

Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee

11 July 2024

Quarter Four, 2023/24 Performance Management Report



Report of John Hewitt, Chief Executive

Electoral division(s) affected:

Countywide.

Purpose of the Report

- 1 To share information about our performance with members, senior managers, employees and the public.
- 2 The report tracks our progress towards achieving the strategic ambitions and objectives set out in our 2023-27 council plan. It contains the most recent performance data available on 31 March. Contextual information relates to activity and events taking place in the fourth quarter of the 2023/24 financial year (January to March). It provides insights into what is going well and the issues we are addressing.

Executive Summary

- 3 We are a key player within the County Durham Together Partnership and are working with our partners to deliver the [County Durham Vision 2035](#). This vision sets out what we want the county to look like over the next decade and beyond. The overall vision is for:
a place where there are more and better jobs, people live long, and independent lives and our communities are well connected and supportive.
- 4 Our [Council Plan](#) sets out how we will contribute to achieving this vision, while continuing to effectively deliver our day-to-day services.
- 5 We refresh our Council Plan every year. Council has now approved the plan for the forthcoming four years ([Council Plan 2024-28](#)). We will commence reporting performance against our ambitions, objectives and priorities for this plan from 1 April.
- 6 We continue to be a 'well-functioning council' in relation to performance. We operate to the characteristics set out in guidance from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC)¹. And we are continuing to

¹ [Best Value standards and intervention](#)

develop the following through our performance management processes and the wider Corporate Business Intelligence Review:

- (a) A council-wide approach to continuous improvement, with frequent monitoring, performance reporting and updating of the corporate and improvement plans;
- (b) A Council Plan that is evidence based, current, realistic and enables the whole organisation's performance to be measured and held to account;
- (c) Clear and effective mechanisms for scrutinising performance across all service areas. We regularly report our performance to the public to ensure citizens are aware of the quality of services being delivered.

7 The government has established an Office for Local Government (Oflog). Oflog aims to increase understanding about the performance of local authorities, warn when authorities are at risk of serious failure, and support local government to improve itself.

8 Oflog is bringing together existing data in an informative way through the [Local Authority Data Explorer](#). Their suite of metrics is being continually expanded and will eventually cover all local government responsibilities. The next tranche of data will be added later in the year. We will also add the new metrics to our performance framework and include in our reporting process.

Context

9 We are a large organisation providing a broad range of services. Our operating environment can at times be challenging, influenced by various interconnected factors including inflationary and demand pressures, demographic shifts and the changing needs of our residents, economic uncertainties, and the ongoing impacts of global events.

- (a) We are showing strong economic performance in the county with a range of measures such as the employment rate and unemployment being favourable compared to previous years. Cultural events and venues are well attended with local businesses enjoying their economic impact. A current challenge for the council is transitioning from European funding to national schemes such as the UK Shared Prosperity Fund for employment initiatives;
- (b) Key measures around waste collection and disposal show that we are diverting a smaller proportion of waste to landfill, and contamination of our household recycling continues to come down. It is anticipated that significant national changes to domestic waste collections will improve recycling levels across the country and bring County Durham into line with national recycling rates. Bus patronage for our park and ride scheme is increasing and public bus services have been impacted by industrial action. Work is going on at national, regional and local levels to improve bus services;

- (c) Although statutory demand for children's social care remains relatively low, children and young people receiving intensive support (children on a Child Protection Plan and taken into our care) remains relatively high. We have experienced a substantial increase in requests for education, health and care plans for children with special educational needs and disabilities since 2019 leading to backlogs for educational psychologist advice. Since 1 January 2024, 4% applications have been processed within the government's 20-week timescale. This remains a concern. Care Acts assessment timeliness for adult social care clients is improving and remains an area of strong focus for us. Homelessness outcomes are generally improving, although we continue to see an increase in people presenting as already homeless. Overall, our leisure centres are performing well and our leisure transformation programme is having a positive impact, although visits remain below target and are still recovering following the pandemic;
- (d) The overall crime rate in County Durham has fallen and compares favourably with many council areas in the region. Domestic abuse incidents reported to the police remained static, however, the number of victims referred to our support services increased by 15%. Fly-tipping reports to the council remain at an all-time low due to the proactive approach. The number of eligible private sector rented properties which are fully licensed or where legal proceedings have been instigated under the selective licensing scheme is now at 48%. Timeliness of repairing all categories of highway defects are better than or near target. Serious casualties from road traffic accidents have increased. We continue to support a reduction in road traffic casualties through road improvements and campaigns;
- (e) Our customer services team is answering a greater proportion of calls within three minutes. Our collection rates remain consistent with previous years. And we are processing housing benefit and council tax reduction requests more quickly (both new claims and changes in circumstances). Satisfaction with our overall service delivery remains high. Our sickness absence rate is 0.33 days per full time equivalent lower than two years ago. We continue to experience recruitment difficulties for specific roles and are developing HR interventions across the posts affected and monitoring the situation.

Recommendation

10 Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee is recommended to:

- (a) note the overall position and direction of travel in relation to quarter four performance (January to March), and the actions being taken to address areas of challenge.

Background papers

- County Durham Vision (County Council, 23 October 2019)
<https://democracy.durham.gov.uk/documents/s115064/Draft%20Durham%20Vision%20v10.0.pdf>

Other useful documents

- Council Plan 2023 to 2027 (current plan)
<https://www.durham.gov.uk/media/34954/Durham-County-Council-Plan-2023-2027/pdf/CouncilPlan2023-2027.pdf?m=638221688616370000>
- Quarter Three, 2023/24 Performance Management Report
<https://democracy.durham.gov.uk/documents/s186162/Q3%202023-24%20Corporate%20Performance%20Report.pdf>
- Quarter Two, 2023/24 Performance Management Report
<https://democracy.durham.gov.uk/documents/s183015/Q2%202023-24%20Corporate%20Performance%20Report.pdf>
- Quarter One, 2023/24 Performance Management Report
<https://democracy.durham.gov.uk/documents/s178933/Q1%202023-24%20Corporate%20Performance%20Report%20-%20Cabinet%2013.09.23.pdf>
- Quarter Four, 2022/23 Performance Management Report
<https://democracy.durham.gov.uk/documents/s174900/Item%204%20Q4%202022-23%202%201.pdf>
- Quarter Three, 2022/23 Performance Management Report
<https://democracy.durham.gov.uk/documents/s166398/Corporate%20Performance%20Report%20Q2%202022-23%20v2.1.pdf>

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Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

Not applicable.

Finance

Latest performance information is being used to inform corporate, service and financial planning.

Consultation

Not applicable.

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

Equality measures are monitored as part of the performance monitoring process.

Climate Change

We have declared a climate change emergency and consider the implications of climate change in our reports and decision-making.

Human Rights

Not applicable.

Crime and Disorder

A number of performance indicators and key actions relating to crime and disorder are continually monitored in partnership with the Safe Durham Partnership and its sub-groups.

Staffing

Performance against a number of relevant corporate health indicators has been included to monitor staffing issues.

Accommodation

Not applicable.

Risk

Reporting of significant risks and their interaction with performance is integrated into the quarterly performance management report.

Procurement

Not applicable.



Corporate Performance Report

Quarter Four, 2023/24



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Executive Summary

- 1 This report shows how we are performing against the priorities set out in our Council Plan 2023-27.
- 2 We are reporting performance on an exception basis with key messages structured around the five thematic areas of, our economy, our environment, our people, our communities, and our council.
- 3 We are reporting the most recent performance available as at 31 March. Contextual information relates to activity and events taking place in the fourth quarter of the 2023/24 financial year (January to March).

Our people

- 4 This priority aims to help our residents live long and independent lives and remain in good health for as long as possible. We will protect and improve health by tackling the leading causes of illness and early death, inequalities, and the challenges around mental health. We will ensure a sustainable high-quality care market and invest in a multi-million-pound programme to transform our leisure centre venues.

