

Corporate Parenting Board 17th May 2021

2020/21 Q4 Performance Report Children in Care/Leaving Care

Purpose of report

To provide key performance information for Children in Care and Care Leavers for Q4 period 01.01.2021 to 31.03.2021.

Recommendations:

- 1 That the Board note the contents of the report

Statutory Visits-Target 95%

Whilst the Q4 performance saw a slight dip this quarter to an average 83.3%, the year-end performance is 87%, an improvement on the 2019-20 outturn of 85%. Since March 2020 we have continued to see strong performance in visiting and this is borne out by the data we have been required to report to the DfE due to the Pandemic. We report on children and young people being seen within the preceding 4 weeks and 91% of Children in Care open to Fieldwork services in April had been seen within the previous 4 weeks. For children and young people open to the Children in Care service, they have permanency plans in care and therefore their visiting frequency may be up to 12-weeklies. The reasons for some children not being seen are provided below:

- Those in custody where face to face visits are not agreed by the secure establishment and virtual contact is not in line with statutory frequency.
- Self-isolation due to Covid has impacted on some visits not taking place in timescales.
- Children and young people who are placed in stable long term foster placements have visits agreed at 12 weekly levels.

We are maintaining face to face visits unless it is not appropriate to do so; some are replaced with virtual visits with agreement from Service Managers and guidance has been issued regarding visits. Visits to Care leavers are undertaken at 8 weekly frequencies and as at the report to the DfE in April 69% of young people had been seen at that frequency with detailed scrutiny of those not being seen.

Health and Dental performance

Health Assessments-the expected target is 90% and Q4 performance is slightly below this at 87.3%. We have been working with Health colleagues to address delays identified in Initial Health assessments being requested. There are no issues about young people receiving medical attention when it has been required.

Dental checks-the expected target is 90% and we have seen a month on month deterioration in the measure which currently stands at 49%. Dentists being shut during the Pandemic has impacted on routine appointments, however as restrictions have started to reduce we expect to see an improvement in this measure. We know that children have not been prevented from accessing treatment when required. This deterioration was expected and raised nationally. There is a working group including health and social care colleagues to address this locally.

Pathway Plan

% Pathway Plans, authorised in the last 6months- the target for this measure is 95% and Q4 performance has seen overall improvement:

- **CIC is 86% an increase from 82% at Q3**
- **Care leavers is 92% an increase from 87% at Q3.**

Pathway Plans are key to supporting children in care and care leavers prepare for independence when appropriate to do so. It is an assessment of their needs, identifies any risks and any actions required to support their next steps. We are working on improving the template used to produce the Pathway Plan to make it more user friendly, having had feedback from young people.

For those young people at university, in secure institutions or not engaging with frequent visits, it is proving to remain challenging and colleagues remain tenacious in working with young people to complete or update their Pathway Plans.

Personal Education Plans (PEP)

PEP compliance

- The PEP reporting for the Spring Term will be completed around the 9th May, so social workers and school staff have until the end of April to finalise their PEPs. However, we have looked at the interim figures and although we remain below a target of 95%, currently the compliance rate is **at 80.1%** (a significant improvement from last term which was 58%), so around 87 children have not had a Spring Term PEP completed/finalised yet. We expect that the % of compliant PEPs will increase slightly once the final report is available next week.
- At the last Board I mentioned that some Virtual School Heads were signing off ePEPs without all of the attainment and assessment data being available, however our Virtual School Head is not prepared to do this because the data is fundamental to the plan. All schools are required to carry out termly assessments for their pupils, which is even more important this term to ascertain the learning loss as a result of lockdown- there should therefore be no reason why schools cannot provide this information on the PEP. The Virtual Head was not aware of any virtual schools in the region signing off PEPs without the full information but was going to check with the group.
- The virtual school have been subject of a Peer review, a full presentation has already been provided to today's Board in terms of key strengths, areas for improvement and recommendations.

Placement Stability

% of Children in Care who have had three or more placements in the previous 12 months has remained static over the last quarter at 9% and we know that the Pandemic and a lack of placement choice has had an impact. A shortage of placement availability can limit choice in matching children to the most suitable placements. Whilst the Q4 has seen a further improvement the overall performance remains at 9%. We have continued to offer support to foster carers both virtually and face to face to support stability. Movements for children in care are picked up by the Independent Reviewing Officer during statutory reviews.

