



Committee report

Committee	POLICY AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES, EDUCATION AND SKILLS
Date	9 DECEMBER 2021
Title	CHILDREN & FAMILIES BRANCH PERFORMANCE QUARTER TWO 2021-22
Report of	DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

SUMMARY

This report covers the performance data in respect of children's social care for quarter two 2021-22. The performance data is presented to Committee as a PowerPoint presentation and progress is summarised in this report.

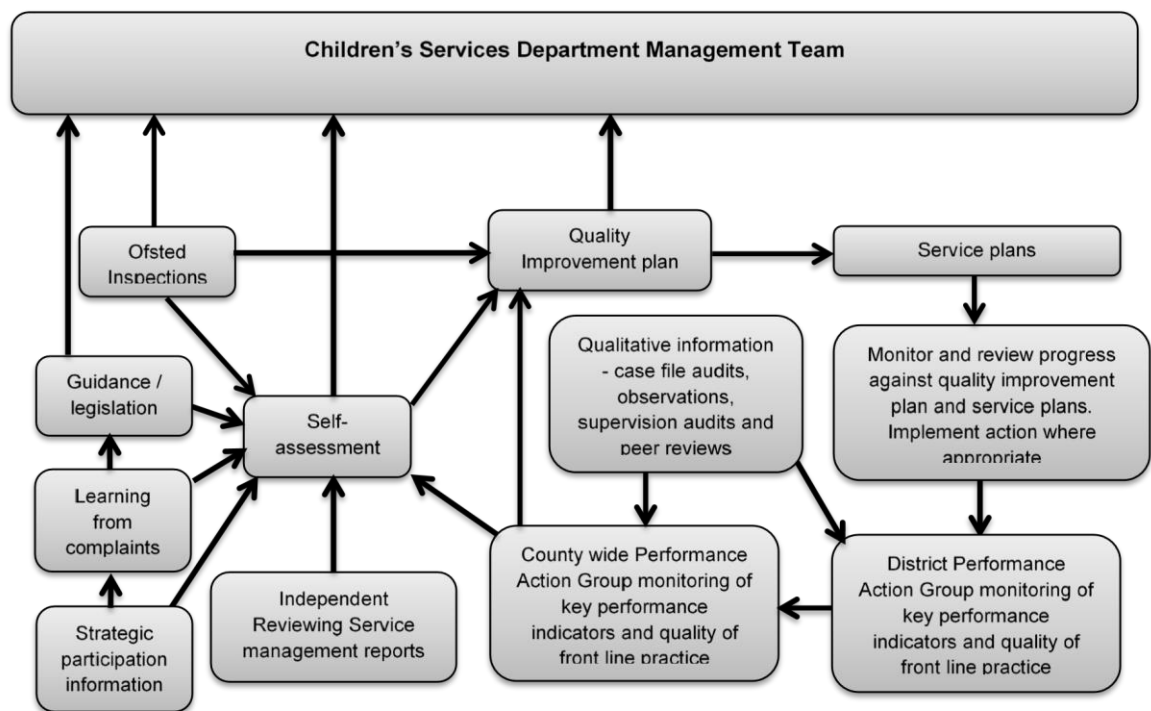
1. Service Plan 2019 to 2021

The Children and Families branch of Children's Services is responsible for delivering a wide range of support and statutory services for children and families which contribute to the children and young people's plan priorities. As a service we have three main functions:

- To support families to help them to look after their children, preventing escalation into statutory services.
- To lead the work to keep children safe and protect them from harm, abuse and neglect. To support families to help them to look after their children, preventing escalation into statutory services.
- Where children cannot safely stay at home, provide permanence through a range of other alternatives.