Going Well

- 5 Demand for children's social care support remains consistent and re-referral rates are low compared to comparators. The new Early Help model is generating more partner-led Early Help assessments strengthening County Durham's system-wide capacity to deliver support to families in need. A wide-ranging programme of activity and support is being delivered in Family Hubs, and other venues with partners.
- 6 School attendance is steadily improving following an increase in absence nationally, regionally, and locally following the pandemic. We are working closely with partners to develop a new Partnership Protocol - "Working Together to Support School Attendance."

Issues we are addressing

- 7 Requests for new education, health, and care plans (EHCPs) increased substantially between 2019 and 2022, and continued at a very high level in 2023, impacting on the 20-week timeliness performance. A comprehensive action plan is in place driving improvements to the EHCP assessment process and educational psychologist (EP) capacity, which have begun to have an impact on the system. Although, during quarter four, 2% of EHCPs were completed within 20 weeks. We expect the waiting times and waiting list for EP advice to steadily reduce and overall timeliness to steadily improve throughout the next financial year. At the time of writing, 5% of EHCPs were finalised within 20 weeks in April.
- 8 Although statutory demand for children's social care remains low, children and young people receiving intensive support (children on a Child Protection Plan and taken into our care) remains relatively high. This is indicative of ongoing high levels of complexity and a change in the composition of demand. However, both decreased in quarter four, and continue to be closely monitored. The service is reviewing these trends as part of impacts of the Early Help model and implementing the findings of the national Care Review.

- 9 As part of our Placement Sufficiency strategy, we are expanding our provision of children's homes. We are strengthening our existing provision with more management capacity and a "grow your own" approach to recruit new workers with no experience of residential care to tackle sector shortages. In 2023 we opened a new home and purchased two new buildings, which we will open as homes during 2024. Furthermore, we secured some ongoing capital investment to ensure all our homes continue to be updated, are homely, and fit for purpose.
- 10 The number of children and young people Electively Home Educated increased in quarter four but is likely to be partly a seasonal trend. Latest benchmarking for the autumn term for this academic year places the county in-line with national rates. The service continues to have strong multi-agency Education at Home operational and strategic groups that are well established, meet half termly with wide service representation including health, SEND and inclusion, education and skills, and wider children's services colleagues to consider suitable education and safeguarding of children.

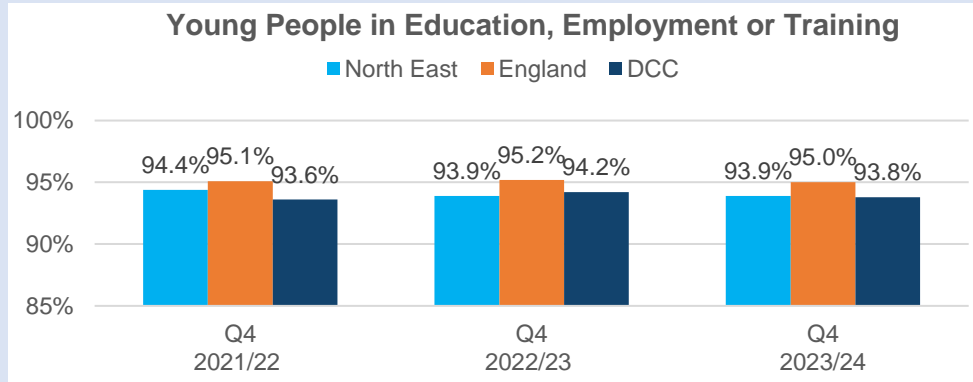
Risk Management

- 11 The government's statutory guidance for best value authorities sets out the characteristics of a well-functioning authority. This details the arrangements that councils should have in place for robust governance and scrutiny including how risk awareness and management should inform decision making. The latest [Strategic Risk Management Progress Report](#) provides an insight into the work carried out by the Corporate Risk Management Group between October and December 2023.

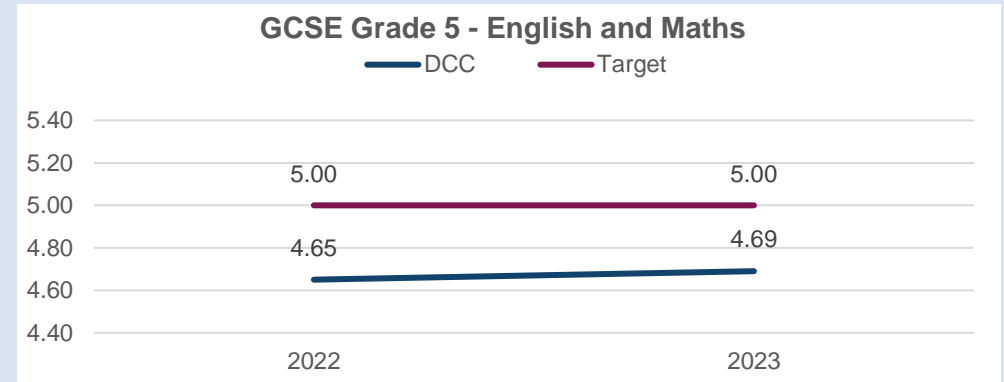
Education Dashboard

(annual data - provisional)

Education, employment or training



GCSE Grade 5 - English and Maths



Due to this metric not being an official statistic published by the DfE, national and regional benchmarking is not available.

Education

- 12 The proportion of County Durham young people aged 16-17 in Education, Employment and Training is similar to previous years (93.8% in quarter four 2023/24 compared to 94.2% the previous year). We remain slightly below target which is to exceed England (95%) and regional (93.9%) averages.
- 13 2023 average attainment in GCSE English and maths showed a marginal improvement to grade 4.69 from 4.65 in 2022. The target is to reach an average grade of 5 by 2030.
- 14 We continue to work in partnership with schools, academies and trusts ensuring that County Durham young people have access to high quality teaching and learning. We also support parents and carers in driving improved school engagement for all pupil groups which contributes to better attainment outcomes for pupils in County Durham.
- 15 Children young people service support local attainment outcomes through their ongoing Education Review which aims to deliver a sustainable school system in County Durham including addressing the current financial and projected budgetary position, sufficiency of school places, quality and stability of leadership, current condition of buildings and accessibility and suitability of schools and settings to provide outstanding learning. The Education Review has the following objectives:
 - *Economy*: ensuring Children and young people have the best possible outcomes.
 - *Environment*: maintaining and strengthening schools' capacity to meet community needs.
 - *People*: ensuring that all children access a good or better education and every child having the option of attending a local school.
 - *Communities*: exploring new education partnerships which maintain high quality provision in every locality.
 - *Council*: develop, evolve, and integrate a service delivery model to secure future opportunities.

Our People

Priority Aims:

County Durham is a place where people will enjoy fulfilling, long and independent lives. We aim to,

- ensure children and young people will enjoy the best start in life, good health, and emotional wellbeing.
- ensure children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities will achieve the best possible outcomes.
- ensure all children and young people will have a safe childhood.
- promote positive behaviours.
- better integrate health and social care services.
- tackle the stigma and discrimination of poor mental health and build resilient communities.
- people will be supported to live independently for as long as possible by delivering more home to meet the needs of older and disabled people.
- support people whose circumstances make them vulnerable and protect adults with care and support needs from harm.
- protect and improve the health of the local population, tackling leading causes of illness and death.

