

Safeguarding Children Unit Independent Reviewing Officers'

Annual Report

April 2016-March 2017

The Contribution of Independent Reviewing Officers
to Quality Assuring and Improving Services for
Looked After Children in Gateshead

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Executive Summary

The completion of this report is a requirement of The Adoption and Children Act 2002. The statutory guidance for the Independent Reviewing Officers (the IRO Handbook) specifies that the manager of the IRO Service 'should be responsible for the production of an annual report for the scrutiny of members of the corporate parenting board'.

This report has been prepared in accordance with the requirements set out in the Statutory Guidance for Independent Reviewing Officers (2010) and will be reported to Cabinet, the Corporate Parenting Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Local Safeguarding Children's Board.

The Annual IRO report is produced by the Children's Safeguarding Unit which sits within the Quality Assurance function of Care Wellbeing and Learning. The report provides quantitative and qualitative evidence relating to the IRO Service in Gateshead Local Authority. The report identifies good practice, as well as highlighting areas for further development in relation to the IRO function. In addition, the report provides an overview of the other activities and functions of the Children's Safeguarding Unit, including information on the performance of the unit in a range of responsibilities. The report covers the period 1 April 2016 to 31 March 2017 and should be read in conjunction with:
Annual Report – Child Protection Conference Chairs 2016/17
Annual Report – Local Authority Designated Officer 2016/17

Purpose of IRO Service and National Context

The Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) Service is set within the framework of the updated IRO Handbook, Department for Children, Schools and Families (2010) and is linked to revised Care Planning Regulations and Guidance which were introduced in April 2011.

Local Authorities are 'corporate parents' for the children and young people they are looking after, and effective care planning is essential for the children's wellbeing and the best possible outcomes. Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) were nationally introduced to represent the interests of looked after children, monitor the manner in which local authorities implement their plans, and ensure that the wishes and feelings of children are fully considered.

Their role was strengthened through the introduction of statutory guidance in April 2011. The IRO has a key role in relation to the improvement of care planning for Looked After Children (LAC) and for challenging drift and delay in the implementation of care plans.

In November 2011, the Family Justice Review reported that 'the work of the IROs and their impact needs to be more clearly seen and understood'. If a dispute between an IRO and the local authority cannot be resolved locally, ultimately the IRO can refer the case to the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS).

The Legal and Statutory Context

Section 118 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 introduced the statutory role of the IRO, with responsibility for the process of reviewing children in care cases. Under this and the subsequent Review of Children's Cases (Amendment) (England) Regulations 2004, Local Authorities are required by regulation to:

- Appoint IROs to review all looked after children's cases
- Monitor the authority's function in respect of the review
- Refer a case to the Children and Families Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS), if the failure to implement the care plan might be considered to breach the child's human rights. (The Dispute Resolution Process)

All children in care, including those in adoptive placements prior to an Adoption Order being made, are covered by these regulations.

The Children and Young Persons Act 2008 and the subsequent 'Care Planning Placement and Review Regulations' developed the role of the IRO and introduced additional statutory requirements. The Regulations supported by specific guidance on the role of the IRO came into force on 1 April 2011. The new duties and responsibilities for IROs include:

- Additional visits to the child outside of their reviews
- Visits to children's placements if the looked after review was not held there
- Additional meetings with other key professionals, including the social worker and the children's guardian
- In order to track the planning and decision making more closely ensuring positive outcomes for the child.
- Reading court bundles and potentially attending court.

The Out of Authority Placement of Looked After Children Supplement to The Children Act 1989 Volume 2: Care planning, placement and case review guidance July 2014 states that the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) must be consulted before any final decision is made about making an out of authority placement, whether distant or not, to enable the IRO to discuss the proposed arrangements with the child.

The child's wishes and feelings should be taken into account, and where appropriate, the child's relatives or parents should be consulted. (The Children's Homes and Looked after Children Miscellaneous Amendments) (England) Regulations 2013 – Part 3:7).

Key Functions of an Independent Reviewing Officer Service

- (a) IROs make an important contribution to the goal of significantly improving outcomes for looked after children and were introduced to represent the interests of looked after children following a number of cases where care plans had not been implemented leading to harm. Their primary focus is to quality assure the care planning process for each child, and to ensure that his/her current wishes and feelings are given full consideration as well as challenging any drift and delay.
- (b) All looked after children should have an initial review within 20 working days of becoming looked after; the second review within a further three months and subsequent reviews within 6 months or earlier if required. A LAC review focuses on the child's care plan and future; all aspects of his/her life in care is reviewed to ensure all of the child's needs are being met and s/he is provided with every opportunity to reach his/her potential.
- (c) The Care Planning regulations have made a step change in the requirements of the IRO placing responsibility on them for monitoring the implementation of the care plans with the review process. IROs should be kept informed by frontline practitioners about any changes in placement, long-term planning, contact or education; significant changes in the child's own family or any safeguarding issues for the child. Where any of these may impact on the child or young person failing to achieve his/her anticipated progress, or require changes in planning, a review of the overall plan should be considered and the IRO should be involved in this.
- d) Where directed by courts, the IRO Service will hold quarterly reviews of children subject to Supervision Orders.

The National Children's Bureau research entitled 'The Role of the Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) in England' (March 2014) provides a wealth of information and findings with regard to the efficacy of IRO services and outlines a number of important recommendations at a National Level, Local Authority Level, and IRO Service Level, which are considered in this report. The foreword was written by Mr. Justice Peter Jackson; in it he makes the following comment:

"The Independent Reviewing Officer must be the visible embodiment of our commitment to meet our legal obligations to this special group of children. The health and effectiveness of the IRO Service is a direct reflection of whether we are meeting that commitment, or we are failing."

Looked After Children Reviews: Roles and Responsibilities

The IRO chairs the 'Looked after Child' review and makes decisions in relation to the overall Care Plan, which is coordinated by the social worker.

The IRO has a responsibility to challenge the planning and practice of the professionals working with the child if any issues arise in achieving the agreed Care Plan or working towards good outcomes for the child. Within the Children and Young Person's Act 2008 there is a strengthening of this commitment and it is a requirement that an allocated IRO is identified at the point the child becomes 'Looked After' and should remain with the child throughout his/her life in the care of the Local Authority.

All Looked after Children cases have identified IROs as soon as the Safeguarding Children Unit is informed that a child has become looked after. The IROs remain responsible for a young person's Care Plan and Reviews throughout the time a child is looked after in line with good practice.

Out of 184 looked after children who have been looked after for three years or less, 145 had the same IRO as their meeting chair in all of their reviews (81%). This is in line with the figures of 79% (154/195) reported in 2015-2016 and 78.9% (142/180) reported in 2014-2015.

IROs:

- Are legally responsible for ensuring the child's care plan is appropriate and meets his/her needs. A LAC review covers all aspects of a child's life, including placement, health, education, contact with family and friends and social activities;
- Ensure the wishes and the views of the child are shared and any requests are addressed during reviews;
- Require each agency involved with the child to provide a report to the review outlining progress to date and proposed work to be undertaken;
- Identify and challenge any drift and delay with regard to the child's care plan and needs;
- Complete and ensure the distribution of the LAC Chair's Report within 20 working days of the review.

