

CHILDREN'S SERVICES SELF-ASSESSMENT March 2022

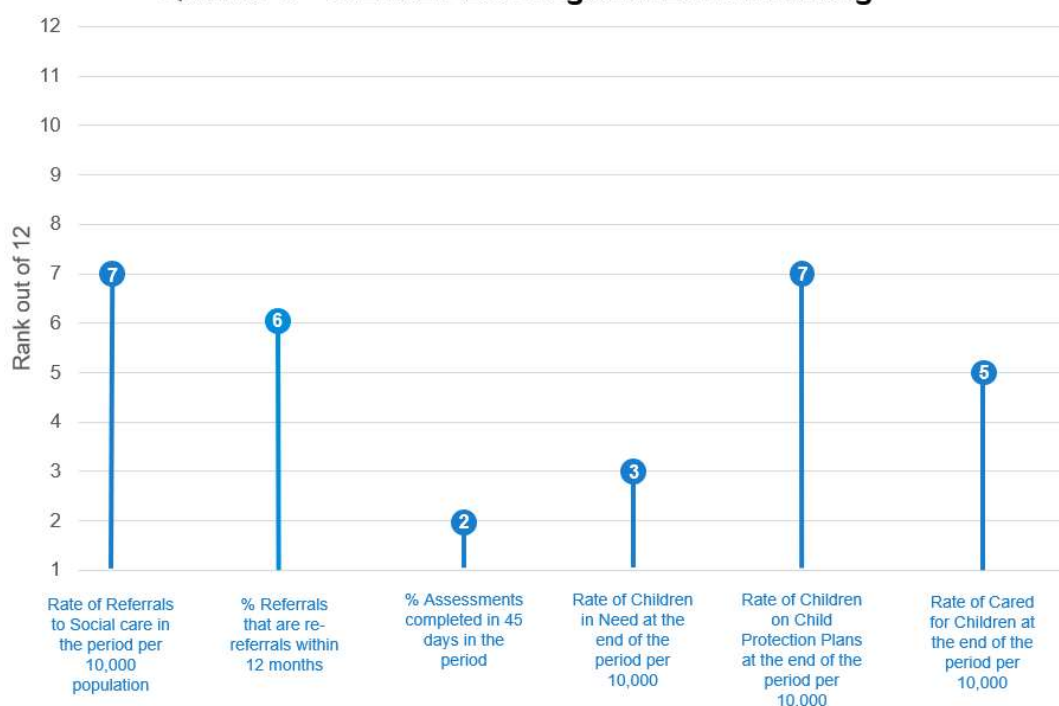
Introduction and Summary

This document provides an overview and summary of key performance, quality and impact of children's services in Sunderland. It is an updated version of the Self-Assessment produced in June 2021 for the Ofsted ILACS inspection and provides an overview of the quality improvements in the service that touch children and families lives.

Brief Summary of Current Performance April 2021 to January 2022

The following graphs provide a snapshot of our performance set in the context of the North East region. The data demonstrates that performance is tracking better than regional performance.

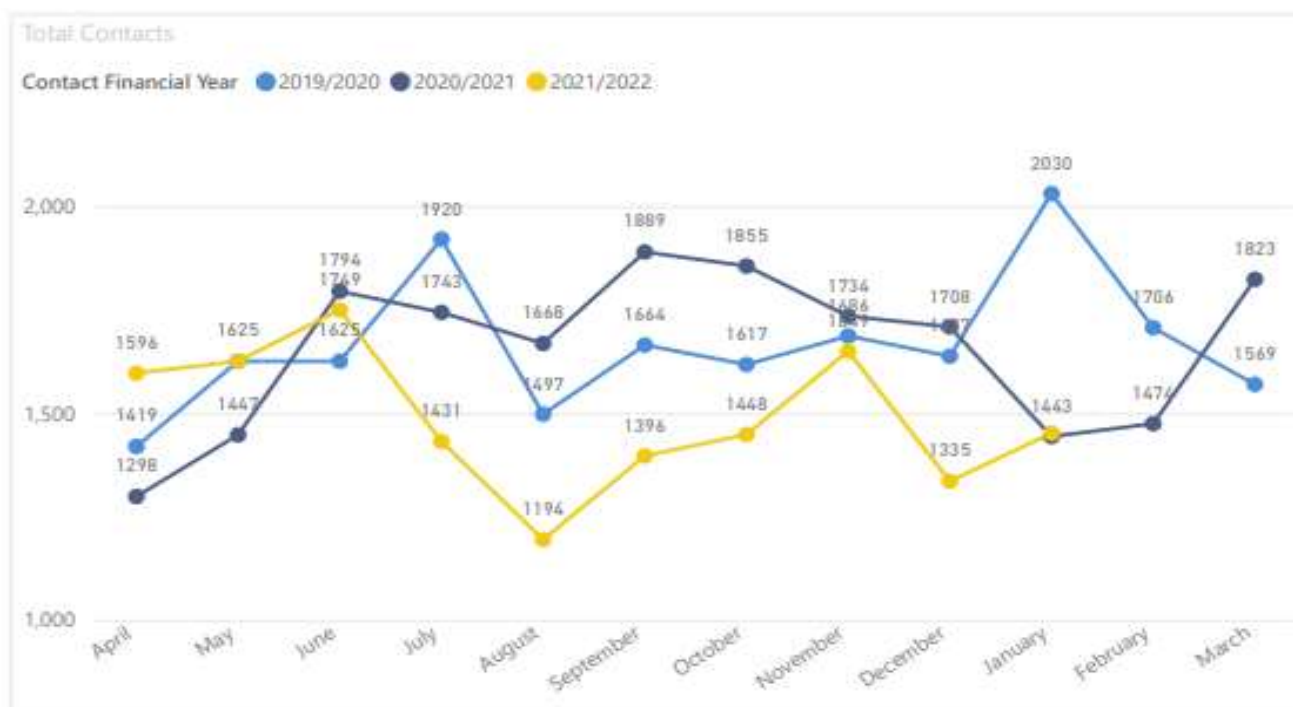
Quarter 3 – 2021/22 ADCS regional Benchmarking



Sunderland Performance	592.86	18.90%	91.60%	390.25	59.67	101.34
North East performance (average)	668.42	20.52%	83.48%	498.47	66.30	111.91

The points below summarise key demand and performance data that is detailed in our CHAT report.

- Overall, the number of contacts to the front door is below 2020/21 levels, with an average of 1,488 contacts per month. June 2021 was the biggest single month, with 1625 contacts as well as an increase in average monthly contacts in April, May, and November 2021. The percentage of contacts progressing to referral has increased to 13.5% compared to 9% during 2020/21.



- The number of referrals has remained consistently above 2020/21 levels, with an average of 270 referrals per month. October 2021 was the biggest single month, with 306 referrals. Performance over the last 6 months shows a rate of 593 referrals per 10,000 children which is an increase of 80 compared to 20/21. Despite the increase in workload, and a marked increase in complexity, an average of 95.4% of referrals received a decision within 24 hours.



- During May to October the number of repeat referrals was under 17% and current performance is consistent with the 20/21 year-end output of 19%.
- Child and Family assessments authorised within 45 working days has slightly dipped, with an average of 90.7% being completed in timescale over the period. Currently, Q3 performance shows we are ranked second in the region.
- The number of children on a Child Protection Plan at the end of January has reduced to 56.6 per 10,000 population. This continues the downward trend from 74.8 in March 2021 and is below the Q3 regional average of 66.30.
- Children becoming subject of a child protection plan for second or subsequent time has reduced to 12.3%. This figure is almost half the 2020/21 year-end output of 23.9%
- The number of Cared for Children is 101.2 per 10,000 population at the end of January. This has steadily reduced from 110.4 in April and has stabilised in the last three months averaging at 101.
- Home (placement) stability has remained strong for our cared for children over this period. As at the end of January 7.7% of children had three or more home (placement) moves in the previous 12 months (43 children). This has reduced since the end of 2020/21 where 9% had three or more moves (57 children).
- The completion of statutory visits to children who are cared for, or on a child protection plan has remained strong, with an average of 96% of children in either cohort receiving their visit on time over the period.
- Care experienced young people who are EET is currently 44% for 17 & 18-year-olds and 36% for 19- to 21-year-olds. 90% of care experienced young people received a contact in the last 8 weeks (as of January 2022).

This following sections of the document describe areas of improvement and core activity that deliver such strong performance.

Early Help

The services delivered and supported by TfC's Early Help Directorate are wide-ranging and go far beyond what would traditionally be described as early help. As provision has expanded and improved, we have been commissioned to support a range of agencies to deliver preventative, targeted and specialist interventions. These range from the earliest health innovations e.g. the Sunderland Health and Happiness Project, and 'Mindful Eating', two of a range of 10 workstreams funded by the CCG to support child health in schools, right through to some significantly more complex areas e.g. a restorative justice pilot in secondary schools which is expanding into feeder primaries, a substance misuse offer in partnership with our local hospital's Emergency Department, and a domestic abuse project in five schools in the north of Sunderland.

We are in receipt of several funding streams to support innovative earlier intervention. We have completed a pilot into the use of Family Group Conferencing at PLO stage and await the outcome of the national evaluation whilst continuing to fund the service ourselves. We were part of the national pilot for Reducing Parental Conflict, and now have staff trained to deliver

interventions directly from April 2022. We are currently setting up a project to trial the use of Family Group Conferencing to tackle poor and persistent absence in Key Stage 1 (this following some internal analysis of the common characteristics of a cohort of young offenders in 2019 and 2020).