National, Regional and Local Picture

Children's Social Care

- 16 [Fighting health inequalities through research excellence and collaboration](#) was published in April 2024 by Health Equity North and highlights higher rates of children in care in the North than the South of England. Key headlines include:
- (a) The North East continues to record the highest overall care rates.
 - (b) The 27% increase in the number of children's homes between 2020 and 2023 disproportionately affected the North of England. There are 1,176 children's homes in the North of England, and just 1,704 in the rest of England.
 - (c) The North accounts for 28% of the child population, but 36% of the children in care.
 - (d) In England, in 2015, children in the most deprived 10% of neighbourhoods were over ten times more likely to be in care than children in the least deprived 10%. This corroborates analysis previously undertaken on children in care in Durham.
- 17 A [report](#) by Action for Children recommends introducing a single, cohesive code for children exploited into criminal activity. This would include a new offence of child sexual exploitation. It also states the need for coordinated policy and practice at both a local and national level, and more research into what works to learn from best practice.

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

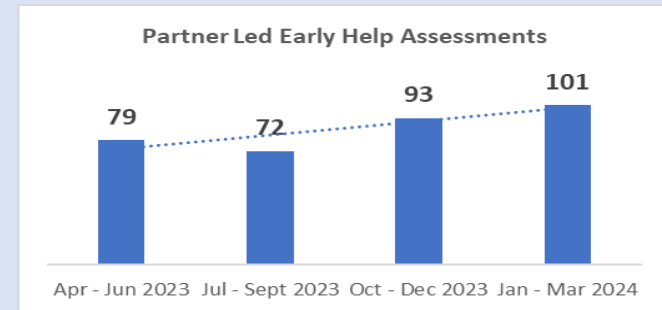
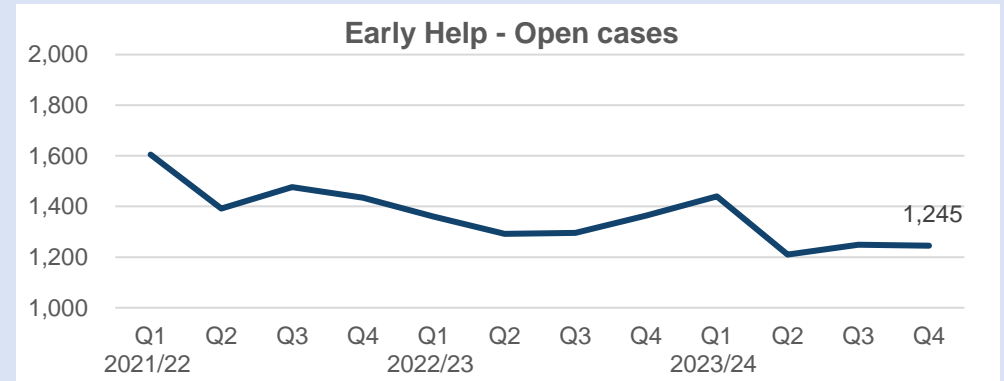
- 18 An annual investment of £850 million is going to councils to create new places for young people with SEND and in Alternative Provision in mainstream and special schools, and to improve the accessibility of existing buildings. However, it is felt that this will not be enough to address pressures in the system.
- 19 This will provide specialist support for children with autism, learning difficulties, mobility difficulties and more to meet their extra needs, including extra encouragement in their learning, help communicating with other children and support with physical or personal care difficulties, such as using the toilet or getting around the school safely.

Children's Social Care Dashboard: Early Help and Referrals

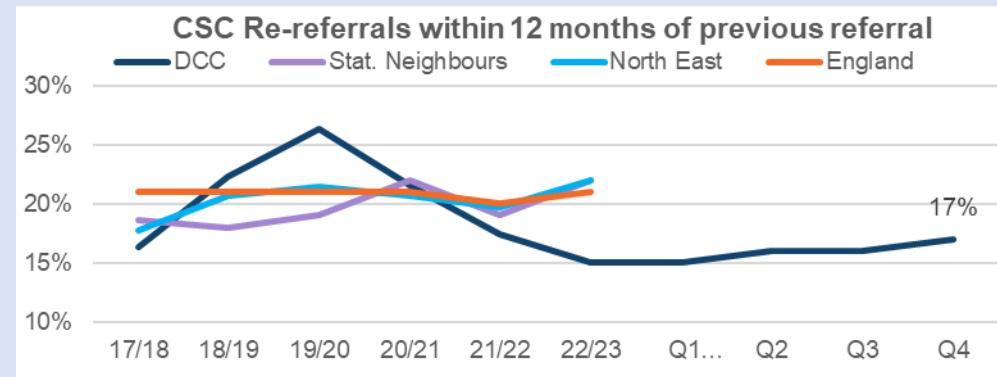
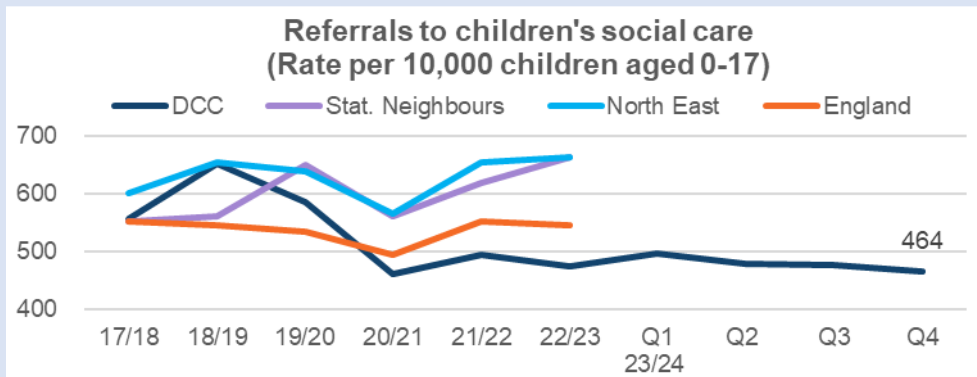
(12 months ending 31 March 2024 / at 31 March 2024)

Early Help

- Demand reduced post-Covid, partly due to a change in operating model with more partner led early help conversations.
- 15 Family Hubs were launched in April 2023. The hubs provide 'one stop shop' access to family support (from conception to age 19, or 25 years for children with SEND). Between September 2023 - March 2024, 3,698 people registered (1,503 families), including 529 aged 0-6 months.
- Feedback from those working with the service remains positive: 95% of parent/carers, and 94% of young people are happy or very happy with the support received. And 97% of parents/carers and 97% of young people felt services worked well together to meet the needs of the family.
- Since October 2022, 3,062 assessment forms have been submitted through the Early Help Assessment Portal, with 18% (559) from partners who are leading on assessments. The chart shows an upward trend in partner led assessments in 2023/24 (345 in total), three quarters of which are from education (43%) and health (32%) organisations.