The child or young person's social worker is:

- Responsible for ensuring his/her report and the proposed new care plan is available for the IRO 3 working days before the review;
- Responsible for the completion and distribution of the new care plan within 10 working days of the review.

Professional Profile of the IRO Service

The Independent Reviewing Officer in Gateshead

In order to fulfil their challenge role IROs must have an appropriate level of experience and authority. In Gateshead all IROs are qualified, registered and experienced social workers. Three IROs are experienced children's social work team managers.

All IROs have extensive experience of communicating and working with children and young people, including three who have worked in residential care and all have knowledge about what contributes to good quality practice in safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children, including an understanding of the relevant legal processes. Most IROs have been working for Gateshead for many years and they are very familiar with the organisation and the services provided.

The range of reported skills and knowledge that IROs need in order to fulfil their duties is illustrated through the comments of one of the IRO managers who contributed to the NCB's The Role of the Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) in England Report March 2014:

'Skills and Knowledge of IROs' [IROs] need a really in depth knowledge obviously about the IRO responsibilities, so they do need to understand the Handbook. They need to understand the care planning regulations, Working Together, the whole framework; legislative framework that works with looked after children and what children subject to safeguarding procedures are subject to really. They also need those personal skills and abilities to, for instance, manage multiagency meetings and they need to be mindful of issues around group dynamics and that ability to work across agencies really and bring that work together to focus on the needs of the child. And they need to be able to manage their professional accountability and their professional authority in a way that enables effective challenge really because that's one of the key things.. It's to do things in a way that actually brings about the required outcome for the child really and that is a really important quality that IROs need to have.' (IRO Manager).

Foster Carer Reviews

There is an identified Independent Reviewing Officer responsible for reviewing foster carers on an annual basis and reporting to the Fostering Panel. This role has, from August 2016, been undertaken by one consistent agency worker. The previous IRO has now moved into the more generic role of undertaking Looked After reviews and chairing Child Protection Conferences. It is anticipated that this role will be filled by a permanent member of staff within the next six months.

The number of foster carer reviews completed over the last 3 years has remained fairly consistent. 184 reviews were undertaken in 2016-17, which is similar to the 190 reviews undertaken in 2015-16. The IRO provides an independent and consistent review for foster carers and links well with the supervisory Social Workers in the Local Authority fostering team to ensure foster carers are supported in providing the right care for the children they look after.

During this period there has been consultation with the foster care panel in an effort to streamline the foster carer review processes. The IRO Chairs report has been streamlined to ensure it is fit for purpose and addresses all the issues raised concisely whilst evidencing the competencies and experience of our foster carers.

Current Staffing Structure

Responsibility for the activity and development of the Unit lies with the Service Manager Quality Assurance, who reports directly to the Service Director of Children's Commissioning, and links with the Service Director of Children's Social Care. Responsibility for the line management of the Safeguarding Unit is removed from operational Children's Social Care, which strengthens its independence and supports its role of challenge, whilst maintaining collaborative links with social work services.

The Service Manager for Quality Assurance is a member of the LSCB, ensuring the Safeguarding Unit is represented and well placed to provide quality assurance of inter-agency working and again supports its independence. This post has, since November 2016, been vacant, although it is anticipated that this will be filled by a permanent member of staff within the next six months of 2017.

The staffing structure for the period includes:

- Service Manager, Quality Assurance
- Principal IRO (3 days weekly) responsible for the allocation of work, support and clinical supervision of the IROs.
- Operational Manager responsible for overseeing business processes within the SCU and operational matters.
- 7.1 FTE Independent Reviewing Officers (including 1 post currently covered by agency staff).
- The Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) and IRO for Foster Carer Reviews are also located within the Unit.
- The team comprises 3 males and 7 females who are all white British.

At present there are currently 3 agency IRO's within the team to cover vacant posts and to meet the demands and challenges regarding capacity and caseloads.

The staff team have backgrounds in working with children who have suffered significant harm from abuse and neglect and children with attachment difficulties, both as looked after children and children subject to child protection plans and child in need plans living in the community, including working with disabled children, care leavers and young people who have offended. IROs have developed working partnerships with the Jewish community, voluntary sector, internal and external partners, and ethnic groups, including the use of interpreters for both meetings and the translation of documents.

IROs within Gateshead also undertake a number of additional tasks which include:

- LADO cover
- Attendance at One Voice collating children's views
- Corporate Parenting Partnership meetings
- Secure Reviews
- Deliver external and internal training
- Links to teams within Social Work Children and Families
- Foster carer reviews
- Attendance at the LSCB Training sub group.
- Attendance at MSET

The team is supported by: 1 senior operational support coordinator, 6 FTE senior clerks and 1 apprentice.

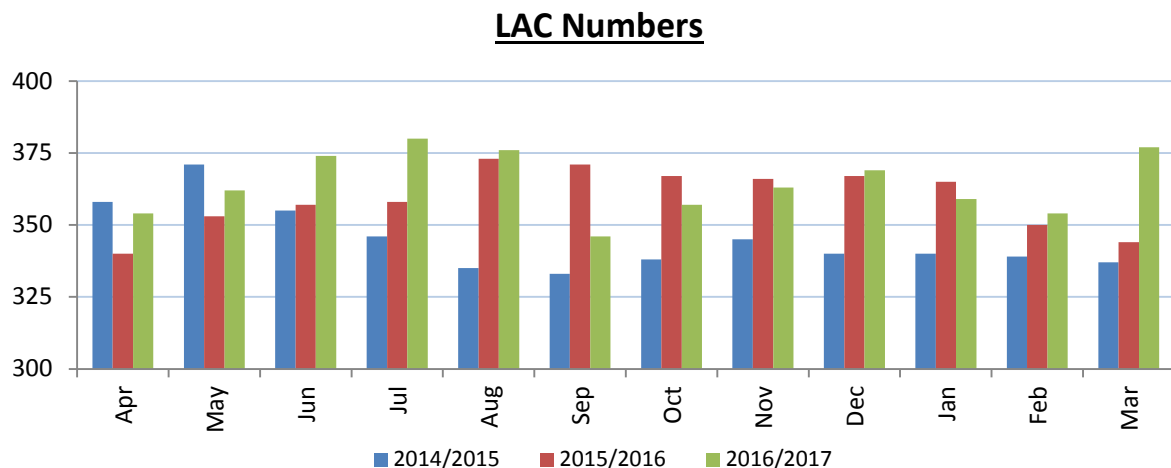
During this period the SCU has had a number of challenges in recruiting and retaining its full complement of IRO's. In February 2017, as a result of these challenges, the Interim Chief Executive requested a full review of the service to consider staffing and capacity issues in light of recent legislation and best practice in order that the SCU can more robustly meet the demands placed upon it. It is anticipated that this review will be formally completed within two months.

Quantitative information in relation to the IRO service

At the end of March 2017 there were 376 looked after children. This equates to 94.2 per 10,000 children, and is higher than the number of looked after children at the same time last year (343/86 per 10,000).

