

**Children and Young People's
Overview and Scrutiny
Committee**

27 September 2021



**Overview of Child Protection
Process**

**Report of John Pearce, Corporate Director of Children and Young
People's Services**

Purpose

- 1 The purpose of this report and accompanying presentation is to provide members of Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee with an overview of the Child Protection Process in County Durham.

Executive Summary

- 2 The report sets out the key stages of the child protection process and provides a summary of the process in Durham and identifies key strengths and challenges.
- 3 Key strengths identified are: Timeliness of Initial Child Protection Conferences and Reviews of Child Protection Plans; Strong multi-agency support; Response to Covid-19 and maintaining timeliness of reviews; Development of Mind of My Own.
- 4 Key challenges identified are: Recovery from Covid-19 to ensure children and families remain central to the Child Protection Process; Maintaining a strength based, relational approach throughout the Child Protection Process.

Recommendation

- 5 That members of Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny committee receive the report and comment accordingly.

Background

Strategy Discussion

- 6 The child protection process is set out in Working Together 2018. Whenever there is reasonable cause to suspect that a child is suffering or is likely to suffer significant harm there should be a strategy discussion involving local authority children's social care, the police, health and other bodies such as the referring agency. The discussion should take place within 2 working days of concerns being identified and where risks are high on the same day. Parents would be informed of this meeting but not take part in it. The purpose of the strategy discussion is to establish whether there is a need to conduct a criminal investigation and whether further enquires are required under section 47 of the Children Act 1989.

Section 47 Investigation (Children Act 1989)

- 7 The s47 investigation is a multi-agency investigation led by the local authority social worker. The purpose of the investigation is to decide whether any action should be taken to safeguard and promote the wellbeing of the child. It should be undertaken in consultation with the family and their network.
- 8 If this investigation finds evidence that the original concerns are substantiated and that the child is likely to suffer significant harm an Initial Child Protection Conference will be convened within 15 days of the Strategy Discussion.

Initial Child Protection Conference

- 9 An Initial Child Protection Conference brings together family members (and the child where appropriate), with the supporters, advocates and practitioners most involved with the child and family, to make decisions about the child's future safety, health and development. It is chaired by an Independent Reviewing Officer who is independent of the social work team. It provides a forum to share and analyse all relevant information from all partner agencies.
- 10 If the attendees at the initial child protection conference believe that the child is likely to suffer significant harm then the child will be made subject to a Child Protection Plan and the primary category of abuse is recorded.

Core Group

- 11 A multi-agency Core Group within the family and their network at the centre will be established and will work together to implement the Child Protection Plan, carry out agreed tasks, monitor progress and outcomes and refine the plan as needed. The Core Group will meet 10 days after the Child Protection Conference and monthly thereafter.

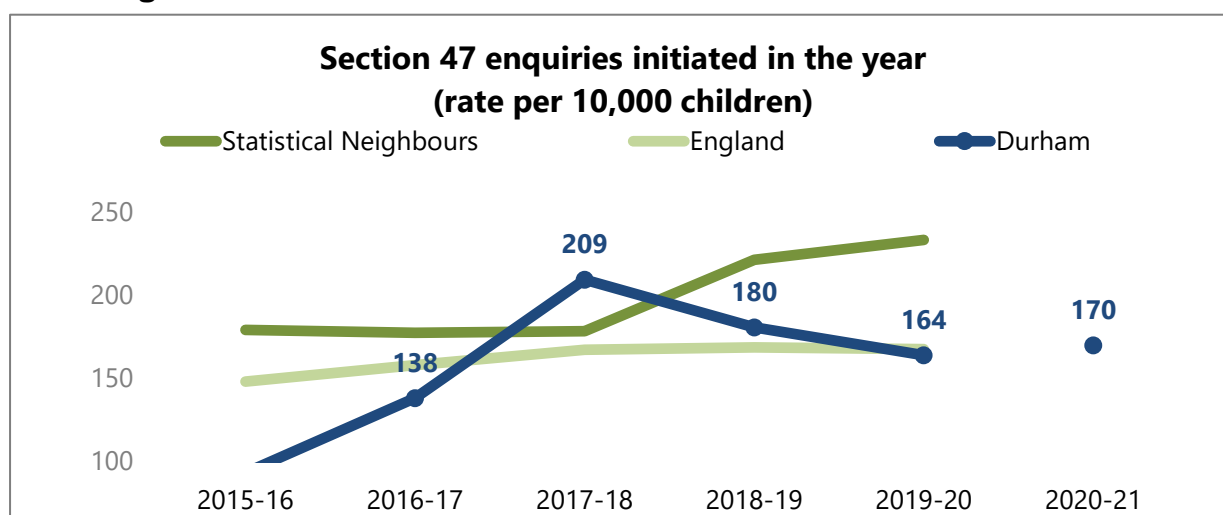
Child Protection Review Conference

- 12 A Child Protection Review Conference is held within 3 months to review whether the child is continuing to suffer or is likely to suffer significant harm, review developmental progress against planned outcomes, and considered whether it should continue. Subsequent Child Protection Review Conferences are held within 3 months and 6 monthly thereafter. When a Child Protection Plan ends there should be a clear Child in Need plan to ensure that change is sustained.