% Children in Care who have lived in the same placement for at least 2 years-Our performance for Q4 is at 65.3% an increase from Q3 when this was at 62.2%. However, we

are below our last year outturn which was 69%. Our target for this measure is 70%. Some positive reasons for moves:

- Moving children to adoptive placements contributes to this measure but should be considered as a positive move.
- Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children can sometimes move from residential accommodation to semi-independence quicker once an assessment is undertaken of their needs and will also contribute to this measure.
- Some Young people may ask to move on to semi-independence as they approach leaving care stage rather than moving straight into independence. This is considered to be a good move in line with young people's needs and wishes.

Type of placement

70% of our children in care are in foster care the remainder are in:

- Residential=13.4%
- Independent living= 6%
- Semi-independent living= 1.7%
- Other category including Health placements, placed for adoption, secure accommodation or with parents=8.4%

The ratio of fostered children homed with internal: external foster carers is at 53.6%:46.4%, this is good because our target is 50:50 and Q4 has seen a further small improvement.

The ratio of children and young people in residential internal: external is 21.7%:78.3%

Fostered children that are in Long term fostering placements

The Department for Education target is for 40 to 60% of children fostered to be in long term fostering placements and our performance in Q4 was at 26.2% this has remained static. A robust tracking process has been put in place setting timescales for all children and young people who have been in placement and are to remain long term fostered. The impact of this work is that children in care have a greater sense of security that they are remaining with their foster carers long term.

We have streamlined some of our processes to secure the permanence arrangement of long term fostering for those children and young people for whom it is planned they remain with their carers long term. The Head of Service and the Service Manager are tracking progress on this work.

Children in Care numbers

The average number of children in care during Q4 was 676 and as at the end of Q4 was at 684, this is at a rate of 99 per 10,000. Our Statistical Neighbour Group with whom we compare are at 98 per 10,000. If Nottingham had the Statistical Neighbour Group average rate then we would have 677 children in care. The target we have set is 88 per 10,000. We have robust processes in place to agree entry into care. The increase in cost of placements has impacted on the overall cost of children in care.

We have 2 programmes to support step downs from residential care to foster care, external foster care to internal foster care and also to support re-unification back to parents and wider families with robust packages of support and these are through the STARS project and a new Re-unification programme.

Discharges

During Q4 8 children have been adopted or discharged through Special Guardianship Orders and therefore are no longer children in care. We know there have been delays in discharges through adoption, Special Guardianship and also revocation of Care orders when children are placed with parents and the local authority apply to discharge the care order.

We are still driving discharges through Special Guardianships which allows children to have more “normal” life experiences with wider family and friends rather than being involved in statutory social work services and the interventions in their families by social workers.

Children in Care Reviews

95.9% of Children in Care statutory reviews took place in timescale during Q4, and the target is 97%. This target was previously at 95% and was raised to be more aspirational and the service are determined to continue this improvement. The outturn for 2019-2021 was 89.9% and the Year to date performance is 95% which is an improvement.

% of reviews where the child (excluding under 4's) participated in their review is at 89.9% with Year end at 91.7%. The Strategic Lead for Quality Assurance and Safeguarding has identified an area for improvement in first reviews both with their timeliness and participation by children and will be a focus to support booking of these meetings in a timelier manner and issues such as language and use of interpreters and of where meetings take place. All of this to improve the participation of young people in their reviews.

Quality of practice

At the Q3 Performance update, the Board asked for some information about the quality of practice. During the period June 2020 to March 2021, 83 cases open to Children's Social Care were randomly selected and audited. **22 out of the 83 cases** audited were Children in Care, during Q4 there were 6. Due to the small numbers each quarter, my commentary is for those audited during 2020-21.

The overall judgement was:

Good/Outstanding= 45.5% equates to 10 of the 22 cases

Requires Improvement= 50% equates to 11 of the 22 cases

Inadequate= 4.5% equates to 1 of the 22 cases

Themes for improvement were in keeping children's chronologies up dated and meaningful and updating children's assessments annually. The greatest challenge for both of these areas has been capacity due to high caseloads and the fact children have 6 monthly reports completed for statutory reviews when the social worker will update the child's circumstances. However, the added benefit of updating an assessment is that the colleague is able to analyse information to consider whether the plan remains appropriate and to assess the birth family circumstances have changed. We have over the last year and a half agreed our Practice Standards and all social workers are clear regarding the expectations and we are working with them to improve on this measure. The case judged inadequate was because the outcome for the child was considered inadequate. Having said all of this the Chronologies and Assessments were both judged to be Good or Outstanding in 36.4 and 31.8% respectively and therefore indicates it is not a systemic issue.

For the Leaving Care Service **3 audits** were undertaken between June 2020 and March 2021 of which:

- 1 was judged overall to be Good or Outstanding and

- 2 were judged to Require Improvement.