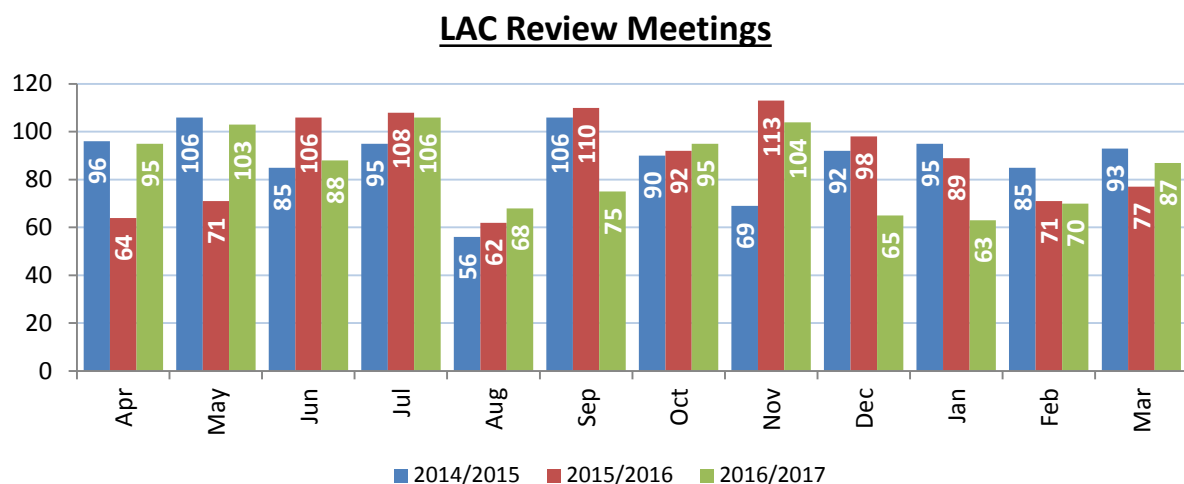
During 2016-17 the number of children becoming looked after fell slightly compared to previous years, however, so did the numbers of children leaving care, which resulted in an overall increase of the LAC figure.#

Gateshead continues to have higher numbers of looked after children compared with the regional rate of 84, and Gateshead's statistical neighbours' rate of 84. It is also significantly higher than the national rate of 60 per 10,000 (SSDA903 2015-16).

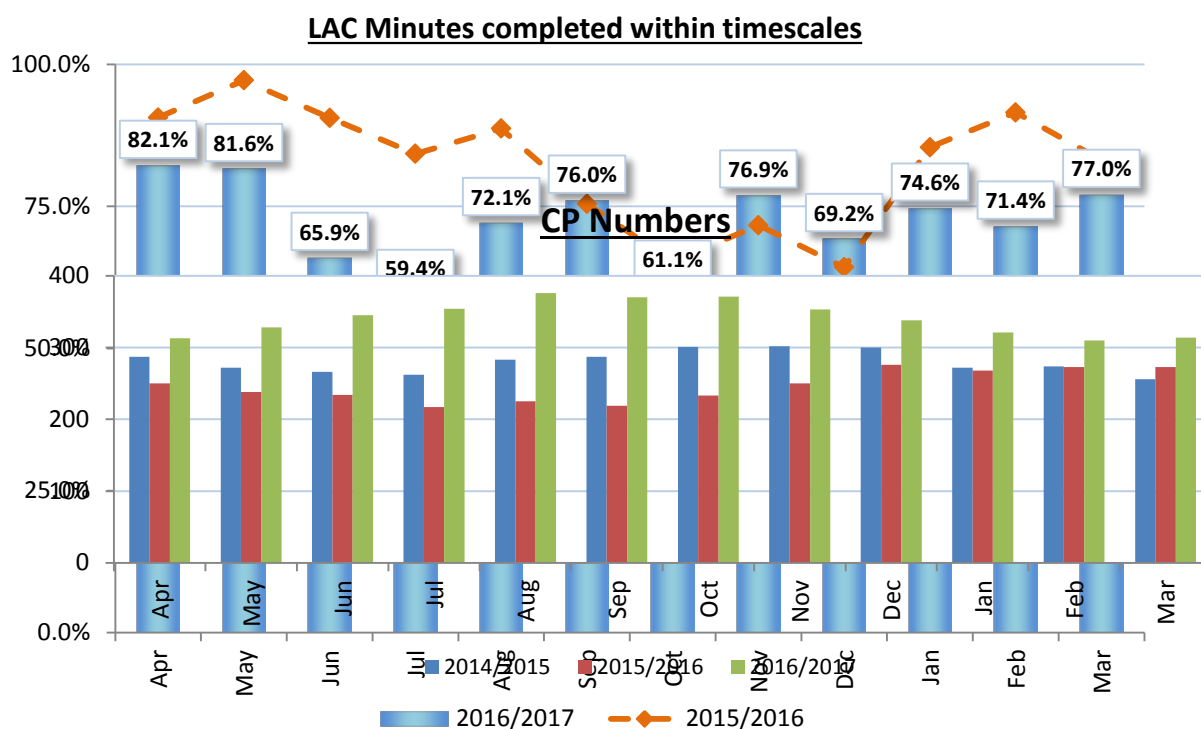


LAC Reviews held within timescale. 98.8% of Looked after children had their reviews held within timescale which is above the national average of 91%; of the 326 eligible Looked After children at the end of March 2017, there were four cases that had a review out of date, 3 of which belonged to one sibling group.

Work is ongoing to ensure that children and young people are sufficiently engaged in their LAC reviews. The number of reviews held in 2016-17 is in line with the number held during 2015-16. The chart below illustrates the distribution of reviews over the course of the year.



During April 2016 to March 2017, 72% of LAC minutes were completed within the 20 working day timescale by the IROs (736/1019 meetings). This represents a decrease in performance compared to last year's figure of 81.1%. Overall, there were 4% more meetings held during 2015 - 2016 (1061).



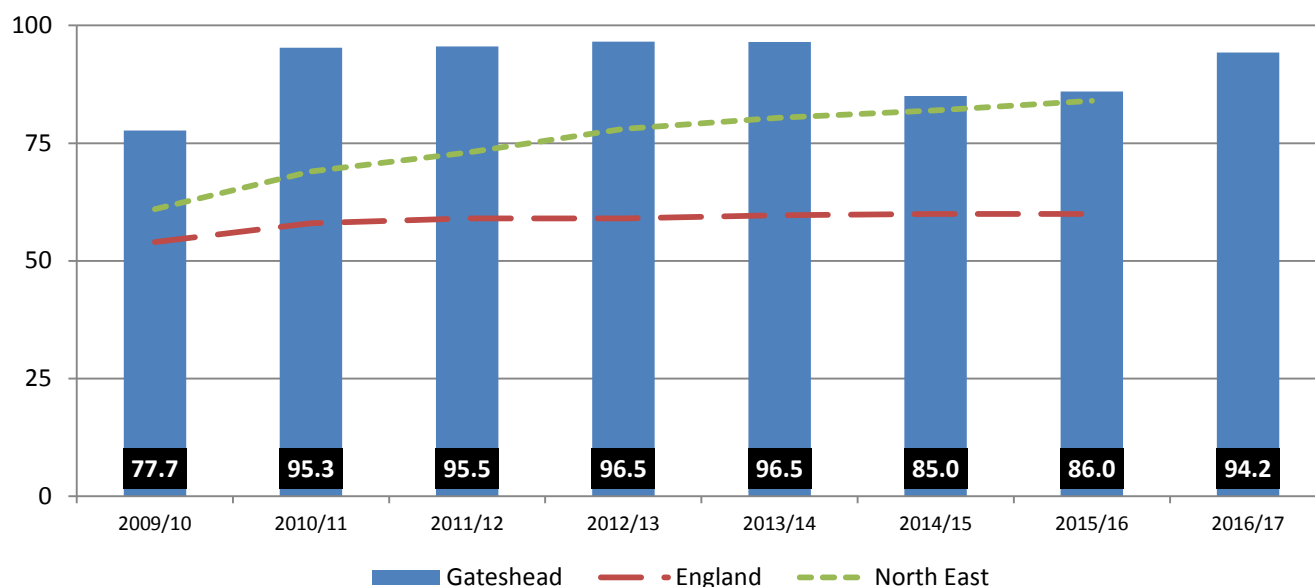
During the year despite the relatively stable headline figure for looked after children, the SCU has seen the impact of increasing child protection activity and increasing complexity of families coming into the child protection conference process. The chart below shows the number of children who were subject to a child protection plan at the end of each month for the last three years, and whilst this figure has decreased to 314 at the end of March 2017, this figure is still 15% higher than the March 2016 figure of 273.