The core Early Help offer has continued to develop with an increasing amount of work taking place with families. This is evidenced through a year-on-year increase in plans opening across a range of needs - up 10-fold compared to 2017 when the service was established.

Under normal circumstances over 65% of cases opened by the Early Help Service step down to Level 2 from CIN plans, CIN assessments and from contacts into ICRT. Levels of activity in the Early Help Service in early 2022 (post-pandemic) are equal to those seen in 2019 which was the highest previously recorded.

Outcomes for children and families are positive with over 86% of cases closed 'outcomes met', up from 72% in 2018.

Family Feedback:

'Me and my children were homeless until my Early Help Worker came along. My Early Help Worker went to Gentoo and within a week I had the keys. My Early Help Worker stayed until the family was settled. I could open up and tell my Early Help Worker anything, support had been amazing. My Early Help Worker helped to look for a home closer to family and friends. I have much more support around me, My Early Help Worker has changed my world, I owe everything to her' (Early Help Plan, Mum, September 2021)

I am now working, my son is more confident and more of a unit again a happy family. My son is now going to a boys group, learning to cope with emotions and I feel less depressed. (Early Help Plan, Mum, September 2021)

The positioning of Early Help at the Integrated Front Door has ensured strong oversight of emerging needs and risks and helps to support our aim to provide the right support, at the right level at the right time. For example, our current work to support schools with an identified rising trend in incidences of inappropriate sexual behaviour was identified at the front door; our response has been rapid, flexible according to need and delivered in partnership with our colleagues in Public Health, the 0-19 service, schools and other services across TfC.

Dedicated IDVAs work into Early Help across the City, in recognition of the extent of domestic abuse incidents in Sunderland. We have been funded for a pilot project to support schools in the north of Sunderland with their response to domestic abuse. This forms part of the 'SARA project' - a multi-agency community support pilot led by the Police. The TfC IDVA linked to the schools is delivering the 'helping hands' intervention for children, 'safe-space' drop-ins for parents, staff training and support for school staff to respond more proactively to Operation Encompass notifications. The five schools linked to the SARA project will form part of a new Early Help 'community group conferencing' initiative from September, to deliver sustainable, community-led solutions to local issues.

Numbers of children taken off roll to be electively home educated (EHE) doubled during the pandemic compared to previous years. Since then, the numbers of children becoming EHE have slowed, but are still significant. Currently, numbers stand at 259. Our usual procedure

is to contact each family that decides to EHE, offer them support and check that no undue pressure has been placed on the family to EHE. Year 11 students are allocated a Careers and NEET Worker to provide Post-16 advice. To strengthen the response in light of increased numbers, an Attendance Officer was redeployed full-time to conduct a monthly check on each family that had elected to home educate from September 2020. These extra checks have ceased with the lifting of restrictions, but we continue to make a welfare check on all children newly taken off roll to be EHE.

We have delivered Return Home Interviews in-house since October 2020. Latest performance shows that 87% of missing children are offered a return home interview. Mind of My Own is now embedded as a tool for young people to share their experiences and capture their voice in a child friendly way to complement existing recording processes.

In February 2021, the Youth Drug and Alcohol Project (YDAP) commenced a pilot with City Hospitals to locate workers in the Emergency Department to provide a rapid face-to-face response to young people attending at the weekend. The aim of this project is to increase the number of young people accessing substance misuse services by operating an 'opt out' approach to consent for referral. Phase one ran until November 2021 with one of the key findings being that the most vulnerable young people with the riskiest substance use were not able to be engaged with due to their levels of intoxication. This led the phase two pilot to move the focus from young people presenting at A&E on Friday and Saturday evenings to young people who require an overnight stay in hospital due to substance use. This began in November and is still being evaluated. The pilot has resulted in a significant increase in the numbers of notifications being sent to YDAP.

Since August 2021 we have run a mentoring scheme matching young people with volunteer mentors in the September. We have engaged 26 young people in this period with referrals from several services. As this scheme is currently only funded until March 2022, we have had to keep numbers at a manageable level but the numbers of referrals evidence that the project could work with much greater numbers should the project continue.

Young People Feedback:

"Really looking forward to our other activities we have planned" (young person aged 12)

"You are my 'bestie' really enjoy our meetings" (young person aged 13).

"Really like meeting and chatting to my mentor – it's definitely helped me get on with my mam better" (young person aged 15).

The Youth Offending Service has been involved in several pilot projects. Operation Harbinger commenced in October 2021 as a six-month project with Northumbria Police. The aim of the project was to introduce better information sharing on young people in custody between TfC and the Police to ensure any immediate information about a young person's needs are communicated to the Police.

Between December and March, we have been working on the transport system across Sunderland and South Tyneside three nights a week with monies from the violence against women and girls agenda. We have engaged approximately 40 young people each night and have offered advice on safety as well as signposting young people to services; on a few

occasions we also have had to get a young person to a place of safety or take them home as they have reported feeling unsafe.

We recruited a Peer Mentor to help us review services from the perspective of a young person who has experienced services. The mentor has been able to review the Return Home Interview process and leaflet we use with families, the activities we provided for the HAF in summer and Christmas, our YouTube channel, and other interventions we use in direct work.

Family Centres (including children's centres) continue to offer both direct and indirect support. This includes both universal and targeted sessions for children and families (0-5) older children's vulnerable groupwork, play therapy, family time, parenting groups and Family Group Conferences. Family Centre staff continue to visit every new birth within the home environment to ensure parents are supported and extra needs are identified from the earliest opportunity. The focus continues to be to reengage children and families with face-to-face provision as well as support for speech and language catch-up in partnership with our early years' officers and local nursery settings. There is also extra support for our most vulnerable groups including children with SEND, BAME families, supporting families with a healthy lifestyle, young parents and those children requiring emotional/wellbeing support. In April 2022 a new Family Centre will open in the Coalfield area of the city.

We continue to see a measurable rise (which commenced during the pandemic) in the numbers of young people referred for RSHE support, contraceptive advice and inappropriate sexual behaviours. Our data shows 178 referrals into the service between June 2021 and Feb 2022. We have doubled our capacity to respond to referrals.

Young person feedback:

'RSHE sessions have made me so much more confident in myself and what I do (Young Person, aged 14).

'Sessions will do a lot for me in the future because I know how to keep myself safe' (Young Person, aged 13).

Several new groups to support and mentor vulnerable adolescents (boys and girls separately) have been established since restrictions relaxed. A pre-teens group has been set up based on the feedback from the teen group that work is needed much earlier to support confidence, self-esteem, and relationships before puberty. A peer mentor position has been set up in the Youth Offending Service and a care experienced young person has just been appointed to the role. Within Early Help, we now have three care experienced apprentices.

Between April and December 2021, 175 referrals were received to the Family Group Conference (FGC) service, and 63 conferences were held. The total from since 2017 now stands at 417 conferences involving 905 children.

FGC has a pivotal role to play in early intervention and where it is possible, to track progress from a FCG after 24 months, and regardless of the starting point of cared for, child protection, child in need, or early help:

- 74% stepped down to universal services or required no further support (further and sustained progress on 68% after 18 months, 57% after 12 months and 36% after six months)
- Another 8% required a lower level of support
- 15% required the same level of intervention
- 2% required a higher level of intervention

Family feedback:

‘A family group conference has helped me – ‘everything was mint especially putting the plan together and getting the plan in place’.

‘My Coordinator was really helpful and supportive to all of us and was not one sided. She kept us up to date with what was happening. I wouldn’t change a thing’.

First time entrants into the Youth Offending Service continue to fall year on year. Our restorative justice pilots in Washington and the Coalfields have been a success and other schools are beginning to enquire about a similar approach. Our ‘Wear Kids’ anti-social behaviour support service has developed much closer links with the Neighbourhood Police Teams which has seen an increase in referrals and requests for support.

The Early Help Service has prosecuted a strong focus on supporting young people into employment, education and training throughout the pandemic, the benefit of which is evidenced in the annual publication of the three-month average for 2020/21: NEET 4.5%; Not Known 0.5 %. This now shows Sunderland as below the England (5.5%) and North East (5.7%) averages. This is Sunderland’s best recorded average moving us from 11th position (bottom) in the North East to fourth.

What do we need to continue to work on?

- The timeliness of the completion of assessments - access to partner information, particularly schools and health, during lockdown has hindered progress.
- Ensuring cases closed to the Early Help Service are always ‘stepped down’ to a universal provider as a future point of contact.

Prevention and Innovation

Last Autumn, the Government confirmed that the Holiday Activities and Food programme (HAF) would be expanded to all 151 top-tier authorities in England, as recommended in the National Food Strategy.

In 2021, 9,418 children and young people engaged in a HAF activity over Easter, Summer and Winter in Sunderland of which 70% were receiving means tested Free School Meals.

