

Summary

Sefton Children's Services Improvement Board

May 2023

Performance Management and Quality Assurance Report

Performance metrics for this period begin to evidence stabilisation and some impact of grip in respect of demand and thresholds. Whilst the level of contacts received remains consistent, a decrease in the percentage of those contacts converted into referrals has held at approximately 25% for the last quarter - the previous period saw this rate sitting at approximately 33% converted into referrals. The impact of this change is a reduction of approx. 100 referrals a month into social care. This reduction can be accounted for by the increasing level of scrutiny applied to thresholds in this area of the service. Figures around rates of section 47s, Assessments completed and those that are concluded with no further action still provide evidence of a system which processes too much work. A number of workstreams are in place to address this but staffing challenges and agency occupancy, particularly in the Assessment Service continue to present a challenge in this regard.

Early Help and Integrated Front Door diagnostics, review and re-design are scheduled to start in May and the planned review will take 12 weeks to be completed. The review will focus on the thresholds, effectiveness, and the quality of 'Front Door', Early Help offer and partnership working.

Performance in respect of supervision and oversight is beginning to show evidence of sustained improvement, quality assurance is beginning to validate that the quality of this oversight is beginning to match the increase in compliance. There is some evidence that the Supervision and Oversight training provided in conjunction with our Leeds colleagues is beginning to evidence impact - however this is far from embedded, and it needs to be acknowledged that improvements are set against an extremely low starting position. Supervision and management oversight remains a focus of performance management and reports for each individual service area are available and scrutinised at each monthly performance meeting. This scrutiny has seen significant increases, particularly in the Localities (Help & Protections) teams over the last quarter - it is improvements in these teams which are driving the increase reported across the service as a whole.

Timeliness in respect of assessment completion has shown some significant increases in recent weeks, however the overall completion rate of 60% now tracks significantly below SN (statistical neighbour) rates of approx. 80%. A clear focus on this by Service Managers in recent months has seen this figure approach 100% in some services, however it remains to be seen if this high level of completion is sustainable given the staffing instability in the Services concerned. A focus on management oversight of assessments at the early (10 day) stage is providing some grip in respect of compliance in this area.

Other than open assessments which have climbed steadily since January (which was a 6 month low of 386), all other aspects of work are broadly static - the large number of assessments which conclude with no further work provides some explanation to the lack of immediate impact these fluctuations have, as well as the roughly 2 month time-lag between an assessment being commenced and then converting into an open CiN case.

498 open assessments  
 740 open CiN Need cases  
 330 open Child Protection cases  
 615 Cared for children.

Accordingly, case loads across the service are mostly static. These figures need to be treated with some caution as they do not take account of factors including FTE or the impact of internal case transfer on quality. It can be seen from these figures that the current case load in each service stands below the 6-month average.

Service	6-month average	Current
Assessment	23.3	22
Localities 1	16.6	16
Localities 2	20.5	19
CWCN	22.8	19
Cared For	14.1	14
Young Peoples Team	12.5	11
Care Experienced	16	15

Recent months have seen decreases in Child in Need and CP cases, and a gradual increase in Cared for Numbers. As has been discussed, a great deal of work leaves the system at the 'assessment' stage with approx. 50% of assessments completed resulting in no further action. The work to rebalance this area of the Service should support in addressing this issue. A clear

Impact of such a high volume of work being undertaken by a discrete area of the service is the impact on quality, this is compounded by the composition of the Assessment service which is predominantly made up of agency workers who move in and out of roles frequently. The impact of staff churn remains the single biggest feature reported negatively by families and a significant driver of poor work identified by quality assurance.

Performance and Quality in respect of our Child in Need cohort is an area that requires significant focus, along with the issues in respect of assessment volume and 'no further action', performance in respect of planning meetings is an issue and has significant impact on quality. Roughly 4 out of every 10 Child in Need meetings are either late or do not take place at all, this has an obvious impact on outcomes (evidenced through QA). When this is combined with the variable quality of the plans which are in place, then this is a clear area for focus.