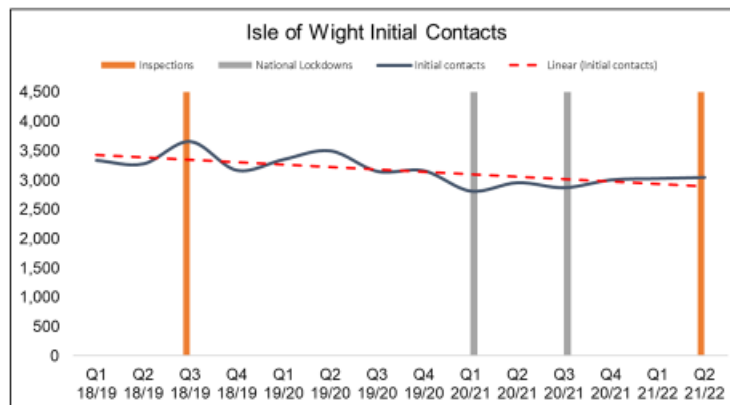
2. Performance and Quality

The Children and Families Branch 'Quality Matters Improvement Framework' sets out the services' performance management and quality assurance arrangements. To be effective and sustainable, quality assurance, performance and continuous improvement needs to be a systems-wide approach, embedded in culture and integrated in practice. All managers and front-line workers within children's social care must work in line within the agreed policies and procedures and ensure that they adhere to and remain up to date with practice and recording requirements. Each worker within children's social care is responsible for their own performance and the quality of the work they carry out with children and their families. The diagram below details performance and quality assurance activity, which is further underpinned through corporate and political oversight and scrutiny.

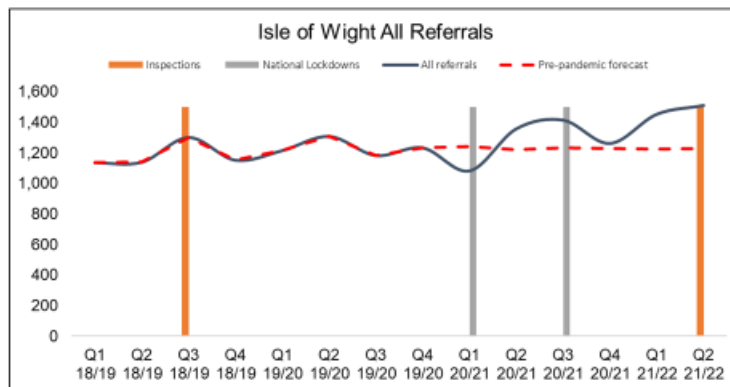


2.1 Contact and Referrals

Performance – Contacts



Performance - Referrals



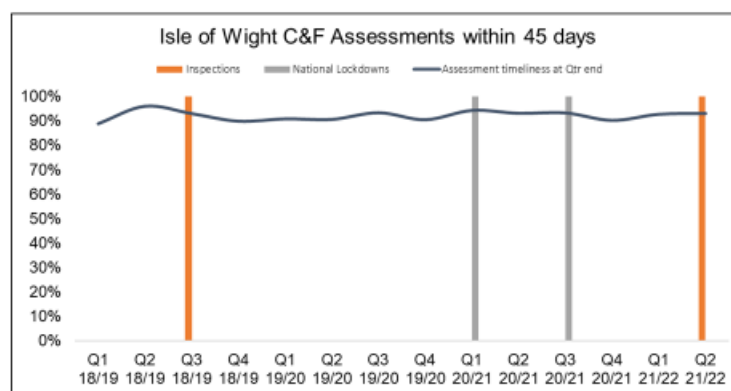
There is a well-established and well-regarded front door process in Hampshire (which provides this function of behalf of Isle of Wight Children's Services) which has been subject to repeated inspection since its inception in 2014, including most recently in November 2021. Decision making across both Children's Reception Team (CRT) and Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) is regularly reviewed and monitored, and this area of work is subject to regular multi-agency audits. The application of threshold continues to be consistently applied, as confirmed in recent multi agency audits by the Isle of Wight Safeguarding Children's Partnership.

The Isle of Wight has had a consistently higher rate of referrals when compared to statistical neighbours and the England average. This is mainly due to the way different authorities count referrals. It is also reflective of the level of awareness of safeguarding amongst partner agencies, and socio-economic profile of the island.

The service has seen a sustained increase in demand following the lockdown periods in 2020, and early 2021. The level of complexity of cases continues to be reported as higher than average by social care staff.

