

Committee: Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Date: 09 February 2022

Wards: All

Subject:

Lead officer: Jane McSherry, Director of Children, Schools and Families

Lead member: Cllr Eleanor Stringer Joint Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children and Education

Contact officer: Karl Mittelstadt, Head of Performance, Improvement and Partnerships

Recommendations:

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

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. This report summarises the performance information for 2021/22, up to 31th December 2021, as set out in the accompanying document, the Children & Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel Performance Index 2021/22.
- 1.2. Information on Q4 (January to March 2022) will be made available at the next scrutiny meeting in February.

2 DETAILS

Exception Report

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

No	Indicator	Rating	Service Commentary
2	% of Single Assessments authorised within the statutory 45 days.	A	Assessment timelines in December was slightly below our target of 91%. 90% remains a high performance. The vast majority of these assessments are only slightly over the 45 day statutory target. A large proportion of these assessments were held in our Family Safeguarding Service which is currently experiencing delivery pressures as a result of a high number children in the system compared to 12 months ago. We are monitoring this carefully, and will consider taking additional corrective actions should this indicator deteriorate further.

11	% of children that became the subject of a Child Protection Plan for the second or subsequent time.	G	See below.
16	Average number of weeks taken to complete Care proceedings against a national target of 26 weeks.	R	See below
21	% of looked after children who are placed with in-house foster carers	R	<p>The number of mainstream fostering households (excluding connected carers) has remained stable with 69 households at the end of quarter 1 2020 and 70 at the end of quarter 1 2021. The end of quarter 2 2022, we have 71 households.</p> <p>Recruitment continues to be challenging. The committee will be aware that we are currently processing a number of applications of Merton residents wishing to become foster carers.</p> <p>As part of the roll-out of the Mockingbird model, we are therefore confident that we can increase the number of in-house foster carers in the medium term.</p>
22	Number of in-house foster carers recruited	R	See commentary below.
30	Reception year surplus places	R	See commentary below.

Commentary

Indicator 16: Average number of week taken to complete Care proceedings against a national target of 26 weeks

- 2.1. Members of the scrutiny panel have been updated about this indicator on a number of occasions. At the last meeting, members requested further detail about the numbers of children and families subject to court proceedings.
- 2.2. The table below provides detail about the number of families and children in so-called 'Public Law Outline' (PLO). PLO encompasses the procedures that the Local Authority must follow should they have sufficient concerns

about any child in their area and the care that they are receiving from their parents or carers, to investigate these concerns.

- 2.3. Nationally a target of 26 has been set for an authority to conclude PLO and to achieve a court decision. We always strive to meet the nationally set target of 26 weeks. Due to small number of children in proceedings in Merton, delays with one family can skew our figures.

Figure 1: Number of families in PLO (Aug 21 – November 21)