During the period, 455 initial child protection conferences were held and 397 children became subject to a child protection plan. These are much higher than in 2015-16, when there were 394 initial child protection conferences and 338 children became subject to a child protection plan.

Rates per 10,000 are used as a method of benchmarking local authorities CPP and LAC numbers against each other, using a more comparable method than simply comparing actual numbers. Figures are expressed as a ratio and are calculated by dividing the local authorities' actual numbers by its total 0-17 child population estimate, sourced from the Office of National Statistics (ONS).

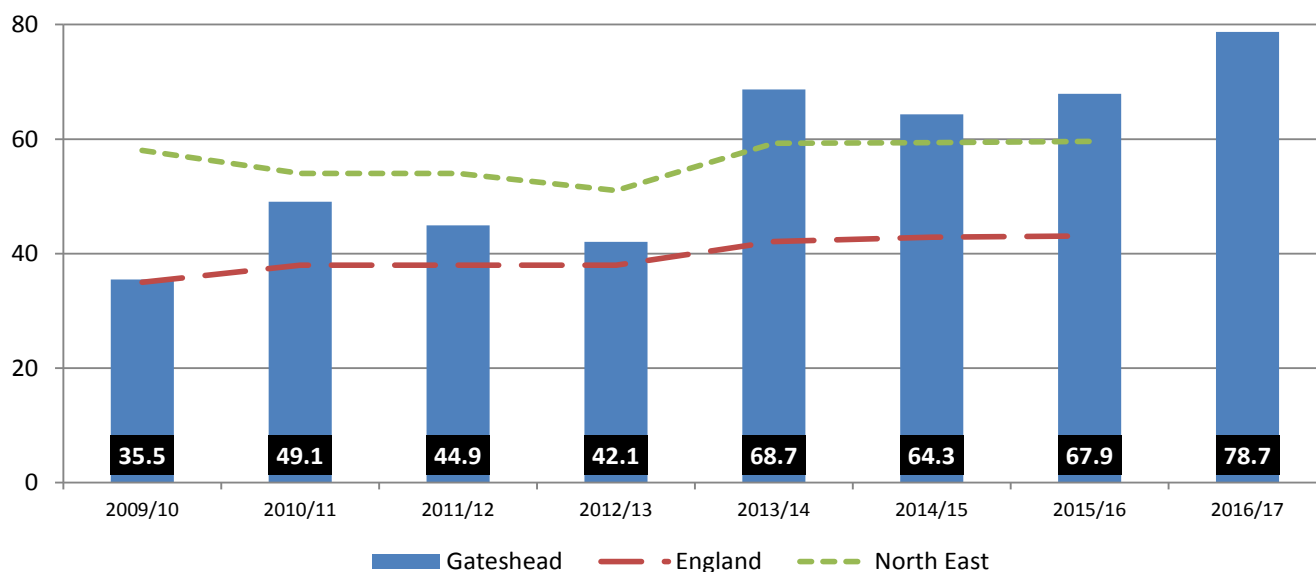
The 2 charts which follow benchmark Gateshead's rates per 10,000 of children subject to a CPP and rates per 10,000 of LAC, against average rates for comparator groups of North East authorities and England as a whole.

Looked After Children numbers per 10,000



The chart above shows Gateshead has historically had higher numbers of looked after children than the regional and national average. The gap between Gateshead and the national average remains significant, and in the past year Gateshead's looked after population has once again risen above the regional average for the North East.

Child Protection Plan numbers per 10,000

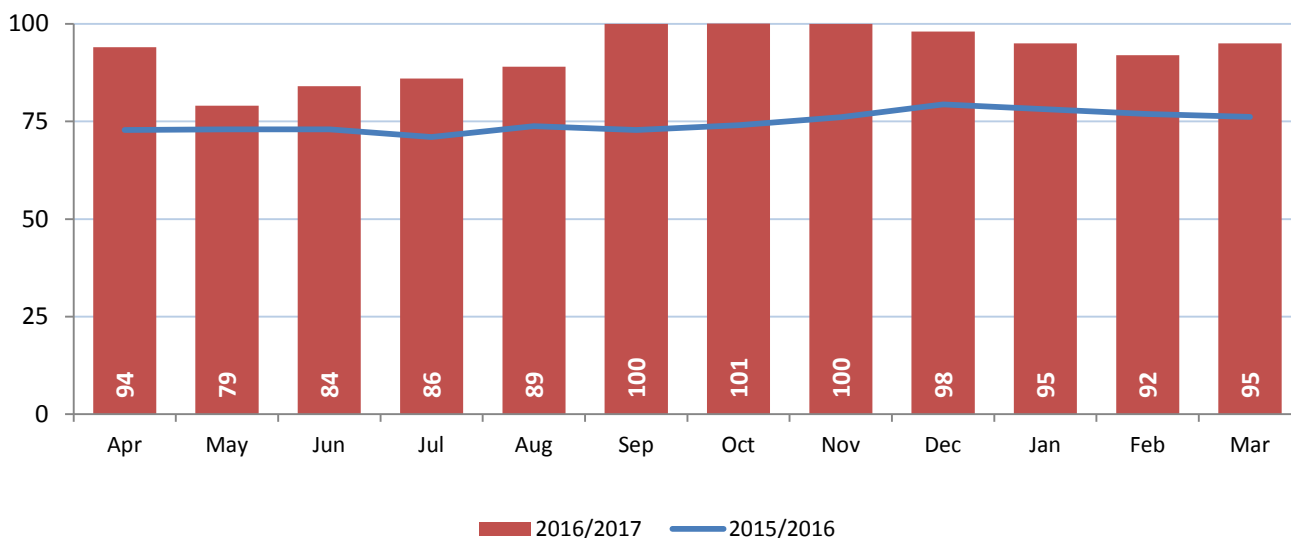


The chart above shows that for the last three years Gateshead has had higher than average rates for child protection and is notably higher than the England average with the gap continuing to widen during the last year.