29 external providers and 15 internal TfC services provide HAF sessions. 2021 sessions saw the following children:

- 511 children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities who have an EHCP

- 1,006 children and young people with special educational needs identified by school but without an EHCP
- 625 children who are currently or who have recently been part of an Early Help Plan
- 526 children who are currently or who have recently been part of a Social Care Plan (CIN or CP)
- 170 of whom are Cared for or Care Experienced
- 98 young people who have worked with targeted youth service

Example feedback:

- Children enjoyed a healthy meal - *"I enjoyed sitting with my friends and having some food, some of the foods I didn't really like but I tried them"* (Young Person Age 10).
- Children and young people had the opportunity to experience new foods - *'Parents reported cooking for the first time with their children after an activity using the cookery book, we supplied to each child who attended HAF' (Provider - Targeted Youth Services).*
- Children, young people, and their families had access to information advice and guidance - *One family disclosed that they were being coerced in a particular type of behaviour. PAG supported the family in being removed from the situation and provided a safe space to talk (Provider – Pallion Action Group).*

The Mobile Prevention Bus is known as WEAR HERE 4 YOU and was launched in Oct 2021 as a 12-month pilot. The Mobile Wear Here 4 You Bus is a partnership bus and offers support to children, young people and their families in Sunderland. Staff are from Together for Children, Growing Healthy, Northumbria Police, Youth Consortium and other partners.

Between 16th October 2021 and 28th February 2022, we have delivered;

- 10 School sessions engaging with 1,320 children and young people
- 15 evening sessions (4-8pm) in Park Lane, Hetton and Washington engaging with 622 young people
- Eight community day sessions engaging with 429 children, young people and their parent/carers.

The Safeguarding 'Front Door'

(Integrated Contact and Referral Team and Emergency Duty Team)

As the data demonstrates the overall volume of contact and referrals has fluctuated over the last 6 months, but front door has remained consistently busy, with complexity and risk noted as an ongoing issue. Further improvement work has continued at the front door since the Ofsted inspection judged it Good in July 2021.

A new process set up with Early Help has ensured that contacts when screened are signposted to the most appropriate service to respond and the recording process for information requests also ensures that concerns for children are being recorded more accurately.

The strength of the relationships with partners has continued to improve the daily operation of the MASH achieving effective information sharing to enable timely and robust decision making to safeguard children. Strong relationships with strategic partners have enabled the front door to proactively respond to the challenges of keeping children safe, ensuing a focus over the

last six months on a shared responsibility in embedding the extensive development work undertaken.

The management of contacts is a strength as all are recorded within the Early Help Module with a revised referral form for partners (in line with the implementation of Signs of Safety) within Liquidlogic (LL). A robust process for screening Police CCN's is in place and MASH assessments include information from both co-located and virtual partner agencies. All contacts received into TfC include a history check and analysis of known information and are completed with robust and timely management oversight throughout which is visible in LL.

There are clear recommendations to support families both when a contact progresses through to referral and when signposting to other services is necessary. A performance scorecard is produced for ICRT which includes a detailed breakdown of the activity in ICRT and shows the number of MASH episodes and outcomes by type, enabling the team and partners to assess the effectiveness of processes, improve decision making and further develop the service.

We have consistently seen an increase in the conversion rates from contacts to referrals within the last 6 months in comparison with the previous two years evidencing that the work undertaken with our partners is resulting in more appropriate referrals into the service. It is hoped that the recruitment of a new senior social worker for supervising designated safeguarding leads in schools, which will be supervised within ICRT, will further support this work.

Monthly MASH audits are undertaken of selected contacts within an operational group to ensure that appropriate investigation and outcomes are being achieved and identify learning. The offer of group supervisions for partner agencies within the MASH continues to support the implementation of the Signs of Safety Model of practice. All processes and procedures have been updated and are readily available for staff to access on-line, including for Early Permanence, Pre-birth, Police Powers of Protection and Homelessness for 16- and 17-year-olds. Evidence of implementation can be seen for example in dip sampling of homelessness presentations which shows young people offered the appropriate pathways of care (arguably evident in our older cared for population numbers).

The Emergency Duty Team (EDT) have continued to provide an effective and timely response to children and families outside of working hours, with a continued commitment to the use of the Signs of Safety approach when responding to emergency situations, supporting the daytime service with necessary welfare visits and providing support and follow up to those young people recorded as missing. Communication between EDT and day services remains a strength of the service offer.

Re-referrals have been an area of focus as performance had been an issue historically and given the volume of work at the front door it is an area that needs strong oversight. The new process developed included the introduction of 'Amber Meetings' to ensure a multi-agency approach. The process has allowed greater analysis resulting in the development of more robust step down and closure procedures. Evidence of the benefit of the process is seen in the continued reduction of re-referrals compared to previous years data (better than NE average and all stat neighbours). There is now a robust closure summary developed to include safety planning upon the closing of cases to social care. The re-referral process ensures that repeat contacts are carefully considered to ensure support at the appropriate level can be offered to the family and their needs met. Additionally an escalation process was implemented

to ensure that any children with repeat contacts reaching five in a six-month period has a separate management overview.

The assessment team (comprised of four teams) continue to hold short term CIN cases so that the family have one social worker through their early assessment journey. CIN clinics are held fortnightly to review plans with early help and education which has led to a reduction in the number of plans open to the service, therefore avoiding drift and encouraging appropriate exit planning. There is now a process in place for the pre-birth team to be allocated all referrals relating to unborn babies, supporting us to achieve consistency in respect of thresholds and interventions and avoiding a change in social worker. In order to provide more consistent CIN assessments for children with disabilities a dedicated social worker post has been created which will also ensure robust social worker contributions to EHCPs.

A continued area for development is to work with partners in health services to improve the timeliness and quality of the information provided to MASH assessments. There has been work undertaken with the Signs of Safety consultant to further review the input of the MASH information, the information included within contacts and strategy meetings across the service.

There is a multi-agency strategy meeting and information sharing process, with senior management oversight in place, for those children where the Police exercise Powers of Protection. This process ensures clear planning for children is in place and joint development sessions have taken place with Police to ensure a better understanding and process when Police Powers of Protection are exercised.

An experienced Domestic Abuse Team sit within the Assessment Teams, consisting of three Child and Family Workers who are supervised by an Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDVA). This team have developed an immediate response to domestic abuse concerns. The process includes joint initial visits with social workers to develop safety plans and develop DASH/RIC assessments and identify further targeted work. A review of Operation Encompass has been undertaken to strengthen the responses from schools received and this is currently in the implementation stage, further to this there is now a process in place to notify health services of domestic abuse incidents which have occurred for all children below school age including midwifery services.

The introduction of the Signs of Safety group supervision model into the front door has not only improved the implementation of the model but has also led to a demonstrable improvement in the information and assessment of risk from partners. This in turn has improved the quality of decision making.

A review has been undertaken of Operation Endeavour which included Police and education services. An evaluation form, guidance and good examples were provided to schools to support them in offering a robust response to children in their provision who are reported missing. Endeavour activity plays an important part in the city-wide management of children missing from home or care.

What do we need to continue to work on?

- On the 1st of April 2022, the senior social worker for Supervising Designated Safeguarding social worker will begin in their role and will be supervised by ICRT. A plan of work will be designed to include training and ongoing support for those schools

identified within the Sunderland area. There will be specific focus on an understanding of thresholds and providing the right level of support to families at the right time.

- A working group has been set up to review the information included within S47 investigations in line with the signs of safety model. This will aim to achieve consistency across the service evidencing a multi-agency information sharing approach to decision making.

Children on the edge of becoming cared for

As part of our innovation programme TfC secured funding from the DfE to develop an Edge of Care provision. Our long-term strategy to reduce the numbers of children who become cared for will be enhanced by the implementation of this new Edge of Care project 'Wear Together'.

TfC are fully underway with this project with the initial phase complete and phase two underway. Phase one developed 'Wear Together' an outreach team of eight workers, including a manager and a supervisor. The team provide intensive outreach support for children aged between 11-17 years of age who are still living at home and where there is a risk that this may break down and they become cared for.

The Wear Together team has been operational since mid-August 2021 and there are early indications that there is a high success rate for preventing children becoming cared for. The team are allocated to work with a low number of children under a bespoke intensive intervention plan. There is ongoing work to develop a bespoke pathway in Liquidlogic and further develop the service offer through specialist training.

We have recently recruited a Speech and Language Therapist to work within the team and are recruiting for a Business Support and Analyst role as part of service.

Phase two is underway with the aim, by Autumn 2022, to transition to provision through a residential hub, providing both short term placement respite and outreach support. The team, and the support that it provides, will be enhanced through the inclusion of further partner roles, including a Psychologist and Police support.

Child in Need and Child Protection

As a result of our learning through CSPR's and a better understanding the needs of young people in Sunderland, we launched the Young Persons Team in November 2021. The team works with young people who experience risk outside of the home, who benefit from intensive support and relationship-based practice. Following assessment, an intervention plan is developed to provide support and intervention targeted at the identified worries with the aim of reducing risk of harm. Social workers work closely with partner agencies to complete multi-agency risk assessments and to educate the family network. The team work closely with the MSET and Missing Co-ordinators from TfC and the Police; they hold a weekly mapping exercise to understand peer group dynamics, adult influences, and the contexts in which young people find themselves at risk. Intelligence is shared with the Police and at MSET and this exercise helps inform disruption plans.

The team are working closely with the Link School (PRU), where most young people open to the team attend and benefit from having a base within the school to increase their visibility to the young people concerned.

TfC are working in partnership with the Sunderland Safeguarding Childrens Partnership and partner agencies to develop and launch a Young Persons Plan. The Young Person plan is a move away from the traditional child protection procedures, which often leaves parent/carers feeling criticised and isolated, with a focus upon the risks outside of the home. The plan looks at how partner agencies can best work with the young person to manage and reduce this risk.