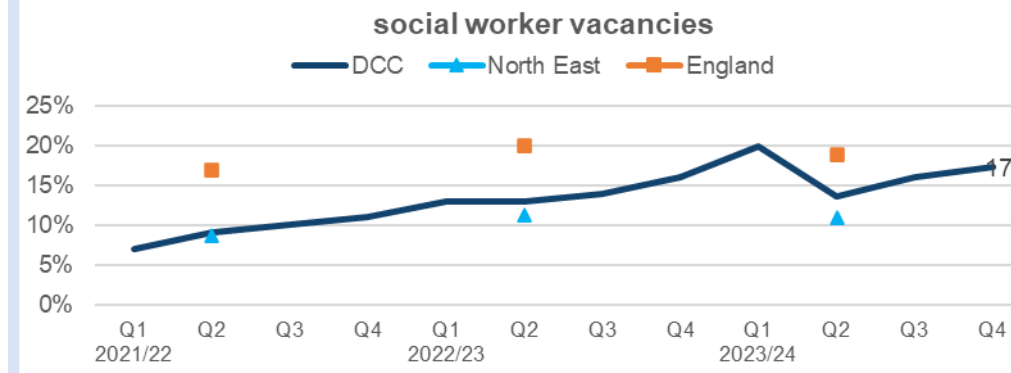
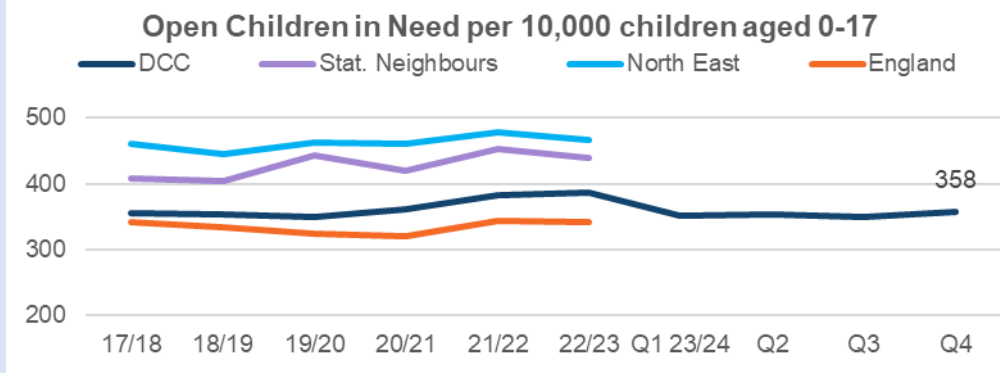
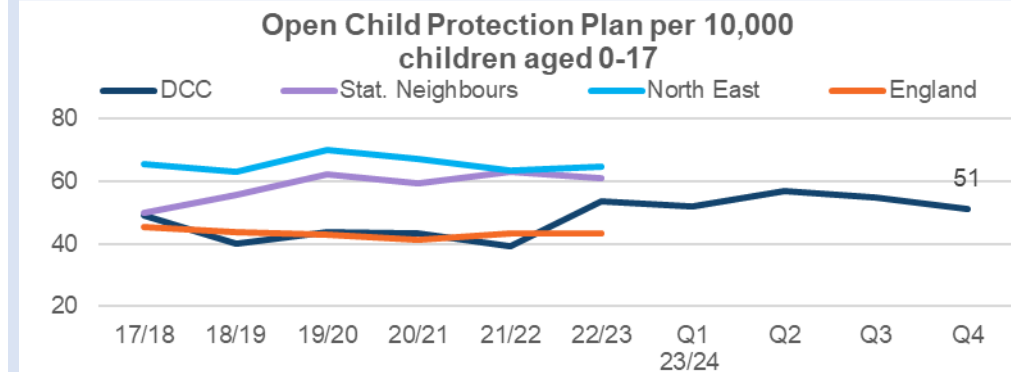
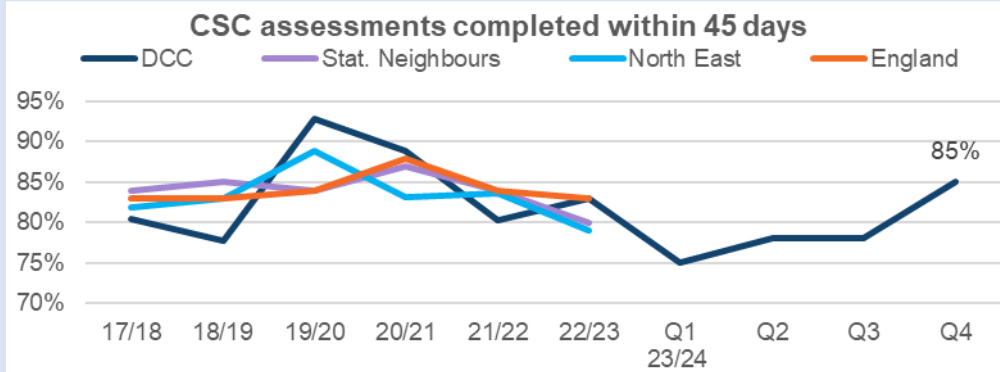


Referrals



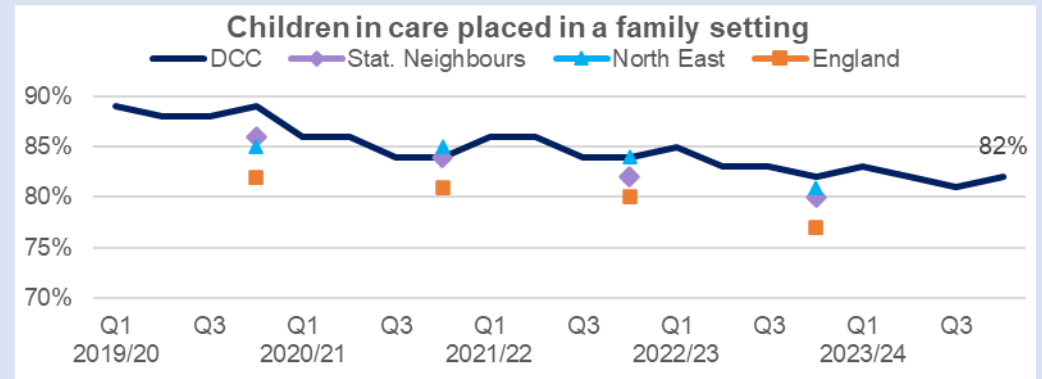
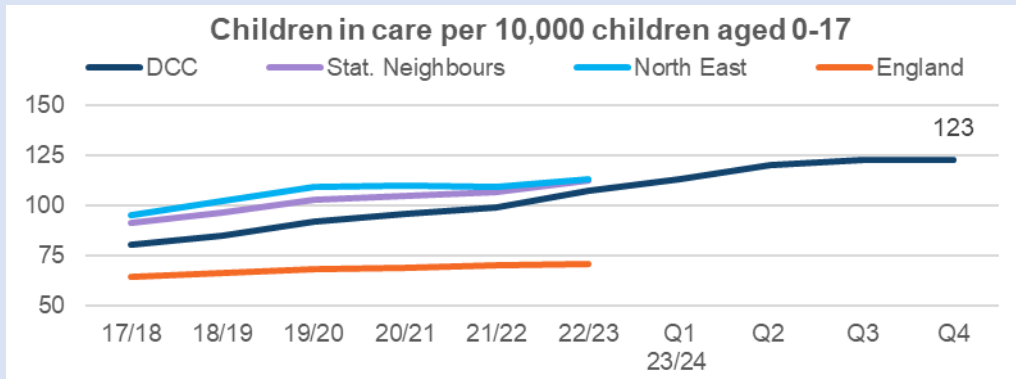
Children's Social Care Dashboard: assessments, protection plans, in need, social worker vacancies

(12 months ending 31 March 2024 / at 31 March 2024)

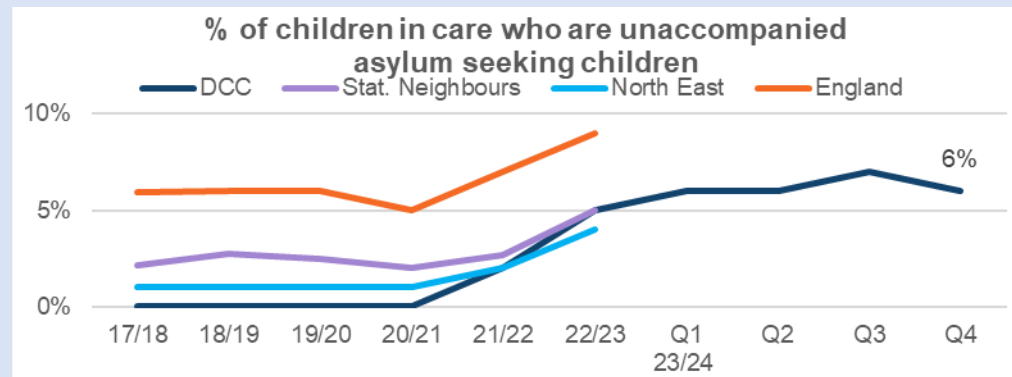


Children's Social Care Dashboard: in care, unaccompanied asylum seeking children

(12 months ending 31 March 2024/ at 31 March 2024)