Caseload

The IRO Handbook suggests that an IRO caseload should be between 50 to 70 Looked after Children. This represents good practice, and ensures the delivery of the full range of functions which are set out in the handbook and the provision of a quality service. There were 7.1 FTE IROs in the unit at the end of March 2017. The average number of LAC cases per IRO at the end of March 2017 was 52. The number of CP cases per IRO at the end of March 2017 was 43 CP per IRO. This equates to 95 LAC/CP cases per IRO. This is higher than the same time last year, when there was an average caseload of 87 per IRO. As mentioned previously steps are currently being taken to address capacity issues with a full review of the SCU to include staffing, caseloads and salary.

Average IRO Caseload (LAC & CP cases only)



The size of caseload alone does not indicate the overall workload for each individual IRO as individual roles and responsibilities vary within the team as described throughout this report, including training, Private Fostering, Complex Abuse meetings, Secure Reviews, ICS / Carefirst developments, together with input into audits and case reviews.

Regulation 44 Visits

The DfE amendments to the Children's Homes Regulations January 2014, which came into force from 1 April 2014, no longer allow for IROs who are managed within the Local Authorities Directorate that carries out the social services functions relating to children to undertake Regulation 44 visits in its own children's homes.

From 1 April 2014 reciprocal arrangements were put in place with Newcastle City Council. However this arrangement ended in October 2016 and Gateshead no longer undertake any Regulation 44's in Newcastle.

Timely distribution of IRO reports

The number of LAC Chairs' Reports being distributed within timescale remains challenging. By the end of March 2017, of 1019 reports required, 736 were produced within timescales (72%). Last year this figure stood at 81.1%.

Inclusion of Personal Educational Plans (PEPS) in Care Planning

Promoting the Educational Achievement of Looked after Children is a key priority for IROs. All looked after children must have a care plan, of which the PEP is an integral part.

The IRO should ensure that:

- The PEP's effectiveness is scrutinised in sufficient detail as part of the statutory review and at other times if necessary.
- Where a child has special educational needs, the IRO should ensure that the PEP review is linked with any review of those needs.
- The IRO should raise any unresolved concerns about a child's PEP or education provision with social workers and the Virtual School Head. However, some PEPs continue not to be updated/completed, which continues to be challenged by IROs with members of the care team.

The majority of children and young people who are LAC remain in their current schools when accommodated. This promotes improved educational outcomes as well as placement stability.

Inclusion of Health Assessments in Care Planning

The health plan or report from the most recent health assessment should be provided to the IRO at least three working days before the LAC review. Depending on the age and understanding of the child, the IRO may decide it is appropriate to discuss with the child whether s/he is happy for this information to be shared at the review.

The IRO will ensure consideration is given at the review to both the physical and emotional health of the child, including an update on any significant health issues or ongoing treatment. The IRO must be satisfied that any actions identified in the health plan are being implemented within an agreed timescale that will meet the needs of the child. In addition, the IRO will monitor with the child /young person and his/her carer when dental checks and optician appointments have taken place.

The number of children who have been looked after for 12 months or more has decreased for the second year in a row. There were 231 in 2014/15 and 226 in 2015-16. Data checks are still awaited to confirm the number of Looked After Children who have up to date health assessments who have up to date health assessments. (Currently being carried out prior to year-end returns).

From February 2017 a joint qualitative audit has been undertaken with the health services for Looked After Children to consider the detail of health assessments and information presented to LAC reviews. The results of this audit are anticipated within the following six months.

Engagement of Children and Young People in their Reviews

The 326 open LAC cases at the end of March 2017 accounted for 730 LAC reviews undertaken during the year. 68 children were under 4 years old. 224 children attended their reviews and were able to express their views directly. For the remaining children and young people who were not present at their LAC reviews, they gave their views indirectly, either through consultation forms or an 'advocate'. Advocates speaking for children have continued to include family members, trusted teachers or carers. Not all children choose to use a formal advocate.

In most cases IROs have offered children and young people a discussion in private prior to their review, subject to age and understanding. A formal pre-meeting has not taken place in some cases, for example, where the young person chooses not to meet his/her IRO prior to the review because his/her placement remains stable, there have been no significant changes planned for the foreseeable future and the IRO and child/young person have already established a relationship or a young person chooses not to talk to his/her IRO.

In 2015-16, out of 724 reviews held, children attended 274 reviews (38%); this decreased to 31% in 2016-17, when out of 730 reviews held, children attended 224 reviews.

Special efforts are required to accommodate the individual needs of Disabled children and young people in their LAC reviews. Parents, residential care staff, the involvement worker and Children with Disability Team members all work hard to ensure that the views of Disabled children and young people are known and reflected in the reviews.

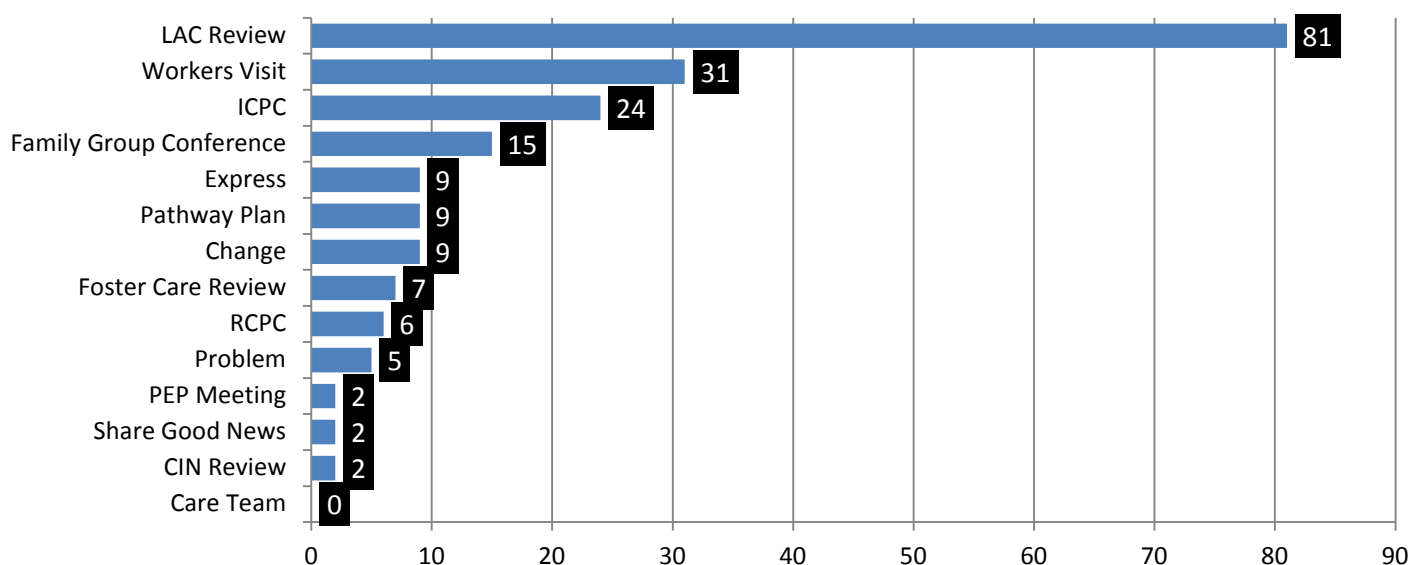
The reviews are intended to be participative, providing an opportunity particularly for the child/young person to contribute, according to age and understanding. They are also intended for the participation of parents, carers and others involved in implementing the child/young person's care plan and in planning for the future.

