

Scrutiny Committee on Children's Services – 14th November 2012

Report of the Director of Children's Services

Directorate of Children's Services – Contextual Information regarding Performance in the Following Areas:-

Care leavers in employment, education and training

Number of looked after children per 10,000 of the child population

Percentage of initial assessments for children's social care carried out in less than ten working days

Purpose of Report

1. To inform members of the committee about specific performance measures, and factors affecting performance measures, in a small number of specific areas highlighted in the quarterly reporting process.
2. To inform members of actions being taken and which are planned, to improve performance.

Background

3. The Directorate of Children's Services reports regularly to Scrutiny Committee on issues where we are performing below target in order to help members understand why this is the case, and what the Directorate of Children's Services and the Children and Young People's Partnership is doing to improve. This report is based upon the performance measures within our Directorate Strategic Plan. In some cases performance measures have not changed since last time as they are based upon data that is only reported annually e.g. examination results.

Care leavers in employment, education and training

3 out of the 6 care leavers who had their 19th birthday in Quarter1 2012-13 were in employment, education or training.

This area of work remains a serious challenge due to the prevailing economic conditions, the national trend in youth unemployment, together with the circumstances of this group of young people.

The group are a priority for Connexions, the 16+ Social Care Team and the Looked after Children Education Team. Every looked after young person is provided with individual support to find a positive destination and this involves assistance in the completion and submission of applications and dealing with recruitment processes. Extensive work is done in colleges in order to prevent looked after children from dropping out of educational programmes.

Whilst every effort is made to maintain contact and support for individuals on leaving care, some of them move away from Dudley and choose not to communicate with us. Others are young mothers and have chosen to concentrate on their parental responsibilities rather than employment or education.

More care leavers than ever before are gaining places in higher education. Six looked after children are currently studying at University. One care leaver recently gained a first class degree in Marketing with International Tourism / Management and an increasing number of care leavers each year are applying for University places.

Number of looked after children per 10,000 of the child population

At the start of the first quarter the number of LAC per 10,000 was 104.9 and this trend has risen at the end of the quarter to 109.4. Our target is 98.8.

The numbers of new admissions are 66 in the quarter, 36 in the 0-9 age group and 30 in the 10 and over group.

30 children ceased to be looked after in the period. In quarter 4 we had a similar number of admissions but more discharges.

We are seeking to accelerate the process of reunifying children in care with their families where this is safe. However this is not always possible.

The numbers of new admissions has remained relatively stable but the numbers of discharges has reduced. Children are staying longer often due to the complexity of case history and family circumstances. We have seen particular rises in the 0-4 and 10-15 age group with neglect accounting for the majority of the admissions. The number has a direct correlation to the numbers of people in receipt of job seekers allowance so the economic climate has a significant impact.

We have a higher proportion of children on statutory orders than the England average so these children will have met the threshold for care as determined by the courts.

We are accelerating the development of early support services and increasing capacity in our family support services. This will assist in the identification of need at an early stage and provide support to those children on the edge of

care to prevent admissions wherever possible but also to provide care where there is a risk of or actual significant harm to children and young people.

It is the case that professionals are encountering more cases of poor parenting than was the case in previous years, and society's expectations about the need to protect children from neglect have risen markedly. The challenge of keeping children safe and controlling the costs of doing so is immense.

Percentage of initial assessments for children's social care carried out in less than ten working days

Whereas our target was 72.5% of initial assessments to be completed in less than ten working days our actual performance was 62.9%.

There are two factors at work in connection with this indicator. One is the increasing complexity of cases that are being referred for initial assessment. The overall number of referrals has gone down in recent quarters. In quarter 1, 473 referrals were received as opposed to 616 at the end of quarter 3 the previous year (December 2011). This is a positive development as it means that many of the previously inappropriate cases that were being referred have now been filtered out.

However it also means that the remaining, appropriate referrals, are time consuming, often containing complex scenarios with a significant risk of neglect or harm to young people. They therefore demand a thorough and considered treatment which absorbs time and means that our target for timely completion is challenging.

In addition we have experienced a high rate of sickness absence in one particular team that also slowed progress.

Social care managers are working within existing resources to prioritise cases and ensure that assessments are completed safely as well as rapidly.

Finance

4. The action plans concerning improvements in these areas will be funded from existing resources.

Law

5. The main pieces of legislation governing these aspects of our work are the Children Act 2004 and the Education and Inspections Act of 2006.

Equality Impact

6. OfSTED judges that Dudley's Services for all children and young people are good but agrees with our self assessment that the progress of children in care

and those with learning difficulties/disabilities should continue to be seen as priorities for improvement.

Recommendation

7. That the report be noted by the committee.



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