Slight increase in the proportion placed in a family setting linked to increases in numbers placed in foster care and children in care starting to plateau



Children's Social Care and Early Help

- 20 Overall demand for early help and statutory support remains consistent with previous reports. The recent reductions in cases open to Early Help should be seen within the context of a transformed Early Help model in County Durham.
- 21 The service has worked with key partners, children, young people, parents, and carers to develop a new Early Help Assessment for partners based on Durham's Signs of Safety practice model, this was launched in October 2022. The purpose being to provide a richer picture of early help offered and the impact on children, young people, and families across County Durham.
- 22 There are a number of partners who are using the new assessment where a Team Around the Family arrangement is in place. The Prevention and Early Help Partnership continue to work with partners who are not engaging in this process to understand barriers and work with them on a solution focussed approach. This will then provide a much more accurate picture of the early help support to families delivered across the system.
- 23 Locality Early Help Conversations are well established within County Durham. When a child's needs cannot be met by universal services alone, quality conversations strengthen and improve decision making and joint working to provide the right help at the right time for families. These conversations often identify that family's needs can be met without a formal referral into the LA Early Help Service (OPS) and so the collective resource from across the system is utilised. The establishment of the Family Hub and Start for Life Offer provides families with the support they need that is much more accessible.
- 24 A wide-ranging programme of activity and support is being delivered in Family Hubs, and at other venues, with partners. Examples of delivery include:

Emotional Wellbeing and Behaviour Programme (EWB)

- The EWB programme has continued, with children taking part in courses including Chill Kids, Teen Zone, Safer Choices, and Staying Cool Teen. Data is reported on a termly basis, and so data from the spring term will be provided in 2024/25.

Parenting Programmes

- Triple P: Teen Steppingstones (SEND), Fear-Less (school avoidance), Incredible Years Baby, Toddler and Pre School, and Empowering Parents, Empowering Communities, which is a parent-led suite of programmes.
- All parenting programme data are reported on a termly basis, and so data from the spring term will be provided in 2024/25.

Universal Programmes

- Between January and March 2024, across all Family Hubs, 320 Baby and Me (for under-1s) / Toddler and Me (for 1-2-years-old) sessions were available for families. These were attended by 954 individuals with a combined attendance of 3,538 (3.7 sessions each on average).

- 25 The target of 1,230 families on our Stronger Families Programme attaining significant and sustained outcomes has been exceeded. 122 families were claimed in quarter four, bringing the total for 2023/24 to 1,264 families (103% of target). Since the start of the programme in 2015, 7,904 families have been supported.

- 26 The 'Enhanced Parenting Support Pathway' offers families a seamless support pathway from the antenatal period until a child is 2½ years old, delivered by Early Help Practitioners within the One Point Service alongside Health Visitors. The aim is to provide additional help and support to families at risk of poor outcomes by providing access to services in Family Hubs, including learning and development, and parenting support and advice. In 2023/24, One Point has worked with the families of 110 children.
- 27 Between December 2023 and March 2024, One Point worked with the families of 35 children following a request for pre-birth Family Hub support. Early Help Practitioners from Family Hub teams working alongside the family Social Worker, provide intensive family support flexible to the needs and strengths of the parent/(s) during the ante-natal and early post-natal period to promote safe and effective parenting.
- 28 The One Point Service manages quality systems and collects feedback to learn and improve services for its users. This includes learning reviews, thematic audits, and service user feedback. Below are some examples of recent comments recorded:
- Respondent comment from quarter three parent/carer survey:
"Everything has helped me a lot after what myself and the children have been through the help has made me feel more positive for our future and less like a failure all the time very grateful thank you for the help xx and xx are both amazing."
 - Respondent comment from quarter three young person satisfaction survey:
"Having the support I need made me feel better it encourage me to go to school more often and I know If I need the help I know who I needed to go to."
- 29 Improved practice across statutory children's social care has led to a consistently low re-referral rate. The rate at quarter four (17%) is slightly higher than quarter three (16%), however it is still better than latest benchmarks. This means fewer children and their families require further support from safeguarding services following support.
- 30 Although statutory demand remains low, children and young people receiving intensive support (children on a Child Protection Plan and taken into our care) remains relatively high. This is indicative of ongoing high levels of complexity and a change in the composition of demand. However, both have decreased through quarter four and will continue to be closely monitored.
- 31 Overall numbers of children in care are similar to the end of quarter three. Levels had continued to increase in January and February but reduced in March 2024 to 1,213. The North East has the highest level in England and County Durham is slightly worse than the North East. Previously, underlying growth in the number of children in care was accelerating further due to an increased volume of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) as part of national relocation plans. Six percent of children in care are UASC, which has reduced from quarter three, but increased compared to 5% at the end of 2022/23 and just 2% at the end of 2021/22.
- 32 We currently have 12 Children's Homes across the county offering residential care to children and young people. These homes are regularly inspected by Ofsted with one home rated outstanding, seven rated as good and a further three requiring improvement. One further home is not rated at present as it has not been inspected.

- 33 These homes are a key element of our Placement Sufficiency programme and provide support and care for young people who cannot live at home, or short respite breaks when children and young people with disabilities need to have a little time away from their family or carer. There have been many developments across the service, including strengthening the existing management teams, with Deputy managers in post and also a “grow your own” approach to recruit new workers with no experience of residential care. During 2023 we opened a new home and purchased two new buildings which we will open as homes during 2024. Furthermore, we have secured some ongoing capital investment to ensure all our homes continue to be updated, are homely and fit for purpose.
- 34 A number of new children’s homes are being developed to ensure that as many children as possible live within County Durham and are able to maintain links with their schools, friends, families and hobbies. The new homes are different sizes (ranging from one to four places) so that children and young people with more complex needs can be cared for. An Edge of Care home is also being planned; this will offer short breaks and wider support to young people and their families to help them to remain living at home.
- 35 During 2023, we have been addressing the capacity issues arising from high caseloads which have been impacting the timeliness of statutory children’s social care assessments. Quarter four’s performance (85%) is better than national and regional benchmarks and is an improvement against quarter three (78%).
- 36 We frequently need to readvertise social work posts due to a lack of suitable applicants. However, we have continued to release a number of recruitment campaigns to try and address these challenges, including increased social media promotion supported by strong recruitment web pages. In some cases, persistence and a different approach can help to resolve long standing recruitment challenges, our Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) team has been fully staffed this quarter having experienced recruitment challenges for more than two years.
- 37 It remains very difficult to recruit experienced social workers. In anticipation of new statutory guidance which could make it less attractive for social workers to remain on agency contracts, we are encouraging social workers with us on agency contracts to consider permanent employment and aiming to raise awareness of the council as a potential employer for agency workers working elsewhere.
- 38 The recruitment of newly qualified social workers (NQSWs) is the most effective way to maintain or increase our social work workforce. Our Social Work Academy was created in 2016 to allow us to support a greater number of NQSWs through their first year in practice. Our Academy offer remains strong and has recently been extended to provide additional support to social workers in their second year of practice, and there are plans to extend that support into the third year of practice, dependent on guidance from the Department for Education on the anticipated Early Career Framework. We are currently anticipating 23 NQSWs starting with us from summer 2024, but recruitment is ongoing so this could improve.
- 39 To enable us to recruit an increased number of NQSWs we have enhanced our approach to the recruitment of students with us on placement, and continue to invest in supporting social work qualification including:
- supporting the social work apprenticeship scheme, we currently have 10 apprentices who are being supported to qualify while in their previous posts who

are expected to graduate between 2024 and 2027, and 18 social work trainees who are a mix of internal and external recruits expected to qualify in 2027.