The Senior Clerk who has responsibility for arranging LAC reviews ensures a letter is sent to the child/young person informing him/her of the name of his/her IRO. In addition, IROs give each child at his/her LAC review a card, which contains their contact details and how to obtain an advocate or independent visitor, if identified to be appropriate.

In September 2015 Gateshead introduced MOMO – Mind Of My Own. MOMO (an app), is a modern and award winning way to engage with young people. It makes it easier for them to express their views and to understand what they are saying. The app gives children in care the confidence and the ability to express their needs and to send their statements with one click. This makes it easier for them to communicate with the IRO when they need help or want to tell the IRO about a problem. Since April 2016, 202 reports overall have been provided from young people through MOMO with 81 reports feeding into LAC meetings. This is a large and successful increase on the previous figures of 54 MOMO reports being used to inform LAC reviews between September 2015 and April 2016, indicating that young people are becoming more familiar with its use and enjoying this as a different format to share their wishes and feelings.

Children's Views

Mind of My Own April 2016 - March 2017



Management Oversight and Dispute Resolution Process

Advocacy

The SCU is committed to promoting independent advocacy for children and young people. Gateshead Borough Council continues to have a contract with Action for Children which provides an independent and confidential service. The unit has a responsibility in ensuring that children and young people who are subject to Child Protection Plans and those looked after are aware of the Advocacy Service and how to access it. All children and young people who become looked after are provided with details of the role of advocates, how they can provide support and how they can be accessed.

The IROs work closely with the Children's Rights Officer and the Inclusion Officer to ensure the voice of the child is heard and to offer an advocacy role within the LAC process.

Placement stability

During the period of April 2016 to March 2017 there were 22 Looked after children (LAC) who have had 3 or more placements. The total number of LAC at the end of the period was 377 (7.6%). At the same time last year there were 26 out of 344 Looked After Children who had 3 or more placements (7.6%).

During the period of April 2016 to March 2017, 103 children have been in their placement for at least 2 years out of the 116 children who have been looked after for 2 and a half years or more (88.8%). At the same time last year there were 104 out of 121 (86%). Placement stability therefore remains good.

Care Leavers

There were 151 care leavers who we are in touch with who turned 17, 18, 19, 20 or 21 during 2016-17 and there are 144 who were in suitable accommodation. There are 5 young people in custody, 1 young person is in hospital sectioned under the Mental Health Act and 1 young person is temporarily staying between family and friends.

There are 71 care leavers in some form of education, employment or training (EET), 11 are not in EET due to parenting commitments and 14 due to illness or disabilities, the remaining cases are due to other circumstances.

Dispute Resolution Process

Gateshead, as a Local Authority is accountable for all children and young people in their care and needs to ensure that timely decisions based on clear assessments of their needs have been completed, and drift has been avoided.

The Dispute Resolution Procedure ensures any issues of practice and standards identified by the IROs are resolved. It identifies the issues and standards, which the IRO will bring to the attention of staff and managers. It identifies the level of management that the issues will be raised with initially and the different stages thereafter. The protocol acts as a check and balance of the tasks that need to be done.

Where all other methods of resolving a problem have proved unsuccessful, the IRO should use his/her power to refer a case to CAFCASS so that legal proceedings can be brought – this may be for further family proceedings (e.g. for discharge of a Care Order for contact), a freestanding application under the Human Rights Act or an application for judicial review. While the types of situations which lead to such a referral are not defined, it is anticipated that they will involve significant failure to meet a child's needs.

Gateshead's IROs have not had to refer any cases to CAFCASS as issues have been resolved locally with senior managers. However, there is a clear dispute resolution procedure in place should this be necessary, which is evidenced by the completion of alert forms on Carefirst. IROs also have access to independent legal advice if it is required.

During this reporting period, there have been no recorded reasons to progress to a Dispute Resolution Process with senior managers.

During this period we have established a IRO, Social Care Management Interface process to strengthen the interface between the IRO Service and Children and Families Social Care considering how we can work together collaboratively, challenge robustly and maintain professional relationships. It is anticipated that Team Managers and IRO's will meet on a quarterly basis to discuss any arising issues, patterns and themes.

IROs have positive professional relationships with the Safeguarding and Care Planning and LAC teams. As a result where issues have arisen, informal discussions have taken place between the IRO, social worker and their team manager to resolve issues on a daily basis. Examples of these include:

- Social Worker being challenged to change contact times so as not to impinge on the activities undertaken by a young person. A referral for an advocate was also made to ensure the voice of this young person could be heard and continue to be heard.
- Quality of reports presented to meetings is addressed with Team Managers- following the challenge further work was identified to complete the reports satisfactorily.
- Reports not being presented in a timely manner prior to meetings by workers.
- The care planning for one young person was challenged with the successful outcome that his foster placement was held 'open' for him should a transition plan to residential care not be successful. He has since returned to this foster placement ensuring continuity.
- Where there have been disagreements between young people and their social workers, the use of advocates has been actively sought.

IROs have continued to highlight examples of good practice which include:

- A number of examples of Social Workers from the Safeguarding teams who clearly knew the family they were working with and the issues they faced very well and were confident to challenge parents in conference appropriately, openly and honestly.
- Social workers' reports and updated care plans completed within time scale and of a high standard.
- Ensuring the voice of the child is heard.
- Updating and sharing information with the allocated IRO in order to plan effective, timely review meetings.

An area for improvement in relation to Looked after Children is to improve the function of the recording system so that it is able to effectively describe the child's journey through care. IROs have made improvements in relation to leaving their footprint on the child's file in terms of their lived experiences, wishes and views however it is recognized that there remains further work to complete in this respect.

IROs are aware that they have individual responsibility for the quality of their practice. They do not work in isolation and a supportive culture has been created in the Safeguarding Children Unit which encourages them to operate effectively. They regularly discuss difficult cases with their colleagues, the Principal IRO, the Service Director and the Service Manager Looked after Children. The Service Manager for Children's Commissioning and Performance has attended team meetings to drive forward improvements in performance.

Impact of the Service

A key part of the role for IROs is developing trusting relationships with the children for whom they are

reviewing officers. The SCU works hard to maintain the stability of those relationships for our children and young people to ensure that IROs can be genuine advocates for them, ensuring that the decisions made during the care planning process are made in children's best interests.

Case Studies

Case Study 1

TC is a 14 year old Looked After Child with physical and learning disabilities. He has no speech. TC has been living with the same foster carer and has had the same IRO for many years. After a session of conductive education with a voluntary organisation TC was very distressed and subsequently taken to hospital as he appeared to be in pain from his right leg. At the time his carers believed that therapy had been applied to his hip area and no concerns were raised about this during the medical examination. It was only later that it became clear that there was swelling to TC's ankle and his physiotherapist diagnosed ligament damage. The issue of making a compensation claim on TC's behalf was raised in a LAC review. There were then a number of changes in social work staff and the issue was 'lost' between Looked After reviews. The IRO felt unhappy that this had not been properly investigated or explained and requested that each new Social Worker follow this up. Discussions also took place with successive Team Managers and assurances were given that action would be taken. TC subsequently had a number of operations to his leg and hip for long-standing issues and in the context of these orthopedic examinations it was established that there was permanent damage to TC's foot. The IRO met with Legal Services and the Social Worker to request that as the corporate parents for TC, the Local Authority needed to instruct a solicitor for TC to advocate on his behalf and make a compensation claim.