2.2 Timely response

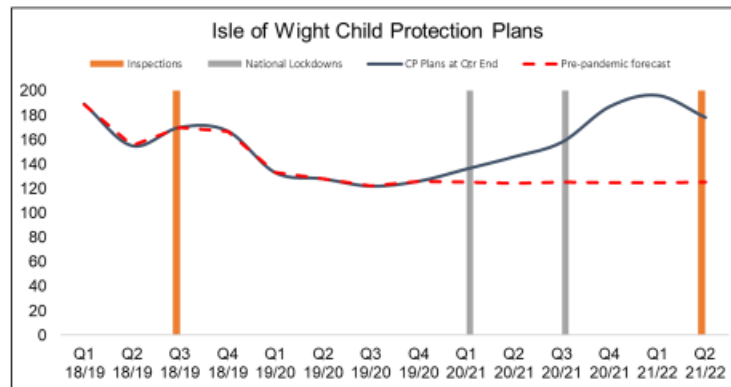
Performance- timely response



Despite the increase in demand assessments are completed in a timely fashion within Children's Services. This ensures that children's needs are early and effective plans and interventions can be delivered when required. The small minority of assessments that are not completed within timescales, are usually one or two days over the timescale.

2.3 Children Subject to child protection planning.

Children subject to child protection planning



Prior to March 2020 the numbers of children subject to child protection plans had incrementally reduced over a 3-year period. Since national lockdown in March 2020 the number of children subject to a child protection plan has slowly increased. At the beginning of March 2020 120 children were subject to child protection plans. At the end of Q2 2021 180 children were subject to child protection plans, although it should be noted that the numbers of children subject to child protection planning has started to reduce. In the focused visit undertaken by Ofsted in July 2021, child protection assessments and planning were highlighted as, *'detailed, with thorough exploration of family histories and circumstances. There is good consideration of safeguarding measures and contingency planning. Social workers speak with children sensitively and there is good consideration of children's needs and abilities. Management decisions are timely and proportionate, and thresholds are applied appropriately. Records of decisions, the rationale for them and next steps are clearly recorded.'* (Ofsted, July 2021).

All Child Protection Plans that are open for 18 months or more (or earlier if required) are subject to a legal planning meeting to consider if alternative interventions are required to affect better outcomes for the children concerned.

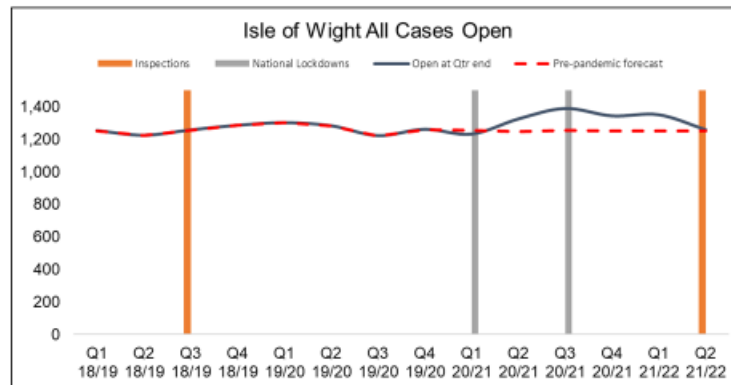
The data for current child protection plans lasting two years or more is lower than South East averages and indicates that services continue to intervene effectively in the lives of children at risk to support families to make the necessary changes to reduce those risks.

Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) analysis of repeat child protection planning at the performance action group has consistently demonstrated that the majority of repeat plans were not foreseeable. Reasons are more likely due to a new event including partner or a change of other circumstances.

Children subject to child protection planning are routinely visited within timescales and this is a strength on the Isle of Wight.

2.4 Children in need

Children in need



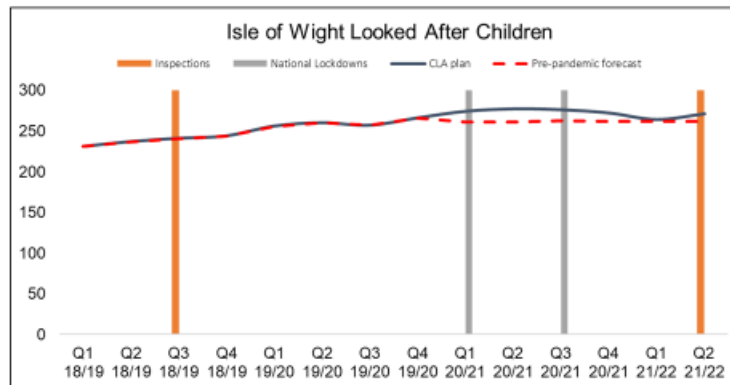
The increase in demand has also impacted on the number of children subject to child in need planning. It is mandatory local practice for all cases stepping down from child protection planning to receive ongoing support through child in need planning for a minimum of three months to ensure that support and progress are sustained. The Isle of Wight believe this is good practice.