- supporting the next cohort of Step Up to Social Work scheme, six participants started the programme in January 2024 and are expected to qualify in spring 2025.
- partnering with Frontline, we expect to support 10 participants on the programme from autumn 2024, who should qualify and join us as NQSWs in autumn 2025.
- working within our regional partnerships to increase social work training capacity. The Department for Education announced in April 2024 that no further funding will be made available for teaching partnerships, so the North East Social Work Alliance is working on proposals for progressing this work in the future.

40 The recruitment and retention of social workers remain a priority for the service and a range of changes to pay, career development, progression and non-pay benefits have been implemented over the last year to retain staff as well as ongoing staff wellbeing support. Wellbeing support for social workers takes a range of forms including a wellbeing portal, which provides information for employees at all levels on a range of issues including physical activity, nutrition, remote working, mental health and emotional wellbeing, bereavement, domestic abuse, and substance misuse to specialist workshops on wellbeing and self-care.

41 In addition, specialist support offers employees or teams who have been involved in a traumatic event to benefit from de-brief sessions, reflection sessions or a commissioned specialist offer designed to promote reflection and healing. Flexible working can have a positive impact on employee engagement and wellbeing, supporting practitioners to better balance their work and home life, and support practitioners with caring responsibilities to stay in, or return to, the workforce. Following a successful pilot, the service is consulting on proposals to further encourage flexible working across social work teams.

Education Dashboard

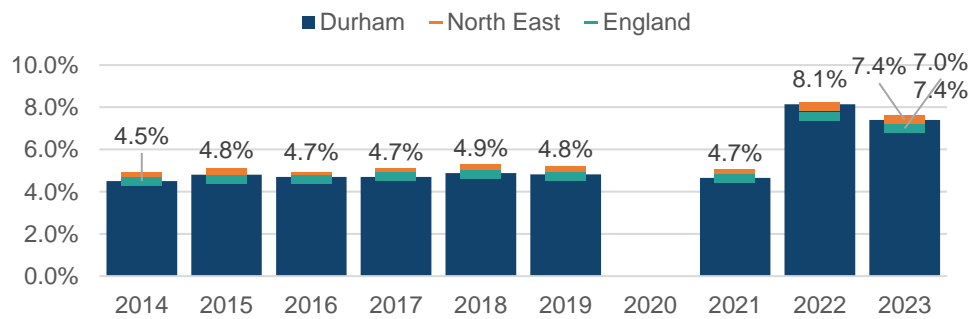
(academic year 2022/23 / as at 31 March 2024)

Attendance

School Attendance improved in the autumn term of the 2023/24 academic year but remains worse than pre-pandemic levels.

Unauthorised absence makes up one-third of all absences in the 2023/24 academic year.

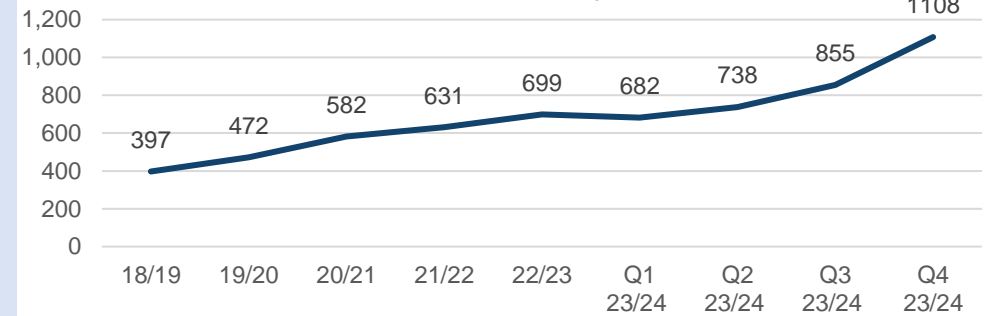
Total Absence Rates - Authorised and Unauthorised



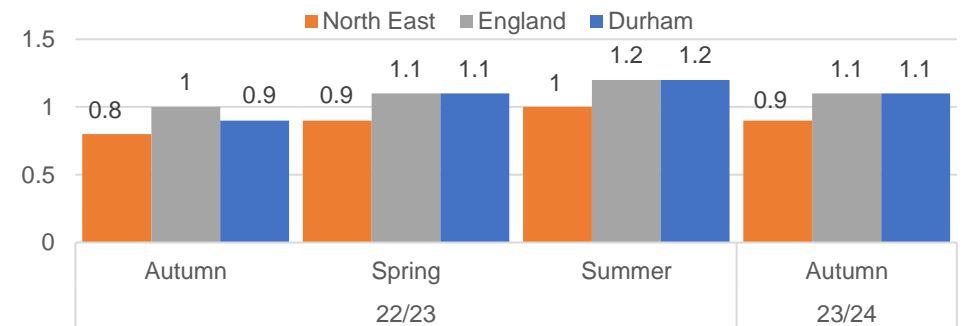
Elective Home Education (EHE)

Annual data are based on end of academic years and accounts for year 11 leavers and the reason for a dip in quarter one data. This also accounts for Q4 being the peak.

Children Who are Electively Home Educated



Rate of EHE Children



Attendance

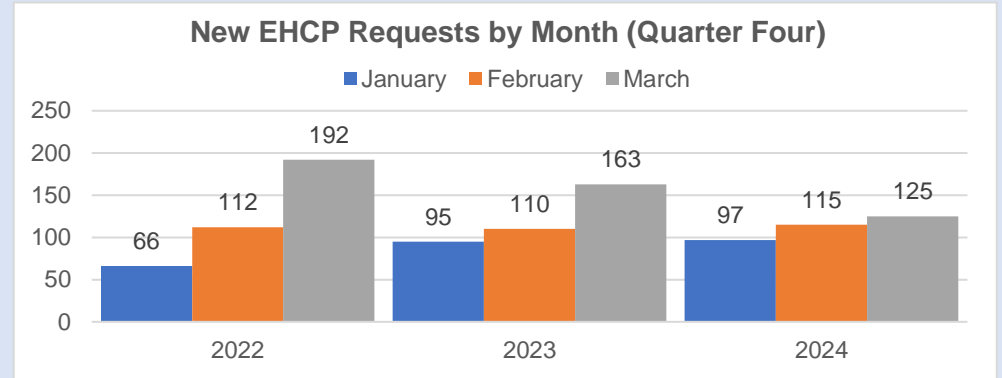
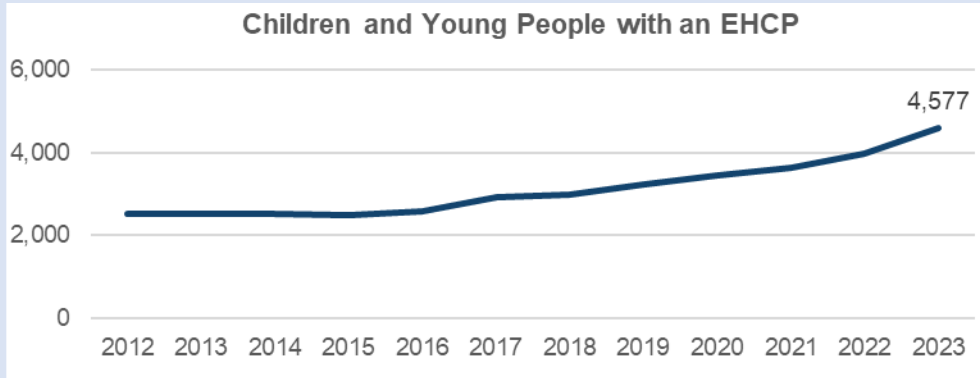
- 42 National data on attendance rates was released in quarter four. Absence rates reduced in County Durham from 8.1% in 2021/22 to 7.4% in 2022/23. Similarly national and regional comparators reduced over that time have falling from 7.8% and 7.9% to 7% and 7.4% respectively. Latest data shows that autumn term 2023/24 attendance has improved further with overall absence at 7%.
- 43 The barriers to accessing education are wide and complex and are often specific to individual pupils and families. These barriers were exacerbated by the pandemic and school attendance rates nationally, regionally and locally have reduced.
- 44 High attendance levels are essential for pupils to get the most out of their school experience, including their attainment, wellbeing, and wider life chances. The pupils with the highest attainment at the end of key stage 2 and key stage 4 have higher rates of attendance compared to those with the lowest attainment.
- 45 The service has a strategic approach to improving attendance delivered through the School Attendance Team. This team works with all schools to reduce or remove barriers to attendance and provide opportunities for schools to share support and best practice. Specifically, this includes holding regular conversation with schools offering support to identify, discuss and signpost to services for pupils who are, or who are at risk of becoming, persistently absent from school.
- 46 We are working closely with partners to develop a new Partnership Protocol - "Working Together to Support School Attendance."

