

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

27 September 2021



**Relationship based social
work practice**

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

Purpose

- 1 The purpose of this report and accompanying presentation is to provide members with an overview of the progress being made within Children's Social Care to embed high quality relationship based social work practice.

Executive Summary

- 2 Durham Children's Social Care are committed to embedding relationship-based practice across all services, ensuring that the relationship between the child, young person, parent or carer and the practitioners who work with them is central to our practice.
- 3 The quality of the relationship has a significant impact on the ability to achieve good outcomes for children and young people. We know from the feedback we get from children and young people how important the relationship is with their social worker.
- 4 This report provides a summary of three key factors in achieving our ambition: a strong workforce strategy; manageable caseloads; a Practice Framework – Signs of Safety.
- 5 It demonstrates that the progress being made in each area and the emerging evidence of impact on children and families.

Recommendation

- 6 Members of Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee are asked to note the content of the report and presentation and comment accordingly.

Background

A strong workforce strategy

- 7 In order to provide an environment where relationship-based practice can flourish there has been continued investment in our workforce strategy. Key elements of this include:

Recruitment

- Invested additional funding of £2.716 million in front line social work between 2019-20 and 2021-22
- Development of Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) academy for newly qualified social workers
- Over recruitment of ASYEs
- Creation of new roles – Enhanced Practitioners
- Different routes into social work – Frontline, Step-Up, Apprenticeship, Return to Social Work

Retention

- Enhanced emotional wellbeing offer
- Clear practice framework – Signs of Safety
- Investment in electronic recording system – Liquid Logic
- Development of Leadership Academy
- Recruitment and retention allowance for “hard to fill posts”
- Creation of new specialist teams
- Aspiring Managers programme

- 8 The impact of this strategy can be seen in the following measures:

- Our average vacancy rate over 12-month period reduced from 14.22% (Aug 2019) to 8.04% (Aug 21).
- Our current agency rate of 7.64% is lower than both the regional average (10.2%) and the national average (15.4%).
- Our leavers have increased slightly between 2019 – 2021. There were 46 leavers in year ending 2021.
- Staff survey (68% response rate) found 76% were satisfied with their employment deal and 85% would recommend their employer to a friend.
- 80% of respondents felt cared about by their manager.

Manageable caseloads

- 9 Manageable caseloads are key to ensuring that social workers have the time to build effective relationships with children and young people. The impact of the workforce strategy upon social work caseloads needs to be seen in the context of increasing demand upon services. Figure 1

shows the increasing trend in the number of children and young people open to children’s social care since July 2019. Figure 2 shows the growth in the number of children in care which has grown by 25% between the start of 2018 and the end of 2020.

Figure 1 – Children open to Children’s Social Care

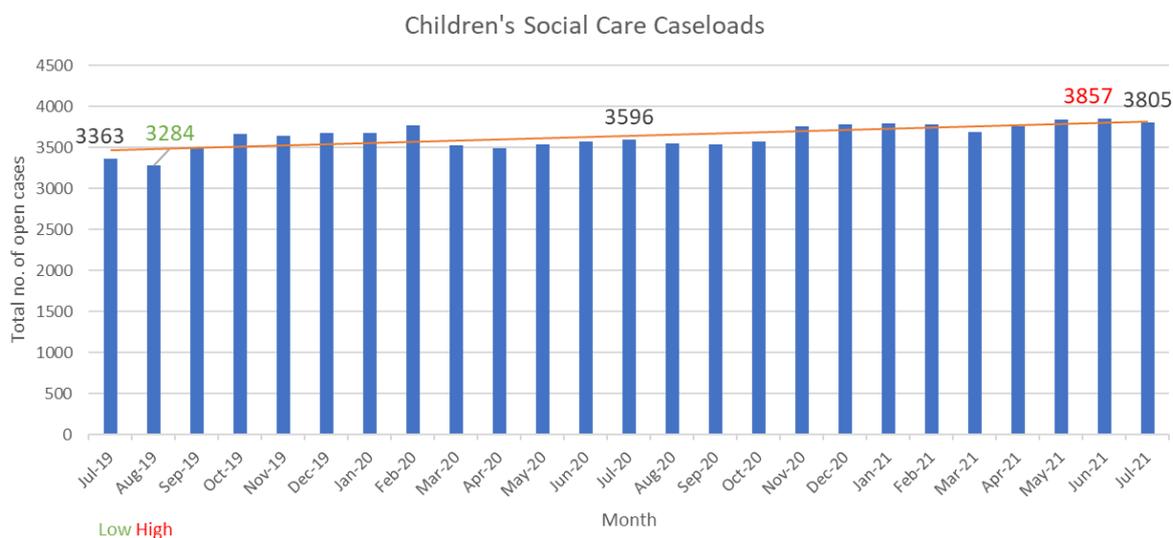
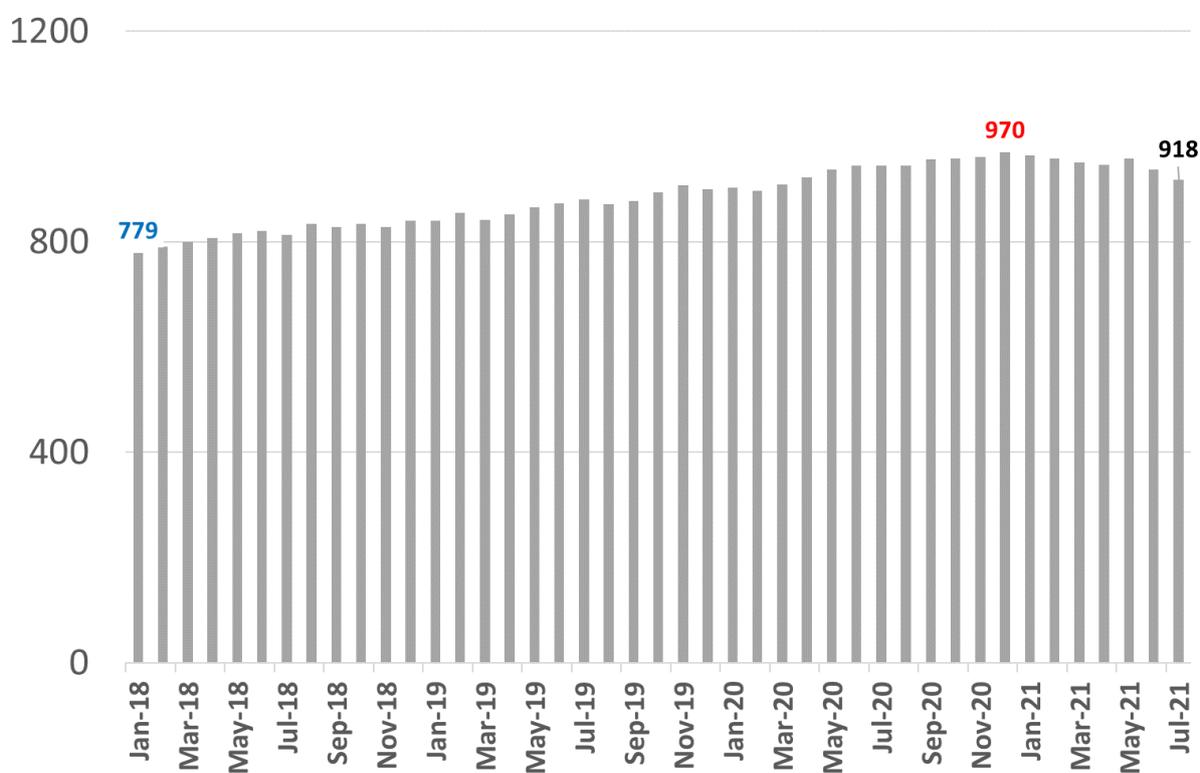