Alongside work with our Leeds Partners to improve the quality of plans and assessments, Independent Oversight of all new CiN Plans will be introduced by the Safeguarding Unit. Two dedicated reviewing officers will oversee and chair all initial Child in Need meetings and then return to review those cases as they reach the 6-month stage. This review will include QA of the original assessment, support to create an inclusive, task focused and realistic plan as well as a clear programme of meetings up to the 6-month stage. At present, roughly 16 children a week become 'child in need', requiring approx. 10 meetings. This initiative will run for 6 months at which point it will be reviewed to assess impact. This work will also be supported by the introduction of the new team focusing on practice and provision of services for those working with children and families impacted by domestic abuse. Our own quality assurance as well as the evidence from Ofsted visits highlights this a clear area for focus.

A priority over the next 2 months is preparation for the next Ofsted focused visit which will be in respect of our 'Cared For' children. The advanced notice of timing and the area to be looked at has enabled a clear preparation plan to be put in place which is reviewed each week. All staff have been briefed in respect of this visit and the expectations that accompany it. Quality Assurance activity will be directed to support this visit as well as enhanced levels of senior management case review.

Given that approximately a third of our Cared for Children are allocated outside of the 'Corporate Parenting' service these actions are service wide.

Performance Management is beginning to support and provide evidence of a system that is beginning to show evidence of stabilising and responding to regular scrutiny, this however is far from embedded. Areas that receive challenge and attention do improve, however this can be at the expense of areas which are neglected. A clear example of this has been the recent stark increase in assessment completion timescales at the expense of visit timeliness for the same cohort. Performance data, whilst much improved, does not yet support effective 'Realtime' performance management at practitioner and first line TM level. This issue will be addressed by the completion of the fully functional, child level Power BI reporting system which will support proactive performance management. This will be completed by August 2023.

1	Overall Good or Improving Situation
2	Overall Improving but Impact Still Concerning
3	Not Improving

	Status	Metric Description	Previous Metric Value	Current Metric Value	Statistical Neighbours Avg Rate	Direction of Travel (DoT) Description	DoT Difference Indicator	Comment	Action
Demand	2	MASH Contact Starts in last 12 Months (Nos)	13490	13608		Change from Previous Month	▲		
	2	Referral Starts in last 12 Months (Nos)	4245	4161		Change from Previous Month	▼	See below. The decreasing percentage of contacts converted to referral in the last quarter is reducing the number of referrals in the system. It can be seen however that the number of contacts received has remained consistent.	
	2	Contact to Referral Conversion Rate Last 12 Months (%)	29.4	28.8		Change from Previous Month	▼	The last three months have begun to evidence a sustained decrease in the percentage of contacts converted into referrals. The last quarter figure has been roughly 25% as opposed to 33% in the previous period. With the number of contacts remaining roughly consistent, this drop equates to approx. 100 less referrals per month into social care.	
	3	Referral Starts in last 12 Months (Rate per 10,000 children)	784.7	769.2	579.3	Change from Previous Month	▼	in reference to the above narrative, this rolling 12-month figure is now beginning to drop, however it remains rated as red due to its distance from the rates of our statistical neighbours	
	3	Assessments Completed in last 12 Months (Nos)	4874	4716		Change from Previous Month	▼	See above, a gradually improving picture but still significantly higher than stat neighbour rates	
	3	Assessments Completed in last 12 Months (Rate per 10,000 children)	900.6	871.2	622.0	Change from Previous Month	▼	See above	
	2	Children in Need Plans – Currently Open (Nos)	774	772		Change from Previous Month	▼	This figure has stabilised in recent months, coming down from a high of approx. 950 open cases	A forthcoming exercise is planned to review those children in need cases which have been open for an extended period of time - the hypothesis that a number will be able to be closed or appropriately stepped down creating further capacity in the system. QA and performance management provides a clear indication that there remain quality and compliance issues in respect of our Child in Need Cohort. Moving forward all new CiN plans will be subject to the independent oversight of an IRO, who will then return to review the progress of the