Elective Home Education (EHE)

- 47 We continue to have strong multi-agency Education at Home operational and strategic groups that are well established, meet half termly with wide service representation including health, SEND and inclusion, education and skills, wider children's services colleagues to consider suitable education and safeguarding of children.
- 48 Spring is our highest point in the year for EHE numbers – in two months the Year 11 cohort will move on, and this Year 11 group is large at 317 currently – in June, our numbers will therefore decrease to around 800 again. Our proportion of EHE per pupil population remains low and fluctuates between 0.8% and 1.1% over the academic year and is now around 1.2% to spring – although the numbers do increase year on year mirroring national trends.
- 49 We have had a high number of families moving into the county at the end of the autumn term and into the spring who have decided to home educate which appears to have also impacted on number. Again, the percentage will likely come down to around 0.9% population in June.

SEND Dashboard

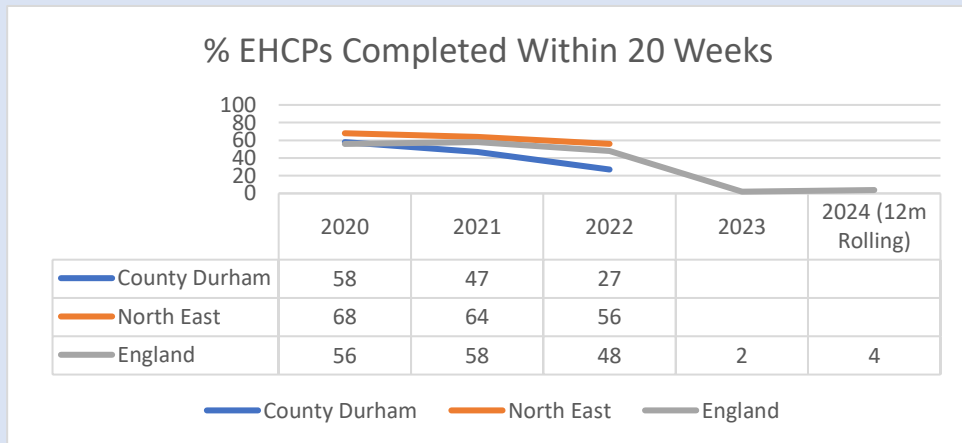
(12 months rolling / annual data)



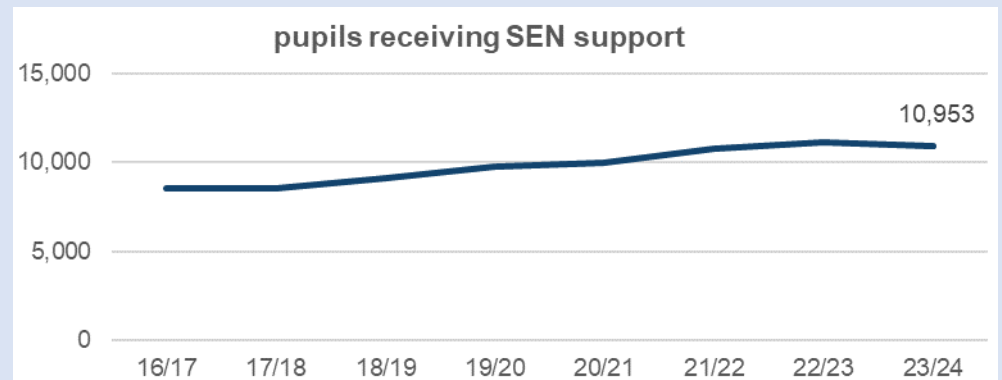
EHCPs completed in 20 weeks

Higher demand alongside a national shortage of educational psychologists (EP) and the time it takes to commission and agree suitable provision has meant no new EHCPs were fully completed and agreed within the expected 20-week timescale during the quarter.

Work continues to improve this and latest data, albeit provisional shows EHCP timeliness at 6% for April and 7% for May to date. This equates to 4% since 1 January 2024.



Special Educational Need Support



Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs)

- 50 Requests for new EHCPs increased substantially between 2019 and 2022 and continue at a very high level in 2023/24. The assessment process is complex with a number of inputs required from schools, social care and health services in line with the statutory guidance. In 2019 we received an average of 50 requests per month and this has increased to 82.
- 51 Latest data for quarter four show that EHCP requests have fallen off when comparing with the same period from previous years. Between January and March 2024, we received 337 requests for EHCPs, compared to 370 last year and 368 the year before that. Quarter four is the busiest time of year for new requests so a fall-off is hopefully indicative of a reprieve.
- 52 In addition to this increase in demand the underlying causes of the timeliness delays are:
- a national shortage of educational psychologists (EP) needed to undertake the required assessment and;
 - the timeliness of education provider responses to consultation and capacity challenges in providing suitable provision.
- 53 Improvements to the EHCP assessment process and EP capacity have begun to impact on the system, although, in quarter four of 2023/24, no EHCPs were completed within 20 weeks. Following their review of capacity and EHCP process the service are implementing a comprehensive action plan which seeks to address these challenges and reduce delay, particularly in relation to the backlog for EP advice.
- 54 Two contracts for extra EP locum support have been fully in place from January 2024 resulting in increased numbers of completed assessments. Recruitment is also underway for two agency workers in the Business Support team to support pressures created by the increased number of draft EHCPs to be issued and consulted on.
- 55 To reduce wider pressures in the SEND casework team created by increased numbers of assessments, three agency workers have been in place from mid-March 2024 with a focus on drafting EHCPs. Furthermore, the service introduced the ability to prioritise cases based on complexity of need, the educational stage in relation to key transitions, and the potential increased risk of harm as a result of delay, ensuring those most in need get support at the earliest opportunity. The revised processes now ensure there are no delays for children and young people identified as a priority.
- 56 These changes are driving improvements in EP throughput reducing unallocated cases within the EP service and the average time taken to allocate, reducing from nine weeks, in autumn of 2023 to two weeks in February 2024. Reducing time to allocate greatly reduces delays to EP advice being finalised and should improve timeliness overall.
- 57 However, overall performance remains unacceptable. Timeliness performance was 1.8% for 2023 and while we know that these pressures are not unique to County Durham, this is likely to be low compared to the majority of local authorities when national comparator information is published in the summer of 2024.
- 58 During 2024, if agencies deliver against their agreed contract volumes, in-house EP capacity is maintained, and demand does not increase further, we expect the waiting times and waiting list for EP advice to steadily reduce and overall timeliness to steadily

improve through the next financial year. However, as EP advice is only part of a complex process it will take time for this to impact on the overall 20-week EHCP target. This area is being regularly reviewed with enhanced operational performance monitoring and at the time of writing, 8% of EHCPs were finalised within 20 weeks in April and 5% for May. This equates to 4% of EHCPs issued with timescales since 1 January 2024.