Case Study 2

AM is a young man with complex, challenging behavior. He had a number of foster placements where he regularly absconded before settling with his current carer with whom he appeared to make a positive attachment. However he refused to engage in more than 2 days of education provision. A plan was made by the Local Authority to move AM into a residential placement where he could receive full time education and therapeutic intervention. AM however was extremely reluctant to move. The IRO could see the residential placement would, on paper, meet his needs, however she had reservations about whether AM would engage. The Children's Rights Officer was asked to visit AM to ensure his wishes and views were taken into account within the planning. The IRO could see that the Local Authority were acting in AM's best interests however felt that the plan would not be achievable given AM's resistance. The IRO therefore requested a robust contingency plan be put in place which included his foster placement being held for one month until the Care team could be satisfied he was settled. She also requested that alternative education provision be explored. AM moved to the residential placement but returned to his foster carer on abscond after several days and refused to return to the unit. He now remains with his foster carer and will be supported to engage with alternative education provision on an additional 3 days.

Case Study 3

Members of One Voice were invited to participate in the interview process for the appointment of new IRO's which they did wholeheartedly and with much enthusiasm. These young people were noted to be extremely astute and ensured that the right people for the posts were appointed.

The Principal IRO also discussed Looked After Review meetings with these young people and asked for their feedback in terms of what they valued from their IRO's and their meetings. Comments included 'I like how he is honest with me, even if I'm not going to like what he is saying, he will tell me how it is, straight.' The young people valued being listened to 'She always makes a point of seeing me on my own, just in case there's something bothering me.' 'She asks me what I want to talk about at my meeting'. They also valued having the same IRO as a consistent person; someone who knew their history.

Case Study 4

Family B – 3 children aged 5, 9 and 11 years. The 11 year old boy has a diagnosis of autistic spectrum disorder and was placed with his 9 year old sister. His 5 year old brother was placed in a separate foster placement. All 3 children were in foster care awaiting the conclusion of care proceedings. Parenting assessments were found to be negative and no rehabilitation to parents care was recommended. A maternal aunt from Scotland came forward, fairly late in proceedings and wished to be assessed for the long term care of the children. She demonstrated much insight into the needs of the children but had 3 young children herself and worked full time maintaining a three bedroom house. The Local Authority felt that she was able to meet the needs of her nephews and niece and planned this as a long term placement for all 3 children under Special Guardianship Orders. The IRO, on learning of this plan, had serious concerns regarding the feasibility of this as a long term option citing the complex and challenging behavior of the eldest child who disliked change, the ongoing commitments of Aunt's own family and work and the positive attachments of the children to their foster carers. The IRO discussed her concerns with the Children's Guardian within the Care proceedings who shared her worries. The IRO sought independent legal advice and was asked to write a statement for Court to outline her thoughts in this respect. After lengthy discussion with Senior Managers it was agreed that it would not be in the older children's best interests to move to live with their maternal aunt. As such the Care Plan was changed to a plan for long term foster care for the 9 year and 11 year old whilst the youngest child was successfully integrated into maternal aunt's family.

Planned Developments and Key Priorities for 2017-1018

Completion of the SCU Review

- To ensure the unit meets the continuing demands and challenges placed upon it and it is compliant with government legislation and guidance, providing a robust service for our most vulnerable children.

Effectiveness of IRO Role:

- To develop a systematic way of collecting and collating evidence of the effectiveness of the IRO role, including oversight of cases, leading to robust plans and avoidance of unnecessary delay.
- IRO challenge, advice and support to operational Social Work teams is appropriately recorded and themes captured.
- To evidence the good quality practice of IRO's and to identify areas for development thereby driving good practice and improvements.

- To clarify and streamline the Dispute Resolution Process ensuring challenge is captured, recorded and evidenced appropriately.

Training and Development and Learning:

- Ensuring SCU staff continuously improve and develop, and use an evidenced based approach to their work.
- Ensuring the SCUs work informs and is informed by strategic plans and relevant operational groups and processes – enabling staff to contribute and respond to the wider agenda.
- Ensuring that IROs play an active role in the development of the new planning frameworks for LAC and CP plans and are represented at all workshop events.

Appendix 1

GATESHEAD IRO PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK Figures are as 31.3.2017 unless otherwise specified

No.	Performance measure	April-March 2015-2016	% April-March 2015-2016	April-March 2016-2017	% April-March 2016-2017	Progress since last year	RAG rating	Commentary
1	Percentage of child protection cases which were reviewed within required timescales	176/176	100.0%	242/242	100.0%	➡	Green	Of the 242 children who have required reviews in between April and March 2017, who have been CP for at least three months and are currently CP, all have received their reviews within timescale.
2	Looked after children cases which were reviewed within required timescales	316/319	99.1%	322/326	98.8%	➡	Green	98.8% of Looked after children had their reviews held within timescale which is above the national average of 91%; of the 326 eligible Looked After children at the end of March 2017, there were four cases that had a review out of date, 3 of which belonged to sibling group.
3	% of IRO's appointed within 5 days of child becoming LAC (must be appointed prior to the first review)	196/219	89.5%	151/201	75.1%	⬇	Yellow	Of the 201 children who have become LAC in the last 12 months, 151 were assigned an IRO within 5 working days (75.1%).
4	% of LAC review minutes completed within 15 days	861/1061	81.1%	751/1019	72.2%	⬇	Yellow	During April 2016 to March 2017, 72.2% of minutes were completed within the 20 working day timescale by the IROs (736/1019 Meetings). This represents a decrease in performance compared to 2015-2016.
5	% of children and young people looked after for 3 years or less who have the same IRO throughout	154/195	79.0%	145/184	81.0%	⬆	Yellow	145 out of 184 LAC who have been looked after for three years or less have had the same IRO as a meeting chair in 79% of their reviews.

No.	Performance measure	April- March 2014-2015	% April- March 2014-2015	April- March 2015-2016	% April- March 2015-2016	Progress since last year	RAG rating	Commentary
6	Proportion of ICPCs held within 15 days of S47 starting	393/394	99.7%	447/455	98.2%	➡		8 ICPCs were held out of timescale between April 2016 and March 2017. There has been a 15% increase in the number of ICPCs held compared to last year
7	Proportion of outline CP plans distributed within 1 day of review (conferences)	477/477	100%	624/625	99.8%	➡		All but one plan was distributed within timescales.
8	Proportion of CP minutes distributed within 20 working days of conference (conferences)	642/643	99.8%	736/790	93.5%	⬇		During April 2016 to March 2017, 736 child protection minutes were distributed within the 20 working day timescale (93.5%). Although the figure is lower than last year, there has been a 23% increase in the number of conferences held (790 compared to 643 last year). Consistent weekly monitoring and supervision of these reports has ensured high performance in this area.
9	LAC/CP cases with an assigned IRO	LAC 335/335 CP 265/265 LAC/CP 8/8	100% 100% 100%	LAC 357/357 CP 295/295 LAC/CP 19/19	100% 100% 100%	➡ ➡ ➡		All cases had an IRO allocated on 31/03/2017



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Gateshead Child Protection Conference Chairs'

Annual Report 2016-2017

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Purpose of the Report

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the work, performance and achievements of the IRO function for the period 1 April 2016 to 31 March 2017. This report has been prepared in accordance with Working Together 2015 and Gateshead LSCB Inter Agency Child Protection Procedures and will be reported to the Local Safeguarding Children's Board.