Durham Context

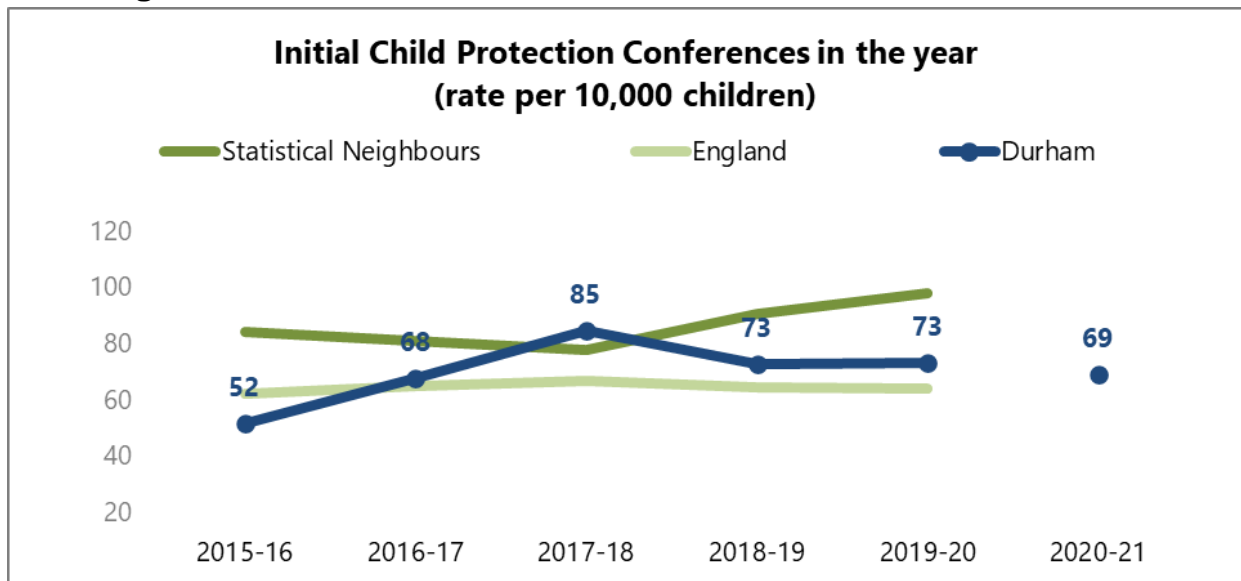
- 13 At the time of writing this report there were 499 children subject to a Child Protection Plan in Durham. During 2020 – 2021 1721 s47 investigations were undertaken and 702 Initial Child Protection Conferences were held.
- 14 Figure 1 shows the rate of s47 investigations undertaken each year since 2015-16 in comparison to England and our statistical neighbours.