The Pre-Birth team has continued to work with unborn babies where there are safeguarding concerns. Performance remains positive with almost 80% of babies born remaining in parent's care. We have continued to keep babies with parents on the ward immediately following birth with robust safety plans to avoid bed blocking neo-natal beds. There has been a significant reduction in the number of babies that were placed with foster carers from birth. Due to this we have been able to use our foster carers differently by increasing our use of parent & baby provision and utilising our foster carers as part of the family network arrangements and safety plans to support parents to care for their own children. We continue to have a reduction in the number of care proceedings issued at birth due to the success of PLO and pre-birth support.

The number of referrals into the team appears to have stabilised, there had been an increase of referrals during COVID however this is now reduced slightly and is at a more manageable level. This has allowed us to slightly amend the criteria of the team so that all the pre- birth work that is not part of a sibling group is allocated to the pre- birth team and does not go through the assessment teams if it is at a Child in Need threshold or if the threshold needs to be determined. This is to reduce the number of transfer points for all unborn work and to ensure we have a consistent approach to assessment and support.

We have worked closely with the Nuffield Family Justice Observatory in their Born into Care series in the development of the 'National Practice Guidance- When the State Intervenes at Birth'. The work of the Pre-Birth Team features in their most recent report as a good practice example.

TfC lead the DFE project- Regional Infant Safeguarding Project, working with Newcastle and South Tyneside to implement the best practice guidance in relation to pre-birth work. This project has included the development of new Birth Arrangements Forms which focus specifically on early decision making through robust assessment and intervention, early planning, practice that is inclusive of parent's wishes and feelings and focusses on support before, during and after parents are separated from their baby.

TfC continue to commission Barnardo's to provide Pause and the Startwell initiative which was developed and commissioned by TfC as an offshoot of Pause. As at Jan 2022, Pause Sunderland was actively working with 15 women (12 who are on the programme, three who are in the engagement phase). The 12 women on the programme have had a total of 41 children removed from their care (an average of three children per woman). The women range in age from 23 – 38 years old, with an average age of 31 years. 8.3% of the women have care experience. Nine women have successfully completed the programme, and none have gone on to have further pregnancies.

Latest monitoring data highlights positive outcomes in relation to reductions in offending, domestic abuse and self-harm, as well as improvements in relation to housing and employment.

Feedback from Women:

"I recently ended a domestic abusive controlling relationship, as things were getting worse. My Pause worker is always there for me when I need her and will support me through times when I struggle. I now have the confidence to contact services and have reported this abuse to the Police, as I know I don't deserve this. I have made steps to apply for a non-molestation order. Pause have helped me to find the inner strength to follow this through. I have experience of the Police not handling the reports of the domestic abuse very well and I have gone back and given them feedback about this. I have still got a lot of work to do. I am now focussing on the future and not so much on the past."

The women have also participated in Pause National work looking at psychiatric and psychological assessments commissioned as part of care proceedings and made recommendations for improvements to these processes.

Startwell practitioners are linked specifically with women in the pre-birth team who have had children previously removed from their care; this service is at capacity as they are currently supporting 12 women who are open to the team. Practitioners offer practical and emotional support which has resulted in increased attendance at antenatal appointments and a greater engagement in changes required.

An evaluation of the pilot programme was undertaken by University of Newcastle researchers and published in Nov 2021. The evaluation highlighted the positive impacts of the emotional, practical and crisis support from Startwell. Following this, funding was secured from the Barnardo's Foundation to expand Startwell across all Pause North East practices for 24 months. A further cost benefit evaluation of the expanded model will be completed by the University.

What do we need to continue to work on?

- We are working with Lancaster University and Nuffield Foundation 'Born into Care' researchers to continue to develop and train social workers across the region on national good practice. As part of the project, we are developing a Data collection tool and audit tool to sit alongside the practice model. We will also be working with the Family Justice Board to explore and develop the practice within the Judiciary alongside the practice within the local authorities.

Work with Families on the 'Edge of Care' (Public Law Outline process)

The weekly PLO panel is chaired by the Head of Service for Safeguarding with legal advice provided by the Principal Solicitor.

Panel continues to be effective in managing new requests for PLO, Care proceedings and for children to be become cared for as well as reviewing all S20 arrangements, and children subject to a care order and living with parents (PWP). On average panel sees approximately 15 children per week and can track progress and outcomes for children through successive panels. The impact of panel can be seen by the reduction in our cared for numbers and the number of applications to issue care proceedings.

It is anticipated that our year end position will show a reduction of 33% in terms of cases issued to court when compared to 2020/21. There has been an increase in work being undertaken in PLO to manage risk and negate the need to go to court; we see good evidence of plans progressing and children safely exiting PLO. This has been assisted by good multi-agency working, again evidence of which is coming through the panel process and can be seen in children's plans. We continue to see good evidence of timely decision making and early permanence secured for children particularly, unborn babies.

What do we need to continue work on?

- We continue to review the consistency and quality of practice so have recently revised the PLO pathway and will be holding a weekly Signs of Safety Mapping and PLO clinics to ensure that we get consistently good plans and PLO letters.

Cases in Court

National statistics published by CAFCASS identify that the number of care applications made by Sunderland continues to decrease by a significant percentage year on year. At Q3 (2021-22), CAFCASS statistics identify that Sunderland has issued a total of 70 public law cases. If numbers of applications continue in line with those made across Q1 (26), Q2 (25) and Q3 (19), the year-end projection could be as low as 93. This would be a reduction in applications of 33% on the previous year and a 52% reduction when compared to 2018/19.

Sunderland's rate of applications per 10k population has reduced in line with this trend from 36.1 at the end of 2019/20 to 25.2 at the end of 2020/21.

Significant improvements have also been seen in cases progressing through court. COVID had a significant impact with average case durations peaking at 53 weeks in Q1 of 2020/21. Current data indicates that Sunderland is now seeing average durations of 36 weeks in Q1 and Q2. This is significantly better than the national average of 44 weeks and slightly better than the Northumbria and North Durham average of 38 weeks. This position has been driven by the courts progressing cases to manage the historical backlog resulting from COVID. Whilst this caused significant pressure on legal and social care resources (again a national issue recognised by the President of the Family Justice Division), TfC are in a positive position now going forward.

The courts continue to operate hearings remotely both by telephone/visual technology and hybrid hearings where appropriate to do so. This is allowing for case progression to normal timescales as far as the case dictates.

To maintain oversight on how COVID was impacting on cases progressing through court, TfC has undertaken two deep dive exercises as well as participating in the two national CAFCASS exercises in 2020 and 2021. A further internal review is planned for May 2022.

A checklist/audit process was implemented within the Legal Team in August 2021 to review a focused sample of cases in the court system to enable the identification of factors which impact on the progressing of cases, both positive and negative. The checklist embeds the principles of Signs of Safety by asking in each case what is working well, what is not working well and

what needs to happen either for internal consideration around practice or to escalate with partners.

There are currently 86 cases of active Care Proceedings, with a further eight cases working towards issue. Of the 86 cases with active care proceedings:

- 42 (49%) have been open under 20 weeks
- 5 (6%) have been open 21-26 weeks
- 39 (45%) have been open over 26 weeks.
- The longest case is currently 107 weeks (as of 17 January 2022). There are a number of factors contributing to the duration including the need for a fact find hearing and delays to expert assessments. The case is listed for IRH on 13/04/22.

The team are also supporting 25 PLO cases at this time and 29 sets of other matters i.e., discharges/revocations.

What do we need to continue to work on?

- A thematic audit looking specifically at cases that concluded under 26 weeks is planned for Q1 of 2022-23 to review what learning lessons can be derived from these cases in terms of positive practice.

Private Fostering

We currently have no privately fostered young people as three arrangements have ended in the past 12 months. This number is extremely low, but in line with most authorities regionally and nationally. The arrangements that have recently ended were due to sufficient support being provided to the family to enable the young people to return home, or orders secured for the children to remain living with the Connected Person long-term.

We have continued to hold briefing sessions across Early Help, Social Care and Education over the past 12 months to raise awareness of private fostering arrangements. The Private Fostering Lead continues to be part of a National Private Fostering Group and the Coram BAFF Special Interest group to explore the issues surrounding the identification of private fostering arrangements nationally and regionally, to keep up to date with any changes to policy or procedures and to share resources and ideas around the identification of arrangements and how we support families.

What do we need to continue work on?

- There is a plan for 2022-2023 to further raise the profile of private fostering with partner agencies and other organisations across Sunderland. As continuing with the briefing to internal and external partners this will include a poster and media campaign to raise awareness with the public.

Work with Children with Disabilities

In January 2022, the Children with Disability Service structure changed slightly to streamline the services provided by the two teams. We now have a Social Work Team responsible for the implementation of plans, be that CIN, CP or Cared for and a Review Team. The Review Team consists of Child & Family Workers responsible for reviewing care packages of support

and is complemented by the CQC registered Family Care & Support Team. All social work positions in the team are filled and an ATM is in post to support the Team Manager of the Social Work team.

The teams provide a comprehensive offer of support for those children and young people with additional needs who access a care package. Following assessment, if no safeguarding worries are identified, children and young people are stepped down to a Child & Family worker who hold a caseload of children and young people in review and ensures the family always has a named point of contact. Visits are completed at least once every 12 weeks with additional telephone calls to provide support, if required.