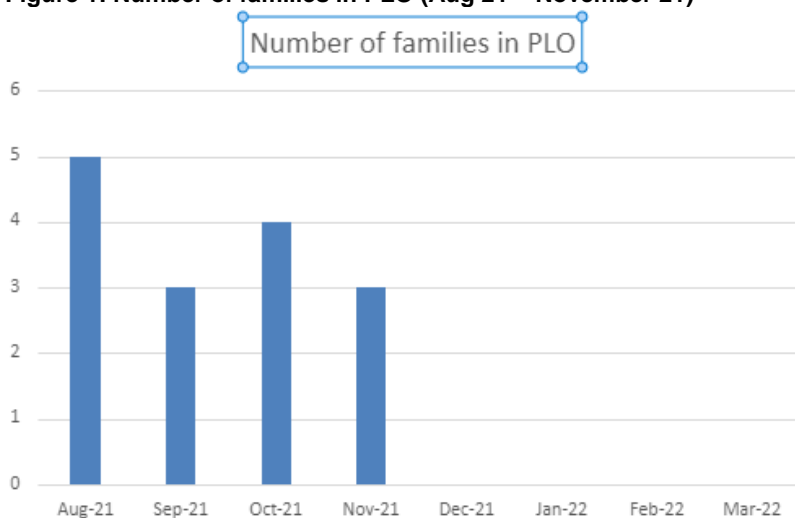
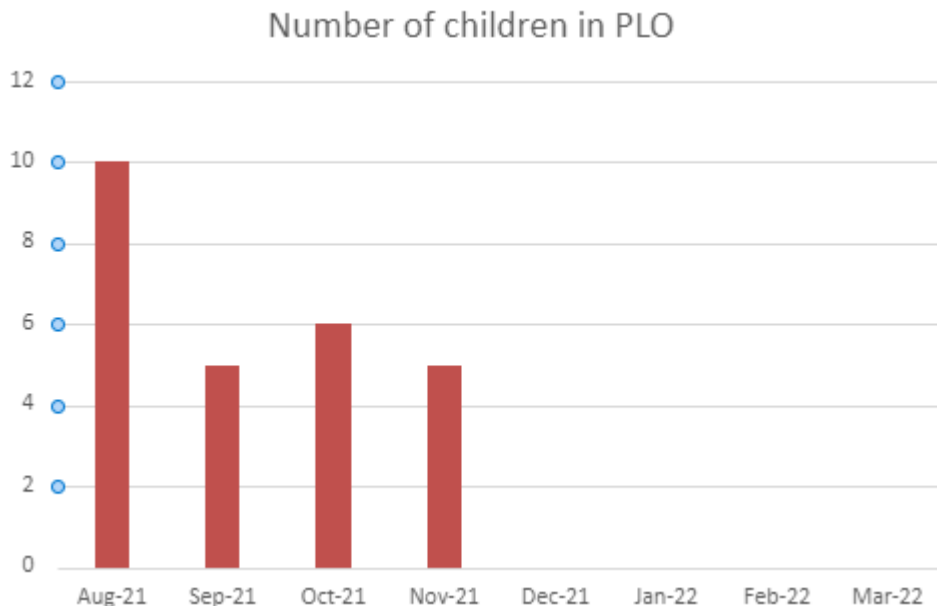


Figure 2: Number of Children in PLO (Aug21 – Nov 21)



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

- 2.5. The service has monthly meetings with the 'Children and Families Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass). These meetings allow the authority to raise concerns about timeliness.

Indicator 22: Number of in-house foster carers recruited

- 2.6. Whilst our total appointments in 2021/22 so far is 3 and our target of 20 for this financial year is at risk, this figure masks the wider success of our foster recruitment work. We received a total of 27 new applications. We have made 6 initial visits and 11 assessments are ongoing. We expect to see an increase in the number of approvals shortly.

Indicator 30: Reception surplus places

- 2.7. This indicator is the total school reception roll against total operating admission numbers. Between October and December 2021, the percentage of surplus places has increased from 10.6% to 12.1% (which is outside of our target range of 5-10%).
- 2.8. There is no official national benchmark on an appropriate level of surplus places. Surplus places across schools provide more choice of school places, but since schools are largely funded based on numbers on roll, surplus places have a negative impact on the school budget, and therefore potentially teaching and learning. In the late 1990s the Audit Commission recommended that a surplus of 5-10% would enable the appropriate balance of choice and to economically provide sufficient school places, and this is still considered a reasonable estimate of best practice and so has been used for this indicator.
- 2.9. With a greater fall in demand for reception year places due to the migration impacts of Covid, we narrowly missed the 10% target maximum for 2020/21. Members scrutinised the School Places Strategy document at a recent meeting.

Amendments, Corrections and Data Caveats

- 2.10. We are currently not able to report accurately against the following indicator:

Indicator Number	Descriptor	Commentary
8	% of quorate attendance at child protection conferences	Data reporting is currently unreliable. The way in which Mosaic is currently configured does not allow an easy analysis of quoracy. The QA and Practice Development Team review quoracy as part of their service.

2.11. The following indicator was subject to a miscalculation. Corrected figures have been provided in this month's performance report.

Indicator Number	Descriptor	Commentary
20	Stability of placement of looked after children (aged under 16) – length of placement (in care 2.5 year, placement 2 years) Target: 65%	Previous figures reported to the panel were incorrect. This was due to mistakes in the way we have calculate this indicator. Consequently, we have had to revise figures previously reported. For reference, corrected figures are outlined below (previous incorrect figures included in brackets): Q1 – 55% (55%) Q2 – 64% (68%) Q3 – 71% (59%)

3 APPENDICES – THE FOLLOWING DOCUMENTS ARE TO BE PUBLISHED WITH THIS REPORT AND FORM PART OF THE REPORT

- Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel Performance Index 2020/21.