Sharing learning is agreed by the Service Manager in areas where good or outstanding practice has been noted and for those areas that require improvement actions are agreed with updates being provided by the managers to ensure they are addressed. This update is then shared with the Head of Service thereby closing the loop on audits.

During Q4, we have had 3 more social workers on the higher range of caseloads 19-22 than at Q3 and this a challenge as it has an impact on practice. Newly qualified social workers are on protected cases and we had a vacancy at the end of Q3 which has since been filled which is good.

The service has no Children in Care unallocated. Many children are placed at long distance and therefore it can be a challenge ensuring face to face statutory visits are taking place especially with the added complication of working under Covid restrictions.

Positively the teams offer student placements and this brings in additional capacity to undertake specific tasks on social work cases. In September 2021, we will be running a Frontline hub, one of three in the City, which employs a colleague as a Consultant Social Worker to oversee fast track training of 4 social work students with a view to them being offered permanent roles when they qualify within the directorate. This will be the second cohort; the first cohort will yield 11 qualified social workers in September 2021.

Suitable accommodation/Sufficiency

We are working with Barnardo's to create a Supported lodgings scheme/Gap homes model for supported accommodation for those children in care and care leavers who are not able to sustain a tenancy.

Barnardo's are working with the Government initiative "Place to Call Home" to recruit specific carers/ Hosts for Supported Lodgings for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking children and young people also. We have a Panel set for June 2021 to approve identified hosts for the Supported Lodgings scheme which will allow us to formulate a needs led pathway for Care Leavers.

Gap Homes' has been costed out and we are scoping out the feasibility of providing supported accommodation to young people 16 to 18 with the option for those young people who require further support to remain until assessed as ready to sustain their tenancy.

Competition and Marketing Authority (CMA) has launched a national market study into children's social care provision and Nottingham City are engaging in this. The study will examine the lack of availability and increasing costs in children's social care provision, including children's homes and fostering. The study will actively seek views from a range of providers and other stakeholders, including private providers and local authorities.

Care Leavers

Suitability of accommodation and employment, education and training (EET) status are key issues in the lives of care leavers.

The percentage of care leavers in suitable accommodation (age 19-21yrs) has gone up from 90% to 94.7% in Q4 which is positive, the target is 90%. Those young people in custody cannot be considered to be in suitable accommodation according to the definition we work to.

We have resolved the housing for one care leaver after 8 months, the Personal advisor working closely with the young person and the local housing providers to secure this.

The percentage of care leavers in employment, education or training (age 19-21years) has risen from 63.8% at Q3 to 68.4% against a target of 60%. We are implementing an Aspirations Champion Scheme to continue to support children and young people with their aspirations as well as scoping out with Barnardo's the implementation of the ASDAN Scheme which will provide certification of skills required for independence. Acknowledging the issues young people face in terms of loneliness and isolation we are also working with Barnardo's to implement a volunteer Befriender scheme to support young people in their transition.

Fostering Service

A dashboard has been set up on our data management system to monitor compliance regarding checks, visits, training for foster carers which is good. Unfortunately, the Dashboard hit a glitch following a Liquid Logic update which has now been rectified. We know some of the data needs cleansing which is underway which will allow a more accurate reflection of performance. The Service has a robust Improvement Plan in place and compliance in respect of Minimum Standards is the priority area we are working on. Recruitment has been maintained throughout the Lockdown periods and we continue to see an increase in Internal Foster carers.

Residential

Children's Residential have continued to deliver services to children throughout the pandemic, on occasions colleagues moving in to live in the home to ensure safe caring. They remain rated by Ofsted as Good or Outstanding which is excellent. As the Pandemic eases Ofsted will resume Inspections, and we have maintained virtually our required Regulation 44 inspections on all of our Homes.

Recommendations

- 1 Social Care will continue to monitor performance regarding dental checks to ensure this improves as Pandemic restrictions reduce, and to address any barriers**
- 2 Head of Service to work with the Virtual school to ensure any changes to the PEP for non-statutory school age children are strengthened in line with the Peer Review recommendations.**
- 3 Head of Service and Service Manager will continue to drive the work on increasing number of children in long term fostering arrangements.**
- 4 Head of Service and Service Manager to ensure actions identified from audit activity is embedded to improve practice**

Report authors

Tajinder Madahar, Head of Service Children's Duty and Targeted Services, Children in Care and Leaving Care

Sharon Clarke, Head of Service Regulated Services

Helen Watson, Interim Director for Children's Integrated Services

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