Figure 2 – Number of Children in Care



- 10 At the time of writing this report 85% of Social Workers had less than 25 cases and the average social worker caseload is 19.

Practice Framework

- 11 In 2018 we began to implement our Practice Framework, Signs of Safety, which provides a method and suite of tools to give as much responsibility as possible to families and their network for the safety of their children. It is a strength-based approach, balancing what we are worried about against strengths and safety within a family.
- 12 In 2020 we developed a Trauma Informed Care strategy to strengthen our relationship-based approach by ensuring that practitioners and managers are supported to work in a way that acknowledges the trauma and ensures subsequent interventions and care respond to this.

Impact

- 13 We have seen a continued reduction in our re-referral rate which suggests that our practice is achieving more sustainable change with children, young people and families.
- 14 Relationship based practice is the strongest feature in our collaborative evaluation programme and is highlighted in the two quotes below:

“The social worker has worked with her perfectly, they have worked together and done everything they can ... they talk about everything and they have open discussions. She says she has felt involved in agreeing the plan and everything has gone well since the initial conference.”

“They are lovely, has followed up on any issues and ensures they are involved with meetings. Mother feels as though they take everything which they say into account and are truthful about concerns. Mother said she feels comfortable to say if something is going wrong now, can ring up and ask anything.”

- 15 Our complaints have continued to be at a much lower level than pre-covid and our compliments have begun to increase over the same period. Two are highlighted below:

“We want to sincerely thank you for your support, professionalism and commitment to supporting us as a family through the most challenging times. You have always remained so composed and guided us through the most difficult process and remained vigilant and impartial to respond to the needs of our children. As a social worker you have renewed our trust in services with your professional conduct, thorough assessments and responses to matters that have arisen always

*keeping us informed and the children at the heart of it.” **Parent to CLS FF***

*“Thank you for all your time and effort you have put into me for 6 years. It’s been a pleasure to work with you and have some good laughs 😊 I hope all is well in the future for you. I’ll see you for family time with Take care of yourself and stay safe. Goodbye it’s going to be hard to see you leave me after 6 years, but thank you once again.” **Young Person to CLA 1***

Conclusion

16 The report provides evidence of a strong workforce strategy that has included significant investment in frontline staff and is having a positive impact on our vacancy rate and reducing our reliance on agency staff. The impact on social work caseloads is evident, although continues to be challenging in the context of increasing demand. Both these factors combine with our implementation of Signs of Safety and a Trauma Informed approach to progress our ambition to embed high quality relationship based social work practice.

17 Our most recent Ofsted Inspection in 2021 provides further evidence of the impact that we are having:

*“Social workers are positive about working for Durham. They report good management support and supervision which enables them to discuss issues and make appropriate decisions for children. **A strong workforce development strategy has ensured workforce stability. This is helping workers to consistently support children and they have developed positive and informed relationships.**”*

Background Papers

None

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Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

Implementation of the Relationship Based Practice Framework will ensure consistency of practice in carrying out the Council's statutory functions under the Children Act 1989 to support children in need and to carry out safeguarding investigations and where necessary, issue care proceedings to ensure that children are protected from harm.

Finance

None

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

None.

Climate Change

None.

Human Rights

None.

Crime and Disorder

None.

Staffing

None.

Accommodation

None.

Risk

None.

Procurement

None.