January.

Child Protection (CP)

The number of children with a CP plan at the end of February (235) increased slightly from January (233) but is 64 less than the February 2020 figure (299). That figure equates to a rate of 46.3 per 10,000 under 18 year olds, above the 2019/20 national average (42.8), but below our statistical neighbour (70.8) average.

Performance for initial child protection conferences (ICPC) within timescale for February is 80%. Year to date performance of 86.7% is above target (85%) as well as the 2019/20 statistical neighbour (76.5%) and national (77.7%).

The proportion of children becoming subject of a child protection (CP) plan for a second or subsequent time ever decreased to 31.8% in February from an annual high of 48% in January. However this is still significantly higher than performance in February 2020 (0%). Throughout the last 12 months, 55 children have been subject to a CP Plan for a second or subsequent time ever, equating to 18.8%. Comparatively, performance remains below the 2019/20 statistical neighbour (21.7%), and national (21.9%) averages.

[REDACTED] This equates to 1.7% of all plans, remaining below the 3% target, but above the 2019/20 statistical neighbour (1.9%) and national (2.1%) averages.

[REDACTED] Year to date performance of 4.2% (15 closures) remains above the 3% target, as well as the 2019/20 national (3.6%), but below statistical neighbour (4.7%) averages.

Performance for the timeliness of child protection reviews has remained at or close to 100% since May 2016, with a 100% year to date average. This is above 2019/20 statistical neighbour (89.4%) and national (91.5%) averages. The timeliness of child protection visits has remained close to 100% since December 2016, with 100% in February and 99.7% for the year to date.

Care Proceedings

[REDACTED]. The average duration of open proceedings cases has remained constant in the same period, from 31.8 weeks to 31.7 weeks. The average age of concluding cases over a 12 month period has risen slightly to 40.2 weeks and is higher than the same point last year (34.4).

Looked After Children

The number of looked after children decreased to 343 at the end of February from an annual high of 352 in January. Barnsley's current rate of LAC (67.5 per 10,000) is well below statistical neighbours average rates (111.4 per 10,000) but above the national average (67.0 per 10,000). The number of children coming into care during the month (12) was in line with January (11) and significantly below the number leaving care (20).

The proportion of looked after children with three or more placements (in the previous 12 months) increased from 3.7% in January to 4.7% February. This is below the 9.5% target, and continues to compare well against 2019/20 statistical neighbour (9%) and national (11%) averages.

The proportion of children looked after continuously for 2.5 years, and in their current placement for more than 2 years, decreased slightly to 65.8% in February, below the 68% target, as well as 2019/20 statistical neighbour (66%) and national (68%) averages.

The number of looked after children going missing increased for the second consecutive month to an annual high of 17. [REDACTED]

The proportion of looked after child cases reviewed within timescales was above target (97%) at 98.8% for February and 99.4% year to date. The proportion of LAC visits in time was 99.4% in February and year to date performance (99.8%) is just below target (100%).

The proportion of health assessments for looked after children completed on time was 98.2% in February, decreasing slightly from 99.1% in January. Performance locally remains above the 2019/20 national (90%) and statistical neighbour (92%) averages. The proportion of children looked after for 12 months or more who have had a dental assessment declined for the twelfth consecutive month to 33.3% in February, as a consequence of COVID19.

The proportion of looked after children (aged 4 to 16 years inclusive) recorded as having a completed Strengths & Difficulties Questionnaire was 96.9% at the end of February, a slight increase from 96.3% in January and above the 80% target.

The proportion of looked after children with a Personal Education Plan (PEP) increased to 99.5% in February but remains just below the 100% target. The proportion with a termly PEP decreased slightly to 97.7% in February, just below the 98% target.

Quality of Schools Attended by Looked after Children

The proportion of looked after children attending schools rated good or outstanding by Ofsted in February (77.6%) was in line with the same month the previous year (77.1%)

School Attendance and Absence of Looked after Children

School attendance and exclusion data has been not been reported on for January and February 2021, as a result of COVID 19.

Adoption

With the exception of 2013/14, Barnsley's performance has remained well above statistical neighbours, regional and national benchmarks.

In relation to the timeliness of our adoption processes, against the target of 120 days between a placement order and a child being matched, timescales decreased significantly to 133.8 days in February, from 144.9 in January and 296.7 in February 2020.

Care leavers

Care Leaver performance is measured 'accumulatively', using information recorded at the last visit, relevant to those care-experienced young people who have a birthday within the current month. This is then added to the previous performance, recorded since April, and builds up over the year. Reporting for care leavers can fluctuate significantly due to the small numbers of young people in the cohort.

Performance for February shows that 72.9% of the cohort aged 19-21 were engaged in EET. Comparatively, the data is well above the 2019/20 statistical neighbour (52%) and national (53%) averages.

The timeliness of care leaver visits decreased slightly in February (99.1%) compared to January (100%) but remains above the measure at the same point in 2020 (92.9%).

Children in Need

There was 1,827 open Child in Need (CIN) cases at the end of February, a decrease from 1,866 in January. When comparing against 2019/20 benchmarks, Barnsley's rate of 359.7 remains lower than Stat Neighbours (487.4) but above the National average (323.7).

Caseloads

February 2020 data shows a sharp increase to the caseloads of the Disabled Children's Team, rising to an annual high of 26.9 cases per worker. There is a similar increase to the Adoption/Fostering Teams (21.8 cases per worker - an annual high). Elsewhere numbers are consistent with previous months.

3. Recommendations

The committee is asked to review the attached report in a private session and challenge performance. Any areas for investigation or improvement can be agreed for formal detailed discussion at a future meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

4. Attachments/background papers

- None

5. Possible Areas for investigation

- What does the data tell you about the overall picture of children's social care in Barnsley? What are our families experiencing?
- How has returning to school impacted upon our children in care? How do you know?

- Was the impact of Covid the reason for an increase in the number of children coming into care or was it something else? How do you know?
- What are the priorities for children's social care over the coming months?
- When do you expect performance to improve for dental appointments for children in care?
- How do you differentiate between genuine cases of neglect and those that are living in poverty?
- How do you know that the right children are being progressed to the next stage of the process?
- When sharing Child Protection Reports with parents and families, what support is available so that they fully understand the content and the implications of the report?
- What are the SDQ's telling you and what are you doing with the information? Can you give an example of changes made to service delivery or support as a result of the findings?
- What happens if a care leaver refuses the offer of accommodation and how are the associated risks assessed?
- How confident are you that there is sufficient planning and support for children and young people when released and discharged from secure settings?
- How many complaints has the council received from children in care (either from them or on their behalf)? What has been the learning from them?
- What recently published evidence and cases of good practice have been used to improve services locally?
- Are case loads for all teams considered to be at a manageable level?
- What can members do to support the work of children's social care in Barnsley?