								plan as it reaches the 6-month stage.
	3	Children Subject to Section 47 Enquiries in last 12 Months (Nos)	2020	2018		Change from Previous Month	▼	Figure continues to track significantly above the national and regional average.
	3	Children Subject to Section 47 Enquiries in last 12 Months (Rate per 10,000 children)	373.4	373.2	207.5	Change from Previous Month	▼	
	2	Child Protection Plans – Currently Open (Nos)	332	334		Change from Previous Month	▲	This cohort remains static with increased oversight of those children where early de-registration is proposed and also those who become the subject of pre-proceedings. Both changes have come in the wake of the last Ofsted visit and have been briefed out to partners
	2	Child Protection Plans – Currently Open (Rate per 10,000 children)	61.4	61.7	63.5	Change from Previous Month	▲	
	2	Cared for Children – Currently Open (Nos)	612	616		Change from Previous Month	▲	Cohort of Cared for children remains broadly static. The slight increase over the recent period has been driven more by a decrease in episodes ending rather than an increase in starts. A clear action plan is now in place to prepare for the next Focused Visit. It is known that this will be in respect of our Cared For children.
	2	Cared for Children – Currently Open (Rate per 10,000 children)	113.1	113.9	89	Change from Previous Month	▲	The rate of cared for children in Sefton remains significantly above the rate of our statistical and regional neighbours – any changes in this number will be gradual. It is of note that the number of these children who are placed at home with their parents now stands at the lowest figure seen for 12 months, at just under 13% of cared for children (79). This decrease is fuelled by a number of factors including improved dialogue with the Family Court and Cafcass.
Timelessness	3	MASH Contacts Actioned within 24 Hours – in last 12 Months (%)	23.6	22.8		Change from Previous Month	▼	
	3	Assessments Completed within 45 Working Days – in last 12 Months (%)	57.8	62.3	89.2	Change from Previous Month	▲	This figure now tracks significantly below comparator rates, however performance across March and April has seen significant improvement, with rates approaching 100% across the Service.
	1	Initial Child Protection Conferences held within 15 Working Days – in last 12 Months (%)	91.1	88.2	82.5	Change from Previous Month	▼	This KPI has been consistently high for the last 12 months and is a strong example of clear and effective practice between the Safeguarding Unit and operational Teams - the recent dip is the result of issues with a small number of identified cases, but has resulted in the pre conference procedure once again being briefed out and re-



enforced across the service

Status	Metric Description	Previous Metric Value	Current Metric Value	Statistical Neighbours Avg Rate	Direction of Travel (DoT) Description	DoT Difference Indicator	Comment	Action
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3	Children in Need (Open) with a Visit within the last 20 Working Days (%)	59.6	61.9		Change from Previous Month	▲	Whilst this figure has improved somewhat over the last month, it remains an area of focus and is symptomatic of the relatively poor performance in this area, especially when compared to those children who find themselves the subject of child protection planning. Staffing instability within this area of the service continues to act as a barrier to improvement in this area. The addition of independent oversight of all initial CiN plans should support improvements in both quality and performance in this area.	
1	Child Protection (Open) with a Visit within the last 20 Working Days (%)	92.5	89.8		Change from Previous Month	▼		
2	Cared for Children (Open) with a Visit within Statutory Timescales (%)	85.8	86.8		Change from Previous Month	▲	Whilst this figure remains high, discrepancies exist across the service. Performance in respect of those children within the localities service is somewhat lower. This perhaps reflects the pressures within that service as well as the breadth of work undertaken. A clear action plan is in place to prepare for the next focused visit which encompasses our Cared for children across the entire service	Enhanced oversight and support from the SGU in respect of those cared for children who are placed within the Localities teams.
3	Children in Need Plans Authorised within the last 20 Working Days (Localities Teams) (%)	55.7	53.5		Change from Previous Month	▼	Evidence of performance issues in respect of this cohort. Plan to introduce independent oversight of child in need.	