In 2021, the teams introduced a more robust approach to care package reviews using the CIN pathway on Liquidlogic. This approach ensures a Team Manager chairs each review, improving management oversight and multi-agency involvement in the care package review process. This approach is embedded across all care package reviews and is providing increased management oversight of these children and young people.

We continue to work closely with colleagues in commissioning to ensure that we have a short break offer which is responsive to local need. Grace House continues to be our commissioned provider to offer overnight short breaks. We are working closely with the provision to increase bed capacity which continues to be reduced following the pandemic, due to staffing difficulties.

The Holiday Club, which was set up during the pandemic is now well embedded and is offering activities to a cohort of children and young people with additional needs every half term holiday. Working in partnership with the HAF (Health Activities and Food) programme we have been able to extend the offer to include a hot meal and nutritional education for families.

Feedback:

Parent - "Huge thank you to the team for making this possible it makes such a difference to families like ours."

Young person C – "You're the best!"

C's Parent – "C loved it as you can see from her comment. Nothing more I could ask for"

Parent of L - "L loves H and keeps asking to go to the club during school holidays. Staff are amazing so friendly and well organized. Thank you so much."

Young person D – "Had a fantastic time."

Regulation 48 of the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010 is now well embedded in practice. Work has been completed with the IRO service and the Liquidlogic Lead to strengthen this process. The short break pathway within Liquidlogic currently can only commence once a provision has been identified and is recorded as a short break 'placement'. Using the CIN pathway, we are now able to appoint an IRO for each child with a Reg 48 status following panel, should there be delay in a child accessing a short break (due to a waiting list, for example). The IRO provides independent scrutiny and challenge of care plans in the best interests of the child or young person.

Work is being undertaken with partner agencies to improve our offer to young people faced with transition. Communication has improved with better interface with Adult Social Care and partner agencies. Following the SEND Inspection, a Transition Strategic Group was

established with partner agencies and the Parent Carer Forum to steer and support best practice. As part of this work, funding has been agreed to appoint a Transition Co-ordinator for a 2-year period, to strengthen the transition process. The longstanding Transition Management Group (TMG) continues to meet monthly, to track and review young people with complex social care need.

What do we need to continue to work on?

- Continue to embed Regulation 48 and the practice around care package reviews.
- Transition and the appointment of a Transition Co-ordinator

Cared for Children & Protection

Staffing within the locality teams continues to be stable with few vacancies which will be filled by ASYE's upon completion of their programme. Caseloads remain manageable, with an average caseload of 17.6. We have exceptionally low numbers of agency staff, with only nine in use across the whole of TfC. The stability of the workforce has allowed locality Team Managers to develop their practice around supervision with some attending the Practice Supervisor Development Programme. A supervision working group has been established to develop practice guidance and to improve the quality of reflective supervision across the teams. A permanent workforce has enabled us to embed Signs of Safety, with the support of the Signs of Safety Team. There has been a specific focus upon Trauma Informed Practice and the Safe & Together model of practice.

The social work teams have worked hard with the courts to complete the care proceedings delayed due to COVID restrictions. Those proceedings previously delayed due to COVID have now concluded. We are seeing an improvement in performance and better compliance with the 26-week care proceeding timescale. Not only are we seeing a reduction in emergency and short notice applications to the court, but we are also seeing a 30% reduction in care proceedings being issued by TfC.

Adoption work has remained within the locality teams. We are concerned that the recent Somerset Judgement will delay plans to achieve permanency for some of those children with an adoption plan.

What do we need to continue to work on?

- To retain experienced staff in the teams and continuing our positive recruitment of social workers.
- Slow down our thinking to ensure we achieve consistency in our practice and consistent quality of work across the service.

Cared for Children, Fostering & Residential, Adoption & Care experienced

There have been four children's homes inspections since the last self-assessment (three full and one interim).

Nook Lodge had their first full inspection in September 2021 and was judged "good" for the overall experiences and progress of children and young people. Colombo Road was judged "outstanding" for the overall experiences and progress of children and young people in December 2021 and Revelstoke Road was judged "outstanding" for the overall experiences

and progress of children and young people in January 2022. Monument View had an interim inspection in January 2022 and were judged to have “sustained effectiveness.”

There has been continued effort to bring children and young people back to Sunderland where safe to do so and in keeping with their plan, since March 2021 we have been able to bring 16 young people back to Sunderland either into our children’s homes or into our internal supported accommodation in accordance with their plan for support rather than care.

As part of the planned investment in a trauma informed model of care, increased capacity from the Clinical Psychologist for Cared for Children has been procured and is enabling the continued development of a therapeutic approach. The Next Steps (care experienced) service is also now receiving support from the Clinical Psychologist for Cared for Children who is providing training and consultation.

Our supported accommodation provisions have continued to operate at capacity and are providing excellent support to those young people ready to develop their independence skills. The teams welcome the news of regulation for supported accommodation and oversight that this will bring.

There have continued to be no young people who have experienced drift or delay in their plans to progress to supported accommodation because of COVID. Transitions have been managed safely and in the best interests of young people.

The Next Steps team have continued to develop their expertise in working with Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children. Since September 2021 we have welcomed four young people through the National Transfer Scheme which we are fully compliant with.

Fostering (IFA) and Adoption (VAA) Services both remain rated as ‘good’ with Leadership and Management rated as outstanding in Adoption. The implementation of the training, support and fee scheme for foster carers had an initial influential impact on recruitment figures which remain positive in line with regional neighbours. Whilst COVID initially impacted upon the ability to provide carers with full access to the TfC training programme this ultimately led to a change in approach and e-learning is now embedded, alongside face-to-face training with positive feedback from carers. There have been over 2100 training courses completed within the last 12 months. This training offer is also accessible by Panel members.

Foster carer recruitment figures were 17 in 2019/20, 18 in 2020/21 and eight in 2021/22 to date. There are currently 16 households under assessment.

We have now implemented The Fostering Networks Mockingbird scheme for foster carers with our second constellation going live in February 2022. The service received complimentary feedback from The Fostering Network around their commitment to the scheme.

Our second hub home carer said;

“We are delighted to be part of Mockingbird and excited to be hub home carers within our constellation. We are looking forward to being a part of an extended family with other carers and children. The Mockingbird offers us the chance to form meaningful and positive relationships with carers and children who can offer support to each other. The children can get to meet and make friendships with other children and form long lasting friendships. We are

really looking forward to our social events and getting to know each and every child and carer. We hope to offer the children another home where they can feel safe and secure and be themselves.”

The service has remained committed to a pilot of ARCBOX, a digital life story tool, this was initially for 60 children/young people and we are currently exploring extending this.

Fostering undertake an annual survey (carers and children) which was conducted in February 2022, we are await feedback from this survey which will be utilised to continue to shape our services.

Our Regional Adoption Agency went live in April 2021. The RAA with Durham and Cumbria is a hub and spoke partnership model, which will see the TfC adoption team remain within the organisation, with management oversight provided by the RAA Head of Service. We have seen a positive impact upon our recruitment figures since the launch of the RAA, with 26 prospective adoptive families approved April 2021 to date. We currently have 20 families within the assessment process.

A revised process for permanence matching is now in place and has resulted in a significant improvement in the number of children and young people permanently matched to their foster family. As of March 2020, this was 7%, today this sits at 41%.

The focus for the family time service continues to be offering face to face family time. We previously offered a hybrid of face to face and virtual family time (during COVID) but have now reverted to face to face for all families who benefit from this offer. On a regular basis we provide over 170 family time sessions a week.

A Clinical Psychologist has joined our Cared For Service and will work with social workers, foster carers and connected carers to broaden their understanding of children and young people's mental health from a trauma perspective and the implications that the impact of trauma can have upon caring for them, since her start in June 2021 she has provided under 340 consultations.

What do we need to continue to work on?

- Review recruitment strategy for fostering and adoption giving consideration to national strategy
- Continue to develop and embed ARCBOX
- Analyse the impact of Mockingbird and consider to further constellations
- Undertake year-end analysis of impact of Clinical Psychologist

MSET (Missing, Slavery, Exploitation and Trafficked) process

MSET Operational Group is a function of Sunderland Safeguarding Children Partnership and is adopted by all six local authorities within the Northumbria Police force area. Monthly Pre-MSET meetings are held to discuss children and young people referred to MSET by their social worker, or children and young people who are already within the MSET arena are reviewed. MSET also discuss the top missing children identified in the month prior, and any areas of

concern within Sunderland. This enables information to be shared, advice provided to social workers, and actions agreed to reduce areas of concern.

Northumbria Police advise there are eight known organised crime groups operating in Sunderland, and Police and partner agencies discuss these at Operation Sentinel meetings (aimed to combat serious and organised crime by targeting offenders and preventing this type of activity from taking place). Operation Sentinel enables senior management within partner agencies to be aware of the related current concerns and work collaboratively to disrupt criminal activity. Further joint initiatives such as the SARA project, the HALO project and LMAPS allow for multi-agency information sharing to address contextual safeguarding for young people, who we seen an increasing number of.

Four of these eight OCG's are said to operate in the North of the city and following further investigations it was found that two of these have been known to actively groom and recruit children via exploitation and trafficking. The figures for children who have been referred to MSET over the last six months has remained consistent, however some of the most worrying examples of exploitation have been young people at risk of sexual exploitation. The review of the exploitation HUB has resulted in all young people with markers being offered intervention in some form to support investigations, direct work and recovery.