Figure 1



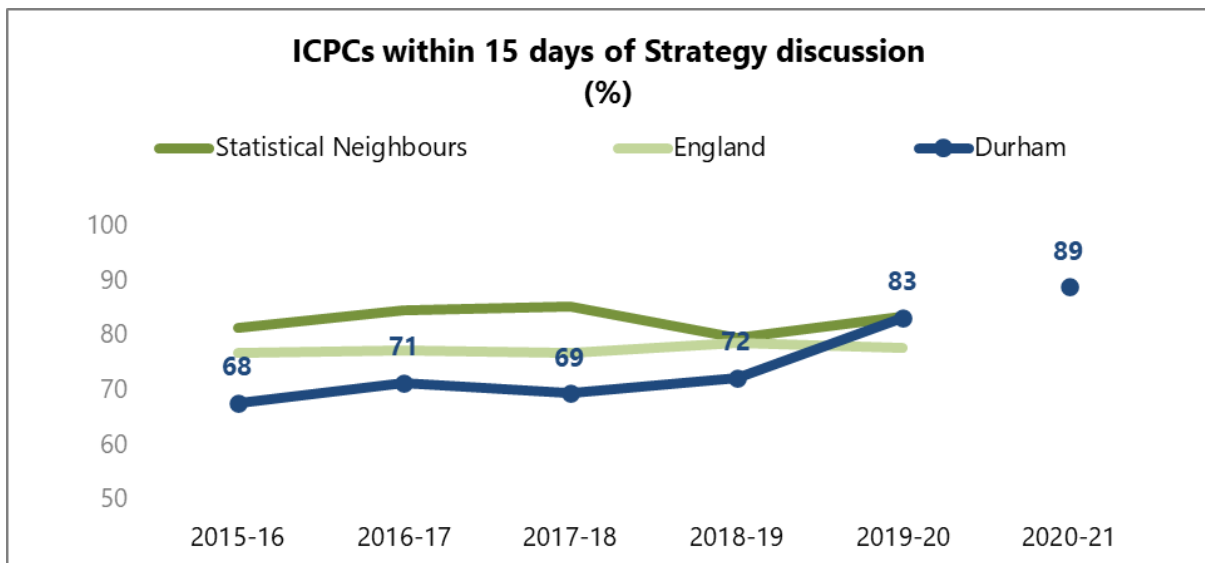
- 15 Figure 2 shows the rate of Initial Child Protection Conferences each year since 2015-16 in comparison to England and our statistical neighbours.

Figure 2



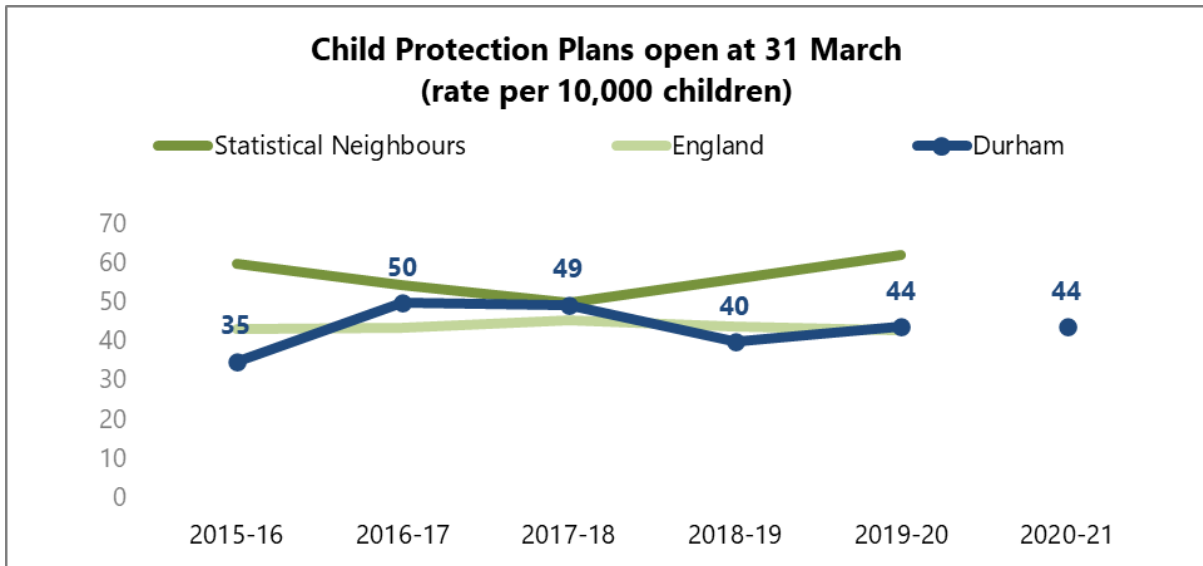
16 Figure 3 shows the timeliness of our Initial Child Protection conferences.

Figure 3



17 Figure 4 shows the rate of Child Protection Plans in comparison to England and our statistical neighbours.

Figure 4



18 Figure 5 shows the primary category of abuse that is recorded when a child is made subject to a Child Protection Plan in comparison to England and our statistical neighbours.