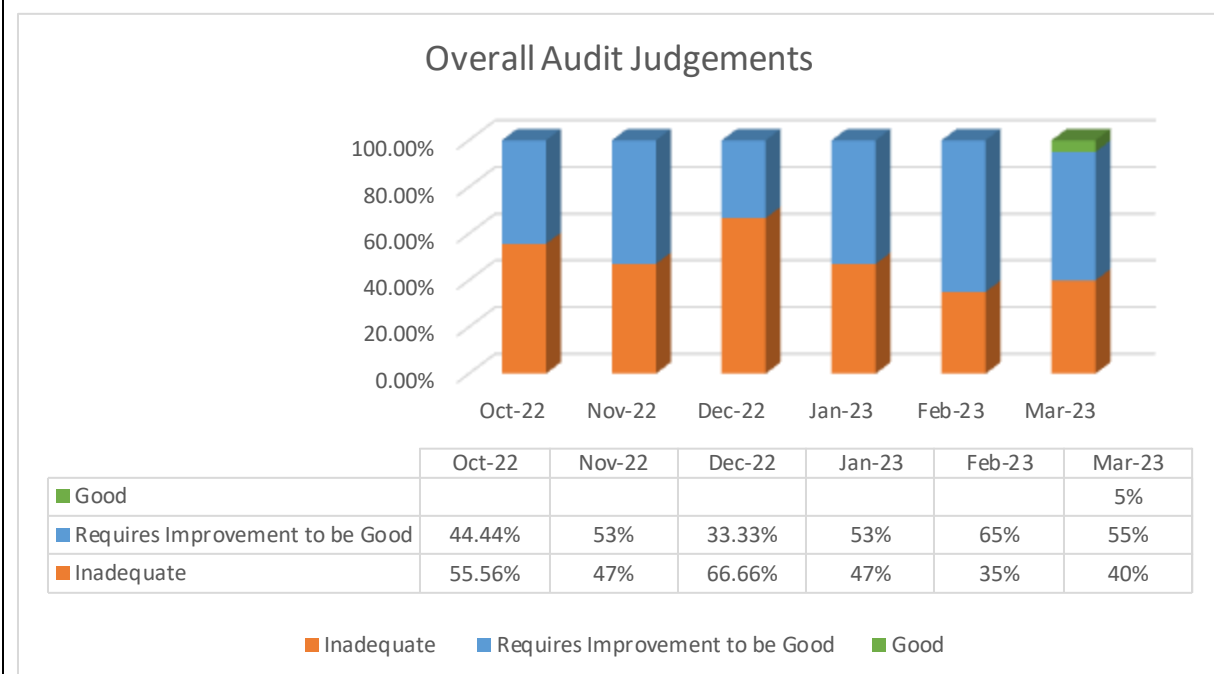
Effectiveness	2	Children with a Previous Referral within 12 months of their latest Referral - Rolling 12 Months (%)	26.5	26.4	21.1	Change from Previous Month	▼		
	2	Assessments Completed in last 12 Months with Outcome of No Further Action (%)	50.7	49.5		Change from Previous Month	▼		
	2	Children who became the subject of a Child Protection Plan for a subsequent time in last 12 Months (%)	17.6	17.2	25	Change from Previous Month	▼		
Management	2	Open Cases (CIN, CP, CfC) with Appropriate Case Supervision Recorded (%)	31.5	67.7		Change from Previous Month	▲	Performance in respect of case supervision has increased significantly over the last few months. This improvement has not been uniformly high across the service and still requires constant performance management to maintain. Quality assurance is beginning to evidence increasing quality of supervision in terms of driving outcomes and improving practice.	
	2	All Open Cases (CIN, CP, CfC) with Appropriate Management Oversight Recorded (%)	31.5	58.0		Change from Previous Month	▲	See above	
	2	Average Caseload (NB: this data does not use FTE as it is not currently available and hence actual average caseload will be slightly higher than the figures reported here)	15.8			Change from Previous Month	▲	See data in summary section. A review of caseloads across all areas of children's services shows that current caseloads in all areas of the department sit below the 6-month average	
	2	Vacancy Rate	68.86	68		Change from Previous Month	-	There has been a slight decrease in the number of vacancies.	
	2	Agency		68		Change from Previous Month	-		
	2	Sickness Absence	-	4.22%		Change from Previous Month	-		
	Outcomes	2	Cared for Children (Open) with 3 or more Placements (%)	9.4	8.5		Change from Previous Month	▼	
2		Cared for Children (Open) with 3 or more Social Workers (%)	17.3	17.4		Change from Previous Month	▲		
2		Care Experienced aged 19-21 Currently in Education, Employment, or Training (%)	30.8	36.7	50	Change from Previous Month	▲		