Managers routinely review the recording of visits, providing a window into the quality of the front-line work undertaken with families, and the progress of this work. This allows prompt action to be taken where progress is not being made or maintained. Further management oversight is provided by managers chairing child in need meetings further strengthening their view and understanding of work being undertaken.

Ofsted highlighted that children in need plans were *'thorough and regularly reviewed, which allows professionals to analyse and evaluate children's changing circumstances. However, some records of reviews are not consistently evident in case records'* (Ofsted , 2021). This area is being addressed y the service through increased management scrutiny of the records of review.

2.5 Looked after children

Looked After Children (LAC)



The rate of children in care per 10,000 remains above the national average and statistical neighbours. This is due to a number of factors including the legacy of historically inadequate service (pre Hampshire partnership), and the socio-economic conditions on the island. The Isle of Wight is participating in the National Transfer Scheme to support Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children, who now make up 5% of our children in care cohort.

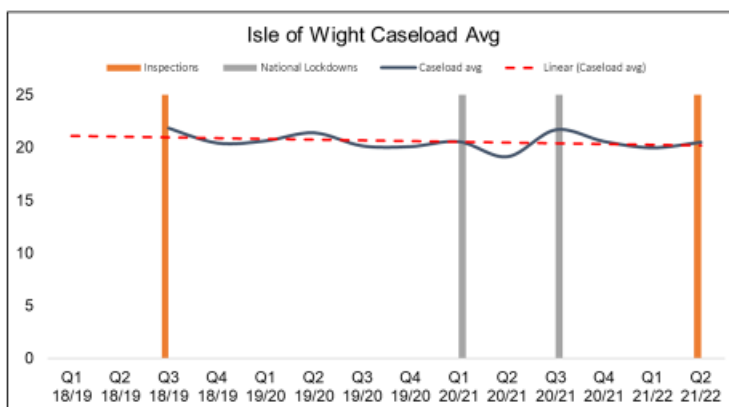
Whilst there has been a small increase in the number of children in care this is not the same rate of increase seen in child protection and child in need planning. The targeted, strengths-based support, and restorative practice being delivered through the Children's Assessment and Safeguarding Teams (CAST) alongside the interventions provided by the multi-disciplinary Resilience Around Families Team (RAFT) is proving effective in ensuring more children are enabled to live at home safely with their families.

Whilst 49% of placements are with in-house foster carers, the need to use external foster care and residential provision remains, with 12% of placements with external foster carers and 8% residential.

Nationally, the picture of demand continues to outstrip the supply of placements for children in care, and the price of placements are rising significantly. A report published by the Competition and Markets Authority in October 2021 has outlined significant concerns about the availability of placements and profits of private providers [Children's social care market study interim report - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/100444/childrens-social-care-market-study-interim-report-2021.pdf).

2.6 Caseloads

Performance - Caseloads



Against a backdrop of rising demand and reduced financial resources, the Isle of Wight has been able to reduce caseloads through innovative approaches. These approaches have included an investment in investment in social workers PAs, introduction of RAFT and the more recent investment in the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Approach, mobile devices and more flexible working. Recruitment and retention of staff through a market supplement, the Graduate Entry Trainee programme and the social work apprenticeship positions are further supporting retention.

Caseloads are scrutinised by senior managers on a weekly basis, and by the Director of Children's Services every two weeks. Action is taken where individual caseloads are considered higher than we would want. Caseloads have reduced from a peak average of 34 per social worker in early 2014 to 21 the end of Q2, 2021.

In response to rising demand as a consequence of the impact of Covid 19 and lockdowns, a further investment in social workers was made by the Isle of Wight Council in September 2020. This includes additional investment in temporary and permanent Social Workers for frontline teams. Recruitment has been problematic, which is a national issue, although there is the additional island factor.

3. Conclusion

The Children and Families Branch continue to be child focused and strength based in the delivery of the service. The Ofsted focused visit in July 2021, which looked at the local authority's arrangements for children in need and children subject to child

protection planning confirmed that senior managers have an accurate view of the quality of practice, which is informed by a '*comprehensive performance management information and quality assurance framework*'. Throughout the pandemic the service has maintained its drive on delivering outcomes for children and families with a relentless focus on quality and performance.