Figure 5

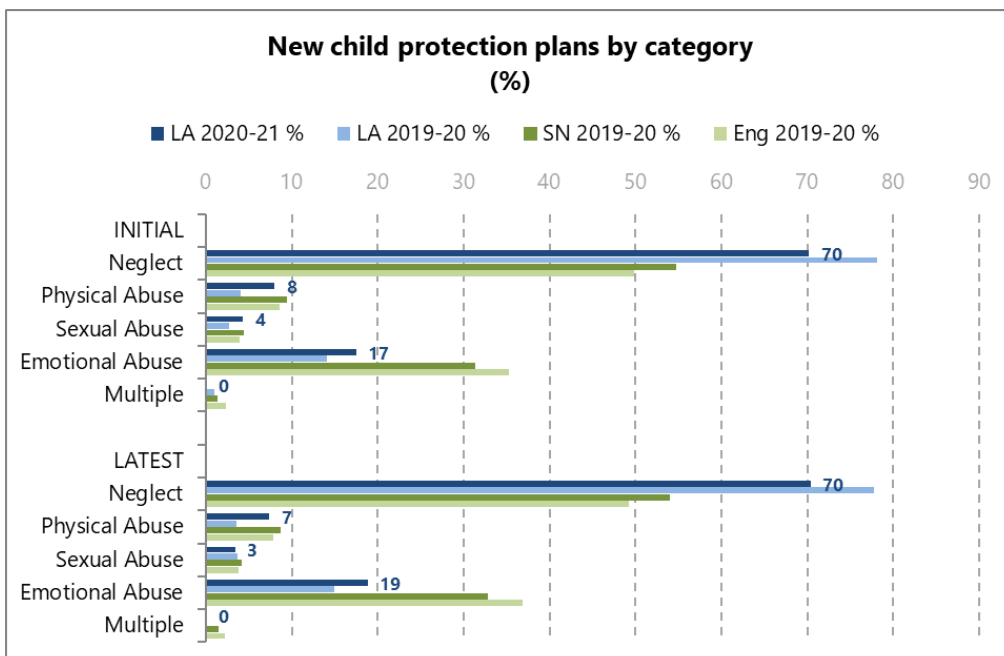
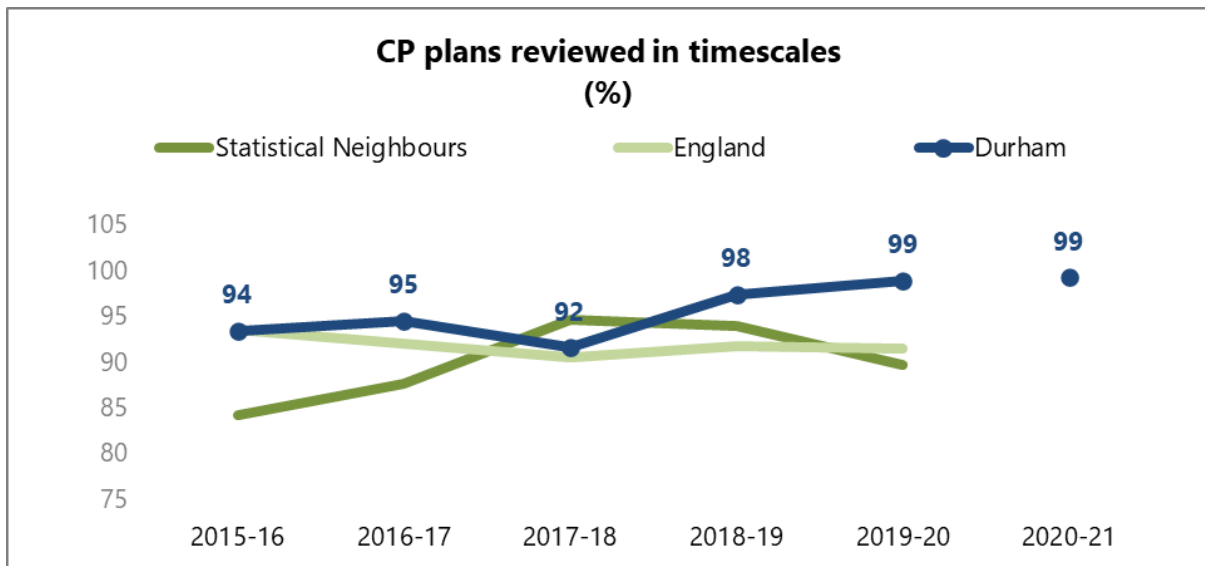


