

## NCC Briefing 3

### Summary: Children's Social Care Data and Digital Strategy

Published 15 December 2023

The Department for Education's (DfE) new strategy aims to support the National Framework and provide a consistent way of understanding progress towards the 4 outcomes (set out in [briefing 1](#)) to support learning for central and local government.

#### Outcome one:

- CSC will help your family stay together.

#### Outcome two:

- CSC will support your family network.

#### Outcome three:

- CSC helps to keep you safe.

#### Outcome four:

- CSC will help to give you a loving home.

The strategic objectives set out the areas of work between now and 2025 to begin building the foundations for transforming data and digital services. Achieving this transformation will be a long-term plan requiring action far beyond 2025.

The 3 objectives reflect the need to do ongoing research to ensure the longer-term approach supports sustainable change through:

- 1 Supporting strong data culture and leadership.
- 2 Supporting systems and technology to meet sector need.
- 3 Improving the data we collect, share, and use.

The strategy recognises that work needs to be progressed on information sharing, reducing the lag on using the findings from national data collections, developing a better data culture among leaders, and developing the systems that can store the data that is important. It will do this by consulting with local authorities on its new data Dashboard and will seek early adopters to test out proposed new developments.

The feature of the new strategy that is most pertinent for us to consider currently are the indicators in its new CSC dashboard. It recognises the limitations of the data in not fully measuring the outcomes.

The DfE are starting with the data that is available and the indicators will evolve over time as they develop a more robust outcomes-based set of measures. All the data used in the first version of the Dashboard will draw on data that is currently collected and suitable for publication.

This data will be presented in a dynamic way to facilitate learning and reflection. The indicators in the Dashboard will show trends and allow for comparison between local authorities. Over time, it intends to develop a more robust outcomes-based set of indicators. Another area of future development is the longer-term, life outcomes of those who have needed the support of children's social care.

The indicators as they currently stand are in [Appendix A](#) and the Dashboard will be published sometime this year, with the request that local authorities use it as a tool to discuss the outcomes and enablers and to generate learning to improve practice. **It is not intended to measure the performance of children's social care, nor will it prompt inspection.**

The data that is currently available does not allow us to fully measure the outcomes and enablers for

children's social care that the National Framework sets out. It uses proxy indicators for these outcomes where appropriate. Thus, many of the indicators are focused on activities that happen within children's social care rather than the outcomes that follow from good practice.

A number of data gaps have been identified during the process of selecting indicators for the Dashboard. There are domains identified within the outcomes and enablers for which there is no reliable or robust source of data currently available.

**These domains include:**

- Wellbeing of the child (specifically in Outcome 2, but also covered in Outcomes 1 and 4)
- Experience, training, and support for the workforce (Enabler 1)
- Leadership stability (Enabler 2)
- People leadership (Enabler 2)

There are other areas where national data is limited such as voice of the child and early help and family help.

**Following the launch of the public Dashboard in 2024, the DfE will:**

- maintain a programme of user testing and evaluation of the Dashboard to ensure it provides maximum value for insight and learning (for both internal and external stakeholders) as part of continuous improvement practices;
- continue to refine the list of indicators, review data gaps across children's social care, and scope out ways in which these data gaps can be addressed, particularly the experience of children, young people and families;
- work with the sector and other experts to look at 'what good looks like' for multi-agency working and how this can best be reflected through data, to support the development of indicators for enabler one: multi-agency working is prioritised and effective;
- develop a strategy for learning loops between children's social care sector and the DfE which will establish forums and a series of events, so that local authorities can continually learn and improve;
- work with 'early adopter' local authorities to develop a private Dashboard based on timely data that is extracted directly from case management systems.

**It would like local authorities to:**

- begin to use the Dashboard as a tool to reflect on their services, particularly as part of embedding the National Framework;
- engage with the DfE in developing the Dashboard and sharing honest and constructive feedback, to identify areas of future data need;
- engage with learning events to help all local authorities and the DfE generate and share best practice based on data and insight.