- 59 A new case management system was introduced in January 2024 which will impact on data quality and reporting over the next few months but will improve process administration and recording in the long-term.
- 60 SEND Inspection preparation continues with partners across health and education. We have developed an assurance programme and multi-agency self-evaluation development informed by learning from other areas being inspected.
- 61 The SEND Local Partnership has recognised the potential impacts on families waiting for services and established a “Waiting Well” group to develop a range of responses to ensure families are supported and informed whilst they wait for specialised services. The group meets every three months, latest progress includes:
- More services are developing clear written policy and guidance for staff in relation to Waiting Well practices.
 - Waiting Well needs are discussed at the first point of contact in more services than previously.
 - More services routinely gather Waiting Well feedback at the end of involvement.
 - More service improvement plans include details of how the workforce is enabled to understand the wider SEND offer.

Data Tables

D	T	C	G	Performance Indicator	Period	Performance	Target	12 months earlier	Benchmark period	DCC	National average	NE average	updated	Oflog
				Household waste re-used, recycled or composted	Oct 22 – Sep 23	36.5%	Tracker	37.7%	April 21 – March 22	38.1%	42.5%	33.5%	Yes	Yes

D = Direction of Travel	T = compared to target	C = compared to England average	G = Gap between our performance and England average
meeting or exceeding the previous year	Meeting or better than target	meeting or better than the England average	The gap is improving
worse than the previous year but is within 2%	worse than but within 2% of target	worse than the England average but within 2%	The gap remains the same
more than 2% worse than the previous year	more than 2% behind target	worse than the England average	The gap is deteriorating

This is the overall performance assessment. Its calculation is dependent upon whether the indicator has an agreed target.

Key Target Indicator	Key Tracker Indicator
targets are set as improvements, can be measured regularly and can be actively influenced by the council and its partners. When setting a target, the D, C and G have already been taken into account.	no targets are set as they are long-term and / or can only be partially influenced by the council and its partners. Therefore, D, T, C and G are used to assess overall performance
better than target	Direction of Travel (D) is meeting or exceeding the previous year AND the gap with England (G) is improving
worse than but within 2% of target	Direction of Travel (D) is worse than the previous year OR the gap with England (G) is deteriorating
more than 2% behind target	Direction of Travel (D) is worse than the previous year AND the gap with England (G) is deteriorating

More detail is available from the Strategy Team at performance@durham.gov.uk

Our Economy: summary data tables

Employability and Skills KPIs

	D	T	C	G	Performance Indicator	Period	Performance	Target	12 months earlier	Benchmark period	DCC	National average	NE average	updated	Oflog
					16-17-year-olds in an apprenticeship	Apr-Jun 2023	7.3%	Tracker	8.5%	Apr-Jun 23	7.3%	4.8%	7%	No	No

Education KPIs

	D	T	C	G	Performance Indicator	Period	Performance	Target	12 months earlier	Benchmark period	DCC	National average	NE average	updated	Oflog
					Uptake of free early education entitlement for 3-4-year-olds	2024	95.4%	Tracker	93.7%	2024	95.4%	93.7%	98.6%	No	No
					Children meeting expected standards in maths and reading at KS2	2024	59%	Tracker	65%	2024	59%	60%	61%	No	No
					Average grade of achievement within GCSE English and Maths to a Grade 5	2021/22	4.69	5 by 2030	new					No	No
					Disadvantaged cohorts meeting basic threshold measures in English and Maths	new			new					No	No
					Young people in education, employment and training	Dec 2023	93.8%	above N / NE	94.2%	Dec 2023	93.8%	95%	93.9%	Yes	No

Our People: summary data tables

Childrens' Social Care KPIs

	D	T	C	G	Performance Indicator	Period	Performance	Target	12 months earlier	Benchmark period	DCC	National average	NE average	updated	Oflog
					Early help cases open	at Mar 2024	1,245	Tracker	1,364					Yes	No
					Children's social care referrals per 10,000 population	at Mar 2024	464	Tracker	437	2022/23	473	545	663	Yes	No
					Children's social care re-referrals	at Mar 2024	17%	Tracker	15%	2022/23	15%	21%	22%	Yes	No
					Children's social care assessments completed within 45 days	at Mar 2024	85%	Tracker	76%	2022/23	83%	83%	79%	Yes	No
					Children in need per 10,000 population	at Mar 2024	358	Tracker	334	2022/23	387	343	467	Yes	No
					Children on a child protection plan per 10,000 population	at Mar 2024	51	Tracker	52	2022/23	54	43	65	Yes	No
					Children looked after per 10,000 population	at Mar 2024	123	Tracker	105	2022/23	107	71	113	Yes	No
					Care leavers aged 16-24	at Mar 2024	466	Tracker	290					Yes	No
					Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children as a percentage of all children in care	at Mar 2024	6%	Tracker	5%	2022/23	5%	9%	4%	Yes	No
					Social worker vacancies	at Feb 2024	17%	Tracker	15.5%	Sep-23	14%	18.9%	10.9%	Yes	No
					Children in care in a family setting	at Mar 2024	82%	Tracker	82%	as at Mar 23	82%	77%	81%	Yes	No
					Families on our Stronger Families Programme attaining significant and sustained outcomes	2023/24	1,264	1,230	581					Yes	No

Education KPIs

	D	T	C	G	Performance Indicator	Period	Performance	Target	12 months earlier	Benchmark period	DCC	National average	NE average	updated	Oflog
					Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage achieving a good level of development	2022/23	66.2%	Tracker	64.5%	2022/23	66.2%	67.2%	66.3%		No
					Pupils attending a school judged 'good or better' by Ofsted	2023/24	84.5%	Tracker	83.1%	2023/24	84.5%	88.1%	87%		No
					Pupils attending a primary school judged 'good or better' by Ofsted	2023/24	94.3%	Tracker	94.3%	2023/24	94.3%	91.6%	94.6%		No
					Pupils attending a secondary school judged 'good or better' by Ofsted	2023/24	70%	Tracker	75.3%	2023/24	70%	83.8%	76.8%		No
					Children who are electively home educated	Jan-Apr 2024	1088	Tracker	699						No
					Children eligible for free school meals	2023/24	32.4%	Tracker	30.6%	2023/24	32.4%	24.8%	14.8%		No
					Take-up on free school meals	2022/23	23%	Tracker	20.6%	2022/23	23%	18.6%	23.8%		No

SEND KPIs

	D	T	C	G	Performance Indicator	Period	Performance	Target	12 months earlier	Benchmark period	DCC	National average	NE average	updated	Oflog
					Children and young people with an EHCP	2023	4,748	Tracker	3,975						No
					New requests for EHCPs	2023	986	Tracker	974						No
					EHCPs completed within 20 weeks	2023	2%	Tracker	27%	2023	2%	48%	56%		No
					Pupils on SEN support	2023/24	10,953	Tracker	11,174						No

Public Health KPIs

	D	T	C	G	Performance Indicator	Period	Performance	Target	12 months earlier	Benchmark period	DCC	National average	NE average	updated	Oflog
					Children aged 4-5 who are a healthy weight <i>Confidence intervals +/-1.2pp</i>	2022/23	73.2%	100%	75.5%	2022/23	73.2%	77.5%	74%	No	No
					Children aged 10-11 who are a healthy weight <i>Confidence intervals +/-1.2pp</i>	2022/23	59.1%	100%	59.2%	2022/23	59.1%	61.9%	58.9%	No	No
					Gap in breastfeeding at 6-8 weeks between County Durham and national average	2022/23	19.0pp	Tracker	18.7pp					No	No