The marker system developed on Liquidlogic to identify all young people where there are MSET (missing, sexually exploited, exploited, and trafficked) concerns, has continued to be effective in developing data analysis. A Pre MSET-meeting occurs monthly to discuss all referrals and concerns and manage the application of the markers on case files. This has strengthened the assessment of vulnerability and subsequent interventions.

A review of the joint protocol for Missing from Home with the Police has now been devised and TfC are in the process of agreeing localised amendments. There is joint working between the CSE co-ordinator, Police and the newly established Young Persons Team within TfC to enable fortnightly mapping exercises to collate information and intelligence supporting a multi-agency approach to planning.

By way of example of current risks to children, there are currently 13 children with CSE flags on Liquidlogic (this incorporates all forms of exploitation). These 13 children are currently discussed in the pre-MSET meetings where risks and disruption actions are reviewed, advice provided about further interventions required, and decision reached if the threshold has been met to place the children on the MSET Operational Group agenda.

Monthly MSET Champion meetings are in place in all TfC children's homes, to discuss any children where there may be concerns, where the MSET coordinator is able to provide advice and information.

What do we need to continue to work on?

- TfC alongside the SSCP are currently developing a Sunderland Young People's Plan, to assist in better planning and interventions where there are risks outside of the home and will further compliment the MSET process.

- In the new version of Liquidlogic there is a contextual safeguarding element which would provide a more robust picture of the intelligence within the city in respect of areas of concern.
- Develop the data and performance information collated specifically in relation to MSET and exploitation.

Quality Assurance (QA)

A consistent audit framework has remains in place across children's social care, and continues to be led by two experienced Team Managers. The team leads on quality assurance activities, such as audit work and takes a lead role in the collation, analysis and reporting of the outcome of quality assurance findings and recommendations.

The QA framework operates at child level, strategically and as a multi-agency process as follows:

Case file audits - to assess the quality of recording, practice and the outcomes and experiences of children and young people. Full case file audits are completed by Team Managers and Assistant Team Managers, which are chosen and allocated randomly. Auditors do not complete audits from within their own teams.

- Audits are completed collaboratively with the allocated Social Worker, the Team Manager and Assistant Team Manager. Case file audits are completed within the Liquidlogic system and where possible and appropriate, feedback from children, young people and their families is also sought and fed into the audit form. Once completed the audit form goes to the Liquidlogic task tray of the Team Manager for whom case responsibility lies.
- Once identified actions have been completed the audit form is returned to the QA Team, who provide regular updates to the Senior Management Team and through Strengthening Outcomes Meetings, to ensure that audit actions are progressed.
- Audits are completed across Children's Social Care, including children open to Fostering, Adoption and Connected Carers teams.
- Liquidlogic audit forms specifically for Fostering and Connected Carers cases have now been developed and work in the same manner as our standard case file audit form, to ensure identified actions are progressed.
- Fostering audits have been shared as a template in the region, as no other LAs in the region have them in place.
- Liquidlogic forms in relation to Adoption and After Adoption are completed and uploaded to the relevant case file. We are in the process of developing these into the Liquidlogic system.

Thematic audits - audits completed by the QA Team Managers focusing on key issues for the service. Areas for thematic audit are identified through the analyses of the case file audits, changes and patterns identified within performance data and any areas of priority or concern identified by senior management. These audits are also repeated where necessary to ensure that learning and development improves and continues within areas of key practice, such as

re-referrals, children subject to repeat child protection planning, private fostering arrangements and the progress of the implementation of the Signs of Safety practice model.

Reflection Forums –recognise the value placed on reflection and learning to improve outcomes using appreciative inquiry. Reflection forums take place, when an opportunity for learning has been identified, either as a result of evidence of good practice, where an innovative approach has been used or where it is thought learning can be gained from looking at a child or young person's plan with the benefit of hindsight.

Strengthening Outcomes Meetings - provide an opportunity for Team Managers to highlight to the Senior Management Team the successes of their team and their practitioners with a view to building on these going forward. The Strengthening Outcomes Meetings also act as a vector to deliver QA findings and in effect 'close the loop'.

Multi-agency audit activity – the QA team continue to work with the SSCP to strengthen partnership audit activities including supporting the Practitioner forum and facilitating multi-agency discussions. Multi-agency audits have been undertaken on DVA, YP known to the YOS, with education partners on thresholds and with the IRO team.

ATM Practice Development Leads - this group was established in January 2021 to drive practice improvement through involving ATMs in undertaking some peer audit/critique. This is also linked to the work with students and NQSWs.

A Moderation group is in place, which meets monthly. This is made up of the QA Managers, Senior Management Team and the Service Manager for the IRO Service. Moderation meetings consider 20% of the audits completed each month, drawing out themes and considering audit quality as well individual and service wide learning.

The QA team provide monthly QA reports detailing findings including recommendations from the analyses of the Managers/ Assistant Team Managers monthly case file audits and associated moderation meetings. The Senior Management Team then determine what actions are required to address the areas identified for improvement as well as areas of practice to be celebrated and shared.

What do we need to continue to work on?

- Group Audit activity will progress to allow TMs and ATMs to take over the running of the audit groups. The Senior Management Team alongside the QA team will continue to moderate audits to ensure consistency of audit quality and understand learning needs.
- The After Adoption audit forms will be progressed into the Liquidlogic system, mirroring the mechanism in place for all other audit activity.
- QA will continue to work with and develop the multi-agency collaboration/footprint with audit and assurance activities, to widen the depth and breadth of understanding and learning for both TfC and its partners.
- The QA team will complete a refresh of supervision workshops.

Signs of Safety implementation

The implementation of Signs of Safety has continued over the past 12 months. Group supervisions, practice lead sessions & workshops, a Signs of Safety Clinic and internal practitioner 'snap- shot' sessions have continued alongside 2-day and 6-day training and external practitioner briefings.

The Signs of Safety Team has expanded to include three Signs of Safety Social Workers alongside the Team Manager. The posts were part-funded by the Sunderland Safeguarding Children's Partnership. The focus of their roles is to develop specialisms in Signs of Well-being (Early Help/ partner agencies), Signs of Safety (Social Care) and Signs of Success (Cared for Services)

There is a focus on 'Appreciative Enquiry' sessions to celebrate and share good practice across the service. This has led to TfC presenting a piece of work at the Signs of Safety International Gathering held remotely but attended by practitioners worldwide.

TfC have continued to work with Liquidlogic and Elia in reviewing and testing the proposed Cared for (LAC) forms in Liquidlogic and identifying the areas for development. We are currently working with Elia in progressing training for all staff in using these forms as they require a change in practice as well. It is hoped this will take place in May 2022 when the forms 'go live' on Liquidlogic.

We have purchased and commenced the 'End to End casework' supported by our Signs of Safety consultant through Elia. This allows a piece of work to be identified and tracked through the service, exploring and developing practice and paperwork. This has been so successful pieces work that were identified and quickly ended due to the positive practice and support offered to these families. Work has been completed with the relevant Team Managers on strategy meetings and a good practice example developed. This work will continue to explore and develop practice within child protection further.

A Multi- agency Steering group has also been developed to improve the use of Signs of Safety with partner agencies. There have been representatives from the Police, education, across health services, housing, domestic violence services, substance misuse services and probation. Work has been completed with this group to outline what is expected of partner agencies in their work with us, for example in the completion of referrals, and their participation in strategy meetings, conferences and other multi agency meetings. The support identified will include training and briefings as well as invitations to group supervisions that are being completed on families they are working with.

What do we need to continue to work on?

- Consistency and depth of practice
- Continue to develop the confidence and knowledge in Practice Leads
- Continue to develop a culture of learning through Appreciate Inquiry, including when things have not gone well.
- Work with SSCP to roll Signs of Safety out to partners and improve understanding across all the services we work with.

Educational Achievement for Cared for Children: Virtual School

The Virtual School has been restructured to better reflect the needs of cared for children, former cared for children and CIN. This recruitment process is currently underway, and it builds on the previous structure to better reflect the work and daily demands.

Against the last reported outcomes in 2019 (pandemic restrictions) Early Years outcomes are above national and regional cared for children. Key Stage (KS) 1 outcomes are above national cared for children at expected standard. KS2 performance is strong against national cared for children performance in all areas and is closing the gap on all schools in Sunderland. The KS2 progress measure across Reading, Writing and Maths is good and is significantly higher than national data. KS4 outcomes show improvement across all indicators.

2020/21 KS4 data for Sunderland cared for children shows improvement against 2019 data but there is no national comparison. At KS4 the Progress 8 measure for KS2 – 4 is below national cared for children. At Post 16 those in education, training and employment (EET) is showing an improving trend and those not in education, training and employment (NEET) is reducing. Higher education data also shows improvement with 27 care experienced young people at university, compared with single figures in previous years.

97% of Personal Education Plans are completed within statutory timeframes. All plans are quality assured against an agreed QA Framework. 87% have green status and 13% amber. All PEPS receive written commentary in the QA feedback, so it is clear what schools need to do to improve.

Attendance has been above the national data and attendance has been maintained throughout the pandemic. Currently attendance of cared for children for September 2021 – 18 February 2022 is 92%, this is better than all children nationally and better than the attendance of vulnerable children nationally. Attendance in state-funded primary schools was 93.2% and was 91% for pupils with a social worker (DfE data). Attendance for Sunderland cared for children at 96.8% is better than the national data for all children and for vulnerable children with a social worker. Attendance in state-funded secondary schools was 87.3% and was 75% for pupils with a social worker (DFE data). Attendance for Sunderland cared for children at 88.4% is better than the national data for all children and for vulnerable children with a social worker

Suspensions for cared for children are reducing, this is an improving trend and has reduced from 11.4% to 8.7% in 2020/21. We have maintained zero Permanent exclusions for 4 years.