**In response to the digital and data strategy, we are already making progress.**

- The Performance Team are already considering the strategy to understand the changes that will be required.
- The Performance Team have already considered the DfE indicators and understand Northumberland's strengths and areas to develop.
- The Senior Manager attended the DfE webinar about the Dashboard on 6 February 2024.
- Work is already underway in response to the proposed national dataset for the voice of the child that was presented to the DfE in 2023. This was part of Northumberland voice of the child pilot.

**We are in a strong position to build on what we already do well. What we need to think more about:**

- The future reporting arrangements for the indicators we have identified as amber and red in Appendix A.

- ❑ How the four outcomes will relate to our Meaningful Measures, for example should the outcomes be mapped to the Meaningful Measures or replace the Meaningful Measures?
- ❑ How the Dashboard will be used as a tool to reflect on our services, particularly as part of embedding the National Framework.

## APPENDIX A

**Key:** Green = indicator is already reported on; Amber = Indicator can be reported on but tweaks are required to produce the data in that format; Red = Indicator not reported on currently and would need development.

### Outcome 1: Children, young people and families stay together and get the help they need.

#### Family Stability

Indicator	Rationale/Description
Rate of new entrants to care, with a breakdown by whether new entrants to care are Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC).	This measures the flow of those children moving into care. Where UASC are placed within an authority, this will represent an unavoidable increase in numbers of children entering the system. This breakdown is provided for context.
Rate of children in care.	This metric measures the rate of children in care as a proportion of the 0-17 population. Avoiding permanent placements in care is a good indicator of supporting families to remain together.
Reunification of children in care without a return to care within 1 year.	Supporting children to be reunited with their families achieves a key goal in delivering services to help families remain together. This delivers on the commitment to keep children within their family, where it is safe to do so.

#### Access to support and getting help.

Indicator	Rationale/Description
Rate of Child in Need (CIN).	Helping children to stay together with their families means ensuring the right support is in place at earlier stages of intervention. Looking at the flow of children who become a CIN will show children being supported by the wider system. Combined with indicators above, this will reflect a broad view of flow into and through the children's social care system.
Repeat referrals (within 12 months).	If children are being referred to services repeatedly, this suggests that they and their families may not be receiving the support necessary to allow them to thrive independently as a family unit. Multiple referrals can be inefficient and cause additional upset and trauma for the child and family, therefore reducing the rate of repeat referrals will result in better outcomes.

Percentage of no further action (NFA) at assessment against the percentage of NFA that progressed to assessment within 6-12 months.	<p>Similar to repeated referrals, if children are being assessed repeatedly this suggests that they and their families may not be receiving the support they need. Multiple assessments can be inefficient and cause additional upset and trauma for the child and family.</p> <p>Note: we recognise this indicator may not be as easy to understand as a stand-alone measure and we will do further research into this indicator, and how it supports understanding of outcomes before inclusion on the Dashboard.</p>
---	---

### Child wellbeing and development

Indicator	Rationale/Description
School attendance: attendance of children in need, including those supporting through Child in Need (CiN), Child Protection (CP), Cared For and previously cared for children (CfC).	Attending an education setting is a key component of long-term development and wellbeing for children and young people, which affects their outcomes. Barriers to attendance can be prevalent amongst children in need, and children's social care has an important role in helping to overcome those barriers.
Educational engagement: persistent absence and exclusions (CiN, CP, CfC).	Engaging in education is a key component of long-term development and wellbeing for children and young people, which affects their outcomes. Barriers to engagement can be prevalent amongst children in need, and children's social care has an important role in helping to overcome those barriers.

### Educational attainment

Indicator	Rationale/Description
Educational attainment: progress and attainment in Key Stage results for those with CiN, CP, and CfC.	<p>Educational attainment is a key component of long-term development and wellbeing for children and young people, which affects their outcomes. Children should be supported to access and make progress in education to support their development and life chances.</p> <p>Virtual School Heads have a statutory duty to promote the educational attainment of all children in their care. This includes ensuring suitable and timely educational provision and managing Pupil Premium Plus funding aligned to objectives in the child's Personal Education Plan.</p>

Note: The indicators proposed above may evolve as we begin to build and test the Dashboard in 2024.