Quality Assurance



In March 2023, 20 children's records were audited from across the service. All managers are now engaged in the process which is proving effective in terms of strengthening everyone's understanding of what good looks like and reinforcing practice standards. Leeds partners have also completed an audit in March and audits are completed each month by the Quality Assurance Team.

The theme, "Effective Supervision and Management Oversight"; was chosen as a key area for improvement and to gain a snapshot in time as Leeds were due to commence Team Manager Training with 3 cohorts of Managers at the end of March. Audits over the last 3 months have shown steady improvement in the quality of practice in Sefton and in March 2023, a first audit was judged 'Good' overall (see direction of travel chart below.) This audit has been moderated by the AD Quality Assurance and Service Manager for Safeguarding who confirmed the grade.



It is significant to note that 2 audits were graded "good" in the "Supervision and Management Oversight" domain for the first time; both grades were upheld when moderated. We saw more reflective discussion and consideration of the child's care plan in these audits; together with better action tracking with clear timescales and ownership; regular supervision and layered management oversight which led to more positive impact.

A dip sample was also undertaken with Leeds colleagues who have delivered Management Oversight and Supervision practice learning sets. We considered 6 supervision records of managers who had attended the training and 6 supervision records of managers who had not attended any of the training. We found greater evidence of a supervision mindset developing, more frequent supervision, better structured recording, more attention given to the child's plan and professionally curious questions amongst the 3 managers who had attended the training showing early impact. Leeds will reinforce issues noted further in subsequent training.

#### Key findings linked to theme

- Supervision is sometimes too infrequent to be effective in driving the child's plan resulting in drift and delay.
- There is not always challenge recorded by the Team Manager when there are long delays in families receiving support.
- Management oversight is not always clear in respect of why decisions were made.
- Actions arising sometimes remain outstanding for a long period of time/ are not always followed up.
- More recently, supervision records are evidencing more reflective discussion, positively impacting upon the child's outcomes.

#### Other areas for improvement:

- Significant delays in the family receiving the identified support and intervention impacting on the child's stability and also resulting in parents losing trust and dis-engaging with key workers.
- Planning for permanence is not focussed upon early enough for some children and it is not always clear what the long- term plan is.
- Multi-agency meetings are not frequent enough to progress the child's plan and improve outcomes for the child/family.
- Changes of social worker have caused a start again approach and hindered progress of the plan in some cases.
- There is not always an up-to-date assessment to inform planning and parents/carers continually report that they have not received copies of assessments and plans.
- Case summaries contain information that is out of date and do not always reflect the child's current living arrangements.

In April 2023, 22 children's recorded were audited. The theme was "whole family approach to domestic abuse" following Social Work Week learning and to coincide with launch of new Safer Families Hub to gain a snapshot in time. Moderation is still to be undertaken. Initial grades are promising with **2 audits being awarded an overall good grade** and a further reduction in those being graded inadequate. Further detail will be provided to next Improvement Board.

Provisional data for April:

April 2023	No. of audits	%
Good	2	9%
RI	15	68%
Inadequate	5	23%

### Feedback from Families

To triangulate findings from audit, we gain feedback from children and families regarding their experiences with Sefton Children's Services. Across March and April, feedback was received from 26 parents/carers and 2 young people.