The Virtual School Governing Board has full representation across all phases of education: Head Teacher reps from Early Years and Nursery, Primary, Secondary, and Special; FE/HE reps from Sunderland College and Sunderland University (Chair); foster carer; and, cared for young people x2. It meets six times per year: three full governing board meetings and three Challenge and Support Committee meetings.

In the context of the new CIN duties Virtual School Head Teachers are expected to use their knowledge and expertise from promoting the educational outcomes of cared for and previously cared for children to become the strategic leader who champions the educational attendance, attainment, and progress of children with a social worker. Initial grant funding for two terms has been allocated until March 2022, further funding is expected for 2022/23 but as yet this has not been confirmed.

What do we need to continue to work on?

- Maintain and further develop robust, valid and timely data.
- Maintain outcomes across all phases at or above those for cared for children nationally.
- Reduce the gap between Sunderland cared for children and all Sunderland children.
- Maintain EPEP compliance above 95%
- Maintain attendance above 95% for cared for children and zero permanent exclusions.
- Maintain percentage of suspensions below national data.
- Develop a CIN strategy which promotes the educational attendance, attainment and progress of children with a social worker.

Key Stage Outcomes for all Children and Young People

Due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic all summer 2020 exams were cancelled. In January 2021 and in response to the pandemic, the government announced that it was no longer fair for many exams and assessments to go ahead as planned that summer. It was confirmed that students taking GCSE, AS and A levels regulated by Ofqual would be awarded grades based on an assessment by their teachers, and the outcome of this consultation was announced in February 2021. Teachers used a range of evidence to make a judgement about the grade at which their students have performed, focusing on the content that students have been taught. Therefore, it is difficult to make comparative judgements against previous years.

	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21
Grade 5+ English& Mathematic	37.4%	39.6%	48.1%
Progress 8	-0.39	-0.34	-0.26
Attainment 8	42.9	44.7	47.0

**For the past two years there has been no statutory end of key stage assessments or published data.*

Cancellation of the phonics screening check in June 2021 meant incoming year two pupils did not take the check in year one. In the 2021 to 2022 academic year, it was statutory for schools to administer a past version of the phonics screening check to year two pupils during the second half of the 2021 autumn term and return results to their local authority. The autumn check intended to ensure that year two pupils who need support in learning to decode using phonics were not missed.

Following analysis of the December 2021 Y2 Phonics Screening Check and from informal discussions with colleagues in other Local Authorities, Sunderland is in line with regional performance. Any school that fell below the December 2021 Sunderland average have received:

- An email offering support
- A follow-up phone call offering a review / audit / support / CPD
- Those eligible have been directed to the funding and support available at the hub.

All schools have been offered:

- Leadership training on establishing an Early Reading Lead to take charge of phonics.
- Termly network meetings for these roles
- Training on auditing the phonics and early reading curriculum "Leading a Deep Dive"

- Training for teachers on quality first teaching and effective environment for phonics.
- Training on promoting reading fluency and automaticity
- TAs have been offered training for 1:1 reading with pupils at risk of falling behind.
- English Subject Leaders have been offered a summative version of the 1:1 reading training so they can monitor and evaluate.
- Planned training has been put in place for Governors how to provide appropriate challenge and support for early reading
- Phonics and Early Reading now forms part of the guidance given by TfC for link Governor visits.

Further areas of support offered to schools cover transitions (ks3-4), R, W & M, training for SENCO's, leadership training, and bespoke support for settings with a high proportion of students with autism.

Children's Independent Reviewing Team (CIRT)

The Children's Independent Reviewing Team implemented a new model of delivery in April 2021, creating a Cared for Team and a Child Protection Team. The model is flexible to enable Conference Chairs and IROs to transition between teams, as required to either meet demand or to enhance professional development within the service.

The service continues to develop confidence and knowledge of Signs of Safety. For example, in July 2021 the team implemented a new Child Protection Agenda to build upon our strength-based practice. Families continue to provide feedback that suggests child protection practice is becoming more inclusive and enabling greater insight into what is needed to keep children safe.

The CIRT team have continued to explore digital solutions to increase the ways in which we secure feedback from children and their families. For example, automated questionnaires are sent to families via Microsoft Teams which is providing the service with feedback around family's experiences. The team have also significantly increased the use of Mind of My Own statements and scenarios as a way of capturing the voice of the child and encouraging the participation of children and young people in their review meetings.

The CIRT team has recently moved to a new premise in Sunderland with purpose-built child protection conference facilities. The building has been designed in keeping with the Signs of Safety approach in aiding families to sit together, to feel comfortable and supported during difficult meetings. Since moving in December 2021, the team have received positive feedback from families regarding the facilities and accessibility to the building.

Child protection conferences remain timely with a year-to-date position of 86% for ICPC and 98% for RCPC. Timeliness for cared for reviews is 98% year to date, with foster carer reviews and Regulation 44 visits being 100%. Referrals to the Designated Officer have also continued to be responded to within timescales, at 100%. IROs and Conference Chairs held a total of 2272 tracking discussions with the children's social workers in 2020/21 (984 child protection tracking discussions and 1288 tracking discussions for cared for children).

Following the impact of COVID it continues to be important that the profile of the Designated Officer is raised to ensure organisations know when and how to contact the Designated Officer for advice, guidance, or to make a referral. The SSCP have been promoting Designated Officer Training to all organisations and encouraging take-up. The Designated

Officer has been contacting organisations, delivering briefings, arranging training, and seeking ways to use social media to communicate the purpose, role, and routes to accessing our service. The Designated Officer has also made improvements to the recording of advice, guidance and referrals with a clear emphasis on the child's voice in the decision making.

Quality assurance work including regular thematic audits, internal audits, peer observations and management observations is allowing ongoing learning and development to strengthen consistency and practice. CIRT management attend monthly audit moderation meetings with Social Care to moderate case file audits and to share thematic audit findings to support overall practice improvement.

In 2021 the team commissioning bespoke IRO training delivered by Edgehill University. Due to the success of this course in the NE12 region funding has been further secured for this to be ran in 2022 meaning that all IRO's within TFC can engage in bespoke training relating to their roles and responsibilities.

What do we need to continue to work on?

- Continue to improve shared learning with the quality assurance team in social care and identifying areas for strengthening practice for children.
- Incorporate the views of children, young people and their families into our audit work.
- Continue to look for creative ways of engaging children and young people in their meetings and strengthening the influence that the voice of the child has upon plans and outcomes for their future.

Commissioning

We have continued to develop our integrated commissioning approach, working with Sunderland CCG to deliver our vision of inclusive, needs-based and outcomes focused support for children and families. Joint governance is being strengthened with a permanent integrated structure in development for implementation in 2022.

A new holistic domestic abuse service has been commissioned in partnership with Sunderland City Council and will be delivered by a local specialist domestic abuse provider, Wearside Women in Need, from 1 April 2022. The new service is modelled on a whole family approach encompassing support for victims and survivors including children, and a perpetrator intervention service. The contract also includes a therapeutic support and counselling programme for children affected by domestic abuse and an early intervention service in which IDVAs are based in the early help and social care teams and work closely with TFC staff.

The children's commissioning team have revised the quality monitoring and assurance processes to ensure that cared for children and care experienced young people receive good standards of care, are appropriately safeguarded and are supported to achieve positive outcomes in commissioned living arrangements. The process includes enhanced information-sharing between professionals and commissioners, increased provider monitoring visits and the development of recording systems to facilitate the tracking and triangulation of risks and concerns.

Waiting times for children awaiting neurodevelopmental diagnostic assessments have been an issue for some time. The CCG began a waiting times initiative in April across community

paediatrics, SaLT and the CYPs to reduce the waiting times. Non-recurrent monies (initially) have been secured to commission a pre and post diagnostic support service. Work is underway to introduce a new neurodevelopmental pathway within Sunderland using an MDT approach to assessment and diagnoses.

Service redesign of children and young people's mental health services is underway, in coproduction with children. The new model will be based on the i-THRIVE needs-led framework and will deliver young people access to the right service at the right time to meet individual needs.

Mental health crisis provision for young people has been enhanced to give young people access to the same level of care as adults, including increased intensive home treatment visits. From February 2021, young people aged 16 – 25 are seen by both an adult nurse and a children and young people's nurse to ensure co-ordination of appropriate.

What do we need to continue to work on?

- Continued sufficiency challenges in the external residential and foster care markets.
- Enhanced models of support for children and young people with complex needs, learning disabilities and autism.
- Improve waiting times for children awaiting neurodevelopmental diagnostic assessments.
- Waiting lists for children's mental health services.

Mind of My Own

At the end of Feb 2022, there were 876 children and young people signed up to use the One app with their own account and 547 workers within TfC registered to use both the One app and Express with young people. There has been an increase of 63% in new young person accounts since May 2021, whilst staff sign ups have increased by 15%. Workers have positively promoted Mind of My Own as a helpful tool for young people, supporting young people to sign up to their own accounts to make sure their voice is heard at a time that suits them.