## Outcome 2: Children and young people are supported by their family network.

### Families engaging and receiving support from their family network.

Indicator	Rationale/Description
-----------	-----------------------

Percentage of children who cease being cared for due to moving into Special Guardianship Order (SGO), or Care Arrangement Order (CAO).	<p>Unlocking family networks and kinship carers can be a key source of support where families are experiencing challenges.</p> <p>Moving children from care arrangements to a SGO or CAO shows that kinship care is being prioritised where children cannot safely live with their parents.</p>
--	---

Note: The indicators proposed above may evolve as we begin to build and test the Dashboard in 2024.

### Outcome 3: Children and young people are safe in and outside of their home.

#### Child safety – general

Indicator	Rationale/Description
Percentage of Child Protection Plans (CPP) longer than 2 years and repeat CPP (within 12 months).	Child protection is focused on investigating and addressing significant harm that children might experience. Remaining on a CPP for a longer period of time or having multiple repeat plans, suggests that children and families are not receiving the help that they need to address their issues.
<input type="checkbox"/> Hospital admissions or A+E visits caused by unintentional and deliberate injuries to children and young people. <input type="checkbox"/> Rates of self-harm. <input type="checkbox"/> Missing children (all children).	<p>These metrics provide some contextual information about safety from harm experienced by young people within the local authority. They look at all children within an area as a proxy to understand whether the right children are currently engaged with services.</p> <p>Note: we will do further research into this indicator, and how it supports understanding of outcomes before inclusion on the Dashboard.</p>

#### Child abuse / neglect

Indicator	Rationale/Description
Assessment factor includes child abuse or neglect.	This metric looks at those children who are assessed as needing support for intra familial harm.

#### Harms outside the home

Indicator	Rationale/Description
Assessment factor includes extra familial harm.	This metric looks at those children who are assessed as needing support for extra familial harm.
Local area crime stats (knife crime, county lines, drug offences, domestic abuse, child sexual exploitation, gangs).	<p>These metrics provide some contextual information about indicators of extra familial harm within the local authority.</p> <p>Note: we will do further research into this indicator, and how it supports understanding of outcomes before inclusion on the Dashboard.</p>

Note: The indicators proposed above may evolve as we begin to build and test the Dashboard in 2024.

## Outcome 4: Children in care and care leavers have stable, loving homes.

### Stability and quality of where a child lives.

Indicator	Rationale/Description
Average number of placement changes children have.	Those children who cannot safely remain living with families or family network should be provided with a stable home environment. Minimising changes to the number of times that children have to move home while in care is key to this ambition.
Distance of placements from home.	Children should be supported to remain in school placements and to retain contact with friends and family networks where this is in their best interests. As such, where possible, children should be supported to remain close to their home address.
Percentage of children living in foster, residential care, or secure children's homes.	This indicator looks at the proportion of children living in different placement types. Where possible, the aim is to support children in care to live in foster care arrangements.
Average time between placement order and match for those children who are adopted.	For those children for whom adoption has been assessed as the right option, ensuring that the child moves to an appropriate home as soon as possible will increase stability for the child.
Number of adoption early permanence placements.	For those children for whom adoption has been assessed as the right option, adoption early permanence placements increase stability for the child.

### Wellbeing of child

Indicator	Rationale/Description
Strengths and difficulties questionnaire (SDQ score).	Understanding the emotional and behavioural need of CLA is important to ensure that they are receiving the care and support they need to thrive. The SDQ score uses a series of carer-reported measures to calculate an overall score to assess the emotional wellbeing of CLA.

### Quality of life for care experienced people

Indicator	Rationale/Description
Care leavers employment, education and training rate.	Care leavers should be supported to access education, employment and training that supports them and allows them to achieve their aspirations and goals.
Percentage of care leavers in unsuitable accommodation.	Care leavers should be supported to have barrier-free access to suitable, good-quality housing.

Note: The indicators proposed above may evolve as we begin to build and test the Dashboard in 2024.

## Enabler one: Multi-agency working is prioritised and effective

We will work with the sector and other experts to develop indicators for this National Framework enabler.

