

Committee: Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Date: 11th January 2023

Wards: All

Subject:

Lead officer: Jane McSherry, Executive Director of Children, Lifelong Learning and Families

Lead member(s): Cllr Brenda Fraser, Cabinet Member Children's Services, and Cllr Sally Kenny, Cabinet Member Education and Lifelong Learning

Contact officer: Maisie Davies, Head of Performance, Improvement and Partnerships

Recommendations:

A. Members of the panel to discuss and comment on the contents of the report

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1. This report summarises the performance information for 2022/23, up to 30th November 2022, as set out in the accompanying document, the Children & Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel Performance Index 2022/23.

2 DETAILS

Exception Report

2.1. The following indicators are marked as amber or red.

No	Indicator	Rating	Service Commentary
7	% of reviews completed within timescale for Children with Child Protection Plans	A	This is an indicator that we monitor every month. Performance data shows that during Q4 we consistently reached our target of 99%. However, there was a slight dip in performance from April 2022. We continue to monitor the situation closely.
9	% of Children that became the subject of a Child Protection Plan (CPP) for the second or subsequent time.	R	This indicator shows the % of children with an open CPP as at the end of the period who are the subject of a CPP for

			<p>the second or subsequent time.</p> <p>Numbers rose from 14 in April, peaking at 31 last month and falling to 30 at the end of November. The proportion (25% at the end of November) has remained steady since June. We are closely monitoring this indicator.</p>
13	Average number of weeks taken to complete Care proceedings against a national target of 26 weeks.	R	Data for Q2 is yet to be published. Nationally a target of 26 weeks has been set for an authority to conclude court proceedings and to achieve a court decision. We always strive to meet the nationally set target of 26 weeks. Due to a small number of children in proceedings in Merton, delays with one family can skew our figures. See commentary below for further information.
27	Reception year surplus places	R	See commentary below.
28	Secondary school surplus places	R	See commentary below

Commentary

Indicator 13: Average number of weeks taken to complete Care proceedings against a national target of 26 weeks.

2.2. Nationally, the duration of care proceedings has increased. This is a result of court closures during the pandemic.

2.3. A range of influences impact on the duration of court proceedings – some of which are outside of the authority’s immediate control. These include court availability, the availability and timeliness of expert witness input, and the desire to engage effectively with the wider family network to explore alternatives (where appropriate and safe to do so).

2.4. The service has monthly court and PLO tracking meetings including legal representatives. On a quarterly basis, representatives from the Children and Families Court Advisory Services (Cafcass) attend. These meetings allow the authority to raise concerns about timeliness.

2.5. Since the last update, the Assistant Director Children’s Social Care and Youth Inclusion met with Merton’s link judge who commented very positively on Merton’s PLO work. There was an acknowledgement that achieving and maintaining 26 weeks timescales for care proceedings across London and across the country is problematic; impacted on by significant District Judge vacancy rates and delayed Court timescales. Some challenging and long-standing cases due to complexities and need for additional expert assessments; however, these are exceptional.

Indicator 27: Reception surplus places

2.6. This indicator is the total school reception roll against total operating admission numbers. Between December 2021 and March 2022, the percentage of surplus primary school places increased to 11.6% and has remained at this level during Q1 and Q2 2022, which is outside of our target range of 5-10%.

2.7. There is no official national benchmark on an appropriate level of surplus places. Surplus places across schools provide more choice of school places, but since schools are largely funded based on numbers on roll, surplus places have a negative impact on the school budget, and therefore potentially teaching and learning. In the late 1990s the Audit Commission recommended that a surplus of 5-10% would enable the appropriate balance of choice and to economically provide sufficient school places, and this is still considered a reasonable estimate of best practice and so has been used for this indicator.

Indicator 28: Secondary school surplus places

2.8. Surplus places in secondary school year 7 remains at 3.2%, below the 5% target, hence has a red rating. However, as the lower roll numbers flow through from primary school there will be more surplus places in future years.

2.9. To reduce the surplus in primary schools, and within the context of the School Place Planning Strategy (which was brought to Scrutiny in autumn 2021), officers continue to review school admission numbers to reduce capacity, with two further schools reducing their reception intake in September 2022.

3 AMENDMENTS, CORRECTIONS AND DATA CAVEATS

Amendments, Corrections and Data Caveats

3.1. All data for 2021/22 are subject to EOY validation by the DfE.

3.2. We are currently unable to report against the following indicators:

No	Indicator	Service Commentary
6	% of quorate attendance at CPP conferences	Following amendments to the system workflow, as part of the Mosaic Repair Project, a report has now been built to extract this data and we are

		currently in the process of user acceptance testing.
16	Stability of placements of Looked After Children - number of placements (3 or more in the year)	Q2 data amended. Error with formula.
17	Stability of placements of Looked After Children (aged under 16) - length of placement (in care 2.5 years, placement 2 years)	Q1 & Q2 data amended. Error with formula.
18	% of Looked After Children in foster placements who are placed with in-house foster carers	Q2 data amended following a review of this indicator. This remains provisional whilst we complete our review. Staying put arrangements had previously been included in error.

3.3. Performance data is provided for the below indicators in the attached Index; however, the target and RAG rating for these indicators are under review to ensure they provide an accurate reflection of service performance across the year, as the data is cumulative. This will be reviewed in the new year alongside target setting for the next financial year. A brief service commentary is provided for information.

No	Indicator	Service Commentary
19	Number of in-house foster carers recruited	Merton places a large proportion of children with in-house foster carers. There were some challenges last year within recruitment due to the pandemic. We have refreshed our communication strategy for the new financial year. We aim to promote the Mocking Bird model and open a second cluster in 2023 which will help with recruitment.
22	% of total 0-5 year estimated Census 2011 population from areas of deprivation (IDACI 30%)	This figure shows cumulative data across the year. The proportion of children aged 0-5 years old from areas of

	<p>whose families have accessed children's centre services (cumulative)</p>	<p>deprivation whose families have accessed children's centre services saw a decrease over the course of the pandemic. There is now a full face to face offer from Children's Centre staff for parenting programmes etc, which are being well used. This, with the return to face to face contact from Health Visitors and other partners (who are co-located in the Children's Centres), and the development of a Family Hub model (as promoted by the Government) has already resulted in improvements in the proportions of relevant families accessing services and it should continue to rise.</p>
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Appendices – the following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report

- Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel Performance Index 2022/23.

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