So far in 2021/22, 1,290 One and Express statements have been received. Of those, 1003 were One statements and 287 were Express statements. This reflects a 104% increase from the same period in the previous year. Overall, TfC were the first local authority to reach 2,000 statements in the country and reach our highest ever number of statements a month in February 2022, receiving 245 statements.

Mind of My Own has supported our Missing from Home service within Early Help since November 2021. Between 1st Dec 2021 to 28th February 2022 (3 months), 118 return from missing statements have been completed by our children and young people to ensure their voice has been captured as part of the return home interview process.

So far, 92 of the statements received have appeared on the safety link sent from 55 young people. 24 young people appeared as unsafe and 28 young people appeared as unhappy

where they lived. Every time a young person appears on a safety link, a form is created on Liquidlogic and is sent to the Team Manager of the worker for management oversight.

Mind of My Own monthly audits are completed across the directorates. Since May 2021, eight audits have been carried out. All audits are sent to the worker and their line manager with actions to improve areas of listening to the child's voice. We continue to directly hear from children and young people who use Mind of My Own and ask them to determine what difference it has made and whether they felt listened to in the process.

Feedback from Young People

"I used Mind of My own to ask for time with my sister and that this made me feel sad I couldn't see her, I also asked for more family time with my mam and this was looked at by my social worker and spoke about on her visit. I like using Mind of My own as I can talk about my feelings and I can talk about my feelings or things that are on my mind". (Young person aged 14).

'Thank you for being here for me, Mind of My Own now gives me somewhere to record how I'm feeling and if I ever need help I can get a message to my early help worker'. (Young person, Aged 13).

What do we need to continue to work on?

- We will continue to speak with young people to see if they feel listened to by completing a Mind of My own on a month-by-month basis.
- We will review of Audits identifying themes across the organisation and feedback into services.

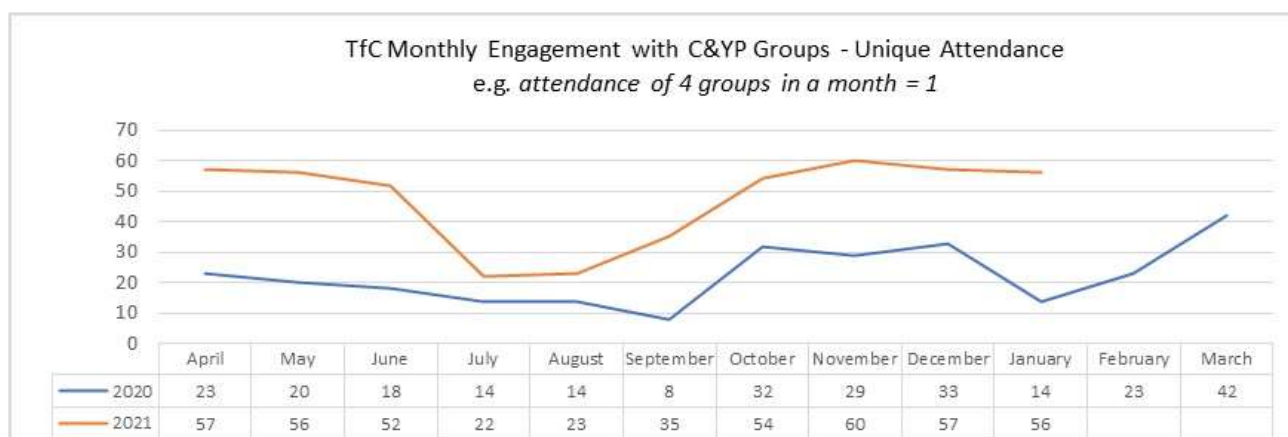
Participation and Engagement

Together for Children support the following participation and engagement groups:

- Sunderland Youth Council
- Change Council – 10-15 years
- Change Council – 16+
- Stars - SEND
- Cozmic 3phiphany – LGBTQ+
- Early Help Young People's Group

The regular events and meetings of young people's groups are key elements of our participation and engagement work. Engagement with children and young people from across the city continues and between April 2021 and January 2022;

- 146 individual children and young people have engaged in a participation and engagement groups ran by Together for Children.
- 1,025 children and young people have participated in a participation activity.
- 3,614 children and young people have engaged in a celebration or consultation event.



Young People's Feedback

'Stars has helped to boost my confidence into a mature young person, ready for the world of work and I know that I can ask them for advice and guidance'. (Young Person, Stars Aged 15).

'The group makes me feel accepted and important' (Young Person, Cozmic, Aged 15)

'Becoming chair of SYC has really improved my confidence in contributing to Sunderland's future by collaborating with and challenging councillors' (Young Person, SYC, Aged 17).

'I like making change for myself and other people. I like knowing that cared for and care experienced young people will have a better experience of foster care than I did'. (Young Person, CC, Aged 16).

What do we need to continue to work on?

- Develop a commissioning engagement role to support the development of young commissioners.
- Embed the Change the Language campaign within TfC and extend the reach to our partners and our schools supported by the development of official launch.
- Develop mentoring offer for our cared for and care experienced young people to support their education, employment, and training opportunities.
- Develop our relationships with our BAME children and young people

Workforce

Since 2017, TfC have heavily invested in our Recruitment and Retention Strategy and continuing to grow our own workforce. This has continued to pay dividends. As at the end of QTR 3, social care employed a total of nine agency staff from a permanent workforce of 403.3, which presents a very different picture historically and nationally. Turnover is equally a positive picture when compared nationally.

We continue to invest and develop in the ASYE and Practice Education Programme and this has supported social care capacity through ensuring that we have a steady stream of new social workers into the company.

We have enhanced the offer to NQSWs by extending support; this includes 1:1 support with the ASYE Co Ordinator and PSW. There are 4-weekly group drop-in sessions and group supervisions which are well attended. Currently there are 19 NQSWs completing the ASYE

programme over 4 cohorts with a further 12 NQSWs to start in September. There is a comprehensive programme for our NQSWs that has a strong focus on ensuring the required practical skills are developed.

We have continued to grow our Practice Education and Student Programme over the last year, with a high number of social workers wanting to be part of supporting future social workers education. Regionally we are the first organisation to offer placements for mental health nursing students in 2021. We are actively involved with the North East Social Work Teaching Partnership and have been successful in bids submitted that have supported TfC NQSWs and students, but also enabled other local authorities to benefit. This includes 'Knocking on the Door', an interactive training event with Geese Theatre Company and Professor Harry Ferguson, which regional colleagues also enjoyed attending.

We have a comprehensive People Strategy, which shifts the focus from recruitment to building an organisational culture that encourages the workforce, whatever their role or background to succeed; the four key strands of this strategy include:

- Leadership and driving our culture
- Protecting our wellbeing
- Growing and developing our people
- Valuing and retaining our talent

We will continue to deliver our learning and development 'me@TfC strategy' by growing and developing the workforce. TfC offers a wide range of learning and development opportunities to social workers. Trauma informed practice was delivered to all social care practitioners in 2021 with positive feedback around the impact upon practice. There is a clear career progression pathway identified, which enables social workers to understand how they can grow and develop within TfC. 28 practitioners progressed in 2021, and four have progressed so far in 2022.

TfC were part of the national pilot for the NAAS in 2020/21. Three members of staff successfully completed the accreditation, two practice supervisors and one practitioner. We had 20 further staff ready to undertake the assessment before it was paused. We are now supporting the research for the next phase of the NAAS due to be launched at end of 2022.

What do we need to work on?

- Deliver our People Strategy, building strong leadership and succession plans as we grow and develop our workforce.
- Consider the national and regional social care picture to ensure that our offer continues to be strong, relevant and up to date.
- We will continue to monitor the balance between newly qualified workers with retention of our post-qualified social workers.

Transformation Programme

In order to drive the innovation and improvement programme TfC invested in a Transformation Programme Office. This ensures robust programme management discipline runs through all business cases and cost benefit analysis. Additionally, there is a Transformation Programme Board that provides strong governance to transformation activity.

The funding has been invested in Family Group Conferencing; aspects of the Domestic Abuse (DA) intervention and practice; increased therapeutic support through investment in a further clinical psychologist dedicated to working throughout our children's social care teams; a further children's home, Nook Lodge; and, in recognition of sufficiency needs another Support to Independence (S2I) Service with the introduction of a fourth provision at Cliffe Park.

The funding has also enabled us to strengthen our support to Foster Carers, including the introduction of Mockingbird. The first constellation went live in May 2021 and our second constellation went live in February 2022. Impact is already being seen from the first constellation and over time, the following benefits will accrue:

- Improve foster carer retention (12% carers would have resigned if they hadn't been supported by the Mockingbird programme*).
- Reduce placement (home) breakdowns (1 in 5 placements would have broken down if they hadn't been supported by the Mockingbird programme*).
- Reduce residential placements (5 placements in residential care have been avoided*).
- Achieve significant cost avoidance.
- Improve school attendance.

**Fostering Network Mockingbird Programme Update 2020; data from 22 Mockingbird partners reporting to March 2020.*

TfC has partnered throughout the last two years with the University of Sunderland to evaluate the Transformation Programme. The University has evaluated TfC Domestic Abuse support services and interventions, Family Group Conferencing and is reviewing cared for children demand management.

The Transformation Management Office (TMO) continues to support organisational activity such as the continued Signs of Safety and Performance Management Behaviour Framework implementations but has also been commissioned to support the regional ADCS in a sector wide best practice mapping exercise.