## Enabler two: Leaders drive conditions for effective practice

### Spending

Indicator	Rationale/Description
Share of local authority total spend on Children's Services, and per child spend.	This metric provides contextual information on the resource prioritisation within each Local Authority.
Share of Children and Young People Services spend minus spend on CLA.	Prioritising funding and resources that help families early helps children and young people thrive. This metric looks at the resource prioritisation between early and later statutory intervention.

### Culture focused on outcomes from children and families and continually improving services.

Indicator	Rationale/Description
Ofsted – The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families.	The culture of leadership drives effective and efficient practice. Ofsted rating for leadership provides a summary judgement of the assessed culture and practice of leadership within each authority.

**Note:** The indicators proposed above may evolve as we begin to build and test the Dashboard in 2024.

## Enabler three: The workforce is equipped and effective

### Workforce stability

Indicator	Rationale/Description
Social worker turnover.	Prioritising a stable workforce allows children, young people and families to maintain consistent relationships with practitioners.
Agency rates.	Prioritising a stable and permanent workforce allows children, young people and families to maintain consistent relationships with practitioners. Agency workers should only be used as per the national agency rules from Autumn 2024.
Vacancy rate.	A workforce strategy should develop and maintain an effective workforce. With a well-supported workforce vacancy rates should remain low.

### Quality of support for children and families

Indicator	Rationale/Description
Social worker caseloads.	Ensuring that practitioners have an appropriate caseload supports recruitment and retention and allows practitioners to deliver impactful services.

### Societal and cultural awareness and diversity

Indicator	Rationale/Description
Ethnic diversity of workforce, and levels of seniority.	A workforce with a wide range of backgrounds, across all levels, which should enable practice that reflects the needs of the communities' practitioners serve.

Note: The indicators proposed above may evolve as we begin to build and test the Dashboard in 2024.

#### Annex A: Example areas of future data or indicators

We recognise there are gaps in the indicators needed for the Dashboard, driven by data availability. The below lists some **potential indicators and domains** for inclusion in future iterations of the Dashboard.

We are including these to help demonstrate where we are aware of some of the gaps, however the scope and feasibility of these have not been tested at this stage and so are subject to change.

#### Outcome 1: Children, young people and families stay together and get the help they need.

Potential indicators include:

- Number of children receiving early help support following an Early Help (EH) assessment.
- Percentage of families receiving support and where children remain in the family.
- Children and family experience and wellbeing.

#### Outcome 2: Children and young people are supported by their family network.

Potential indicators include:

- Children in contact with family networks.
- Number of families receiving Family Group Conferencing.
- Number of evidence-based programmes families are accessing.
- Number of young people in kinship care placements (of any sort).
- Pre-proceedings information.
- Children feel happy and settled where they live.
- Children placed with siblings.
- Percentage of children with supervision orders who do not subsequently return to court within a given number of years.

#### Outcome 3: Children and young people are safe in and outside of their home.

Potential indicators include:

- Extra familial harm categories.
- Child Protection Information Sharing data (children on CPP presenting at hospital).
- How safe children feel / whether they have an adult they can trust.
- Access to advocacy services.
- EH plans that result in no further plans.
- Health of the child.
- Percentage of s47 involving police and health.

#### Outcome 4: Children in care and care leavers have stable, loving homes.

Potential indicators include:

- Children's experience of their home.
- Percentage of placements that match what was requested.
- Reason for distance of placement from home.

- Wellbeing of care leavers.
- Care leaver views on quality of and satisfaction with housing.

### Enabler three: The workforce is equipped and effective

Potential indicators include:

- Social worker stability, measured by how many social workers a child has had.
- Expand current measures to broader definition of workforce.
- Length of tenure, years of experience.
- Quality of relationship between practitioners and children and young people.
- Time use of social workers.
- Indicators on training and development.
- Social worker supervision frequency.
- Number of CiN who have a lead practitioner who does not have a social work qualification.

### Enabler two: Leaders drive conditions for effective practice

Potential indicators include:

- Leaders creating learning and improvement environment for services to succeed.
- Percentage of social workers who believe their employer delivers the eight social worker employer standards.
- Experiences of workforce in local authority / staff satisfaction.