The parent/carers who rated the service as good felt well supported by their current social workers/child social care support workers and felt the plan for their families were progressing. The parents/carers who rated the service as poor was mainly due to frustrations with changes in social worker, poor communication from their social worker, not receiving copies of the assessment/plan and not receiving the support promised to them.

*'The child social care support worker was excellent and always responded immediately when she was involved and would contact the young person to speak with him when I let her know he was having a melt down, she also visited regularly.'*

*'I think my feelings are taken into account within the plan. Initially I was having family time in a centre but asked to have it at home which has now happened.'*

*'This is my first time involved in adoption planning and would like to say that everybody has been really kind and thoughtful and if I have needed to speak to anybody, they have got back to me to answer my query.'*

*'The support has been good, it would be better if there was a less turnover of staff. When a social worker leaves I need to know who to contact in the mean time by a named person.'*

*Mum feels that all the support that was promised has not materialised. "Lots of promises of help but nothing came from help requested." She says she has sought help herself from parenting groups and family. Done it all on her own.*

*Mum has had to tell her story three times which is upsetting and frustrating for her.*

### Pace of Practice Improvement

The churn of staff and impact on social work allocation, especially in the Help and Protection and Assessment Teams continues to impede progress. Workstreams are in place to improve staffing stability, assessment and plans and there will be an ongoing focus on transfer protocol and pre proceedings work. Additional recruitment has occurred/ is planned to increase capacity and provide greater focus:

- 23 International Social Workers due to join Sefton - Summer 2023
- 2<sup>nd</sup> permanent Practice Improvement Manager in post on 13.06.23
- Specialist teams set up - My Space, Family Group Conferencing & Safer Families Hub (who will take a whole family approach to domestic abuse and launch Caring Dads Service in Sefton)
- 2 dedicated Reviewing Officers will oversee and chair all initial Child in Need meetings and then return to review those families as they reach the 6-month stage.
- Interim AD Transformation Team will focus on Early Help and workforce stability – Feedback from families/partners highlights impact of changes in social workers/ poor communication is a significant issue.
- 9 Frontline participants to join Sefton in September and increase in Social Work Apprenticeships available.

### **Capturing good practice**

A good practice library is being added to as we see more examples of good work. When an audit is graded good, strengths based summaries have been produced and will be cascaded. We have also introduced “Make A Difference Interviews” which allow us to meet with practitioners when a good outcome is identified to drill down on actual practice using “appreciative enquiry” techniques.

Examples of good audits will be anonymised and shared to support auditors and the QA Manager and Service Manager have been reviewing new auditors audits to consider quality and give direction if required and positive feedback. We want to be sure audits are clear, well structured (to ensure we can use them to measure progress effectively) and that actions are timely, and that they include issues raised by families to achieve outcomes they also identify and prioritise.

### **Ofsted Monitoring Visit July 2023:**

The last ILACS inspection provided a clear view of practice in respect of our cared for children. This has formed the basis of an action plan to prepare for this visit, with clear actions and time bound tasks assigned to individuals and reviewed on a weekly basis by SMT and AD.

Quality assurance activity will focus on the experiences of “cared for children” over the next 2 months with increased oversight from SM/AD level, ongoing monthly deep dive audits (Themes EPEPs and children’s input into their plans). All Independent Reviewing Officers will be observed conducting children’s meetings with a focus on participation and effective care planning. Dip samples will consider impact of Sefton recently launched “Go To” direct work tools on practice, referrals for Independent Visitors/Advocates, experiences of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children, Children Placed with Parents (PWP) and those subject to Section 20. 2 About Me books have been created to support specific work with our “cared for children” ensuring we understand their lived experiences, current circumstances, and views. Advice has been issued to support good case summaries and writing directly to children. A matrix has also been produced to support practitioners understanding of what good looks like in audit; an idea suggested by a social worker showing commitment to increase insight and understanding. Team Managers and Social workers have also been provided with useful good matrix to support assessment work and leaflets etc have been created to support relational practice.

Performance data will be considered in an ongoing way to plan additional preparatory work.