Figure 6

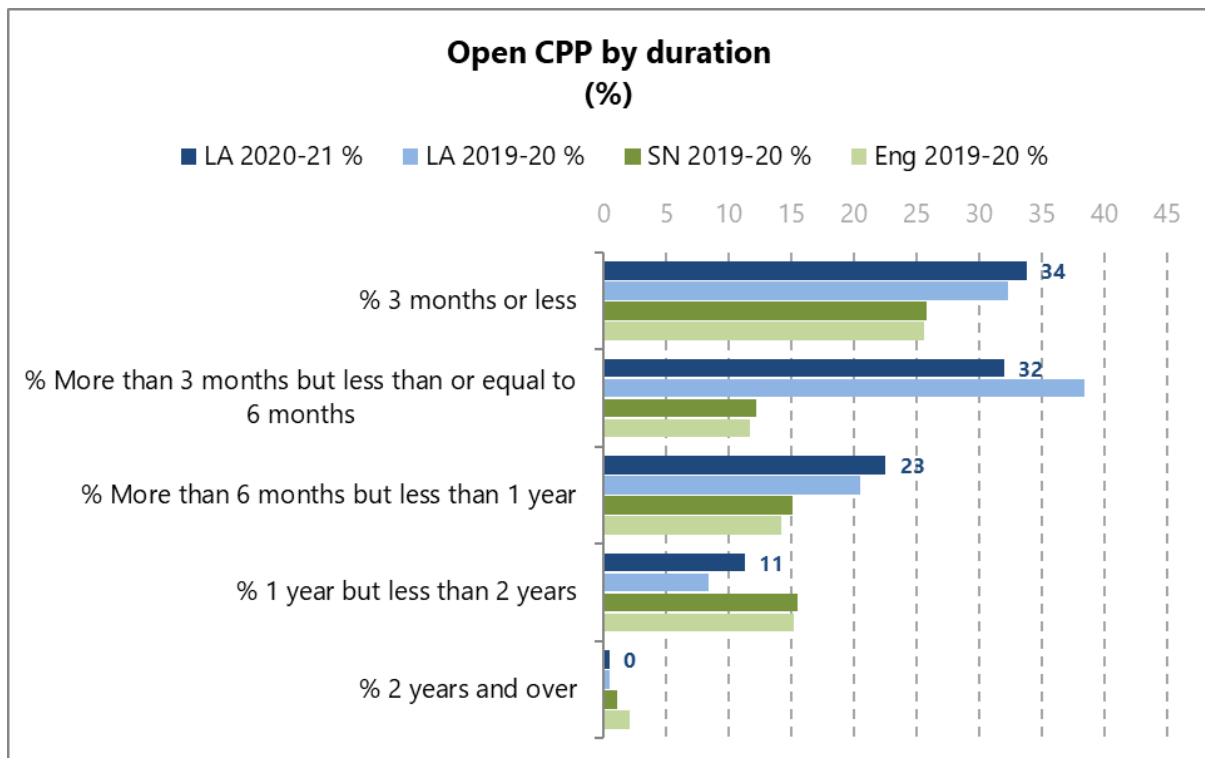
19 Figure 6 shows the timeliness of Review Child Protection Conferences in comparison to England and our statistical neighbours.

Figure 6



20 Figure 7 shows the duration of Child Protection Plans in comparison to England and our statistical neighbours.

Figure 7



Conclusion

Key strengths

- 21 We continue to maintain strong performance in relation to the timeliness of our Initial Child Protection Conference and our Review Child Protection Conferences. This is critical to ensure that the risks to children and young people are being managed effectively and that the plans to promote their safety and wellbeing are progressing.
- 22 We have quickly adapted to the challenges of Covid-19 by embracing the use of technology and have maintained the timeliness of our reviews throughout this period.
- 23 There is strong multi-agency representation and support throughout the child protection process.
- 24 The continued implementation of the Mind of My Own app which provides children and young people with a way of providing their views within the child protection process is a significant and positive development.

Key Challenges

- 25 Whilst we have responded rapidly and well to the challenges of Covid-19 we are continuing to work hard to ensure that children and families remain central to all multi-agency meetings as we move towards more face-to-face meetings.
- 26 It is always a challenge to implement and maintain a strength-based relational approach when assessing and managing risk within the child protection process. The implementation of Signs of Safety is the primary method of achieving this ambition.

Feedback

- 27 Two examples of high-quality relationship-based practice are shown below in feedback from a young person and from parents who have experienced a Child Protection Conference:

“I didn’t want to be part of the meeting and the IRO spoke to me beforehand and arranged for me to come via video call to the beginning of the meeting so that I could say what I thought it was like at home, including what was good and what I was worried about. I was then able to listen to what everyone else said from the other side.”

“Your presence and demeanour on the day was really helpful. You seemed kind, calm and supportive. Personally, I also appreciated your understated authority – you seemed very much in charge and I respond well to that sort of thin.

Background Papers

None

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Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

The Children Act 1989 provides a legislative framework for child protection in England and is strengthened by the Children Act 2004, which encourages partnerships between agencies and creates more accountability.

Finance

No implications.

Consultation

No implications

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

No implications

Climate Change

No implications

Human Rights

No implications

Crime and Disorder

No implications

Staffing

No implications

Accommodation

No implications

Risk

No implications

Procurement

No implications