The report provides an overview of practice in relation to children and young people subject to CP Plans, highlighting the progress made during 2016 to 2017 in strengthening the IRO/CPC Chair's role within Gateshead. Whilst acknowledging the challenges faced by the service and recognising the areas for development, the report also seeks to celebrate achievements and successes in improving outcomes for children and young people subject to CP Plans.

Governing Legislation

The main legislation and regulations that govern and support professionals to safeguard children and hence surround the work of the IRO are as follows:

- Children Act 1989
- Children Act 2004
- Human Rights Act 1998
- Data Protection Act 1998
- Children and Young Person's Act 1933
- The Protection of Children Act 1999
- Adoption and Children Act 2002
- The Criminal Justice Act 1998
- Sexual Offences Act 2003
- Protection From Harassment Act 1997
- Education Reform Act 1988
- Education Act 2002
- UN Convention of the Rights of the Child 1989
- Working Together 2015

Priority areas identified in 2015/16 for improvement and action during reporting period 2016/17

Key priorities

Effectiveness of Chair's role

- Develop quality assurance role of chairs.

Update: An 'interface meeting' for Team managers and IROs has been established and it is anticipated these will be held on a quarterly basis. This process aims to prove communication between all parties. It is in its early stages and will be subject to review. This will continue to be an area of focus during the forthcoming period.

- Continue to challenge practice and embed processes with external agencies to ensure timely provision in submission of reports for conference, to ensure appropriate preparation and to enable clear risk analysis to be undertaken.

Update: Chairs continue to remind and encourage Social workers and our partner agencies to provide their reports five days prior to Review Child Protection Conferences and one day prior to an Initial Child Protection Conference. This continues to be a challenge for both social workers and our partner agencies. Previous issues highlighted the lack of consistent GP reports available for conference - Current figures stand at 62.9% which is a slight decrease on last year's data which stood at 71%.

Ongoing quarterly meetings continue to be held with the relevant health representatives, to discuss any issues or concerns in relation to submission of GP Reports to conference.

Performance reports are received on a weekly basis monitoring the receipt and recording of GP/ Police reports.

In addition work is ongoing to ensure reports produced by the SCU - CP Plans and Chairs Reports -are distributed within timescales. Performance management data is monitored on a weekly basis to address any issues. 99.8% of plans were distributed within timescales and 91.7% of minutes were distributed in timescales despite a 24% increase in the number of conferences held compared to last year.

An audit has been recently undertaken over a recent 2 week period to monitor timescales in relation to the conference duration and production of Plans and Chairs reports to highlight any areas that need to be addressed.

- Use performance information effectively to highlight evidence of shortfalls within procedural requirements internally and with partner agencies.

Update: The use of performance information to improve standards and quality assure work is embedded within the unit. Performance information is used routinely to identify both good practice and any areas for improvement. Performance information is released and scrutinized on a weekly basis.

- Consider what qualitative information is collated in addition to quantitative data.

Update: This is an ongoing area of development for the unit.

- Regular reports to be produced setting out practice issues and where improvements have been made.

Update: This is an ongoing area of development for the unit.

- Ensure the chair maintains oversight of the case in between meetings and raises any issues if there is delay in progressing plans.

Update: Chairs now have regular updates and discussions with social workers and team managers regarding the progress of plans. There is a CP Chair's oversight assessment on the CareFirst system to record these discussions. This remains an area for improvement in terms of recording the Chair's oversight.

- Further use of technology to improve communication regarding conference processes.

Update: The SCU have had 2 Transfer in conferences where the use of technology has been extremely successful. One transfer conference involved a facetime link to Germany which enabled the social worker to play an active role within the meeting. It is hoped and anticipated that this work can be used further to encourage active participation in conferences by partner agencies.

Ensuring children's voices influence planning and their future

- Ensure that children and young people contribute to meetings in the most appropriate way and the child's views are evidenced.

Update: This remains an ongoing priority for the forthcoming period. Young people, of sufficient age

and understanding, are invited to attend the Child Protection Conference and a discussion will be held with the social worker regarding how best to facilitate this. Chair's now routinely query if a young person has a need for an advocate at conference and will request the relevant referral is made by the social worker; this can be included within the plan and is identified on the Chair's agenda as a 'prompt'. However, data regarding service uptake indicates that further work is required to ensure younger looked after children and children in the child protection system are accessing advocacy when required.

- Develop processes to ensure children's voices are captured and used to inform decision making.

Update: Children's and young people's understanding of the meeting, their wishes and views of the concerns raised are captured by direct work taking place by the family support workers located within the Referral and Assessment team. This is presented to the Initial Conference. It is anticipated that this will be rolled out to the Safeguarding teams to provide continuity of practice. In addition the use of MOMO, now well established in gaining and recording the views of our Looked After Children, is also increasingly being used by social workers in the field of child protection. This needs to be further developed and encouraged.

- Strengthen service user feedback –particularly in relation to the experience and views of children and young people, with a view to capturing and applying more qualitative feedback to complement the quantitative data.

Update: The SCU needs to do more to learn from service users and partner agency views. New processes will be established in 2017/18 to ensure children and families and professionals from across the partnership are able to inform how the service develops.

Training and development and Learning

- Ensuring Chairs continuously improve and develop, and use an evidenced based approach to their work.
- Ensuring the Chairs' work informs and is informed by strategic plans and relevant operational groups and processes – enabling chairs to contribute and respond to the wider agenda.
- Ensuring that Chairs play an active role in the development of the new planning frameworks for LAC and CP plans and are represented at all workshop events.

Update: Training on outcome focused Child Protection plans has been provided which all IROs and the LADO have attended. IROs have also been able to attend a number of recent training courses such as Deprivation of Liberty, MSET, Attachment and Trauma and Systemic Practice. The LADO attended the National LADO Conference in Birmingham in March 2017. The learning from this event will be taken forward through the LADO annual report.

- Through the regional IRO group there will be further opportunities to work with our colleagues across the region, sharing learning and solutions to common problems.

Professional Profile

In order to fulfil their challenging role, CPC Chairs must have an appropriate level of experience and authority. In Gateshead all CPC Chairs are qualified, registered and experienced social workers. They have extensive experience of communicating and working with children and young people and have knowledge about what contributes to good quality practice in safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children, including an understanding of the relevant legal processes.

A Child Protection conference is chaired by the CPC Chair who is responsible for ensuring:

- Parents have been given copies of reports prepared by all agencies involved (excluding the police and GPs whose report is shared at the CP Conference) at least 1 working day before an Initial Conference and 5 working days for a Review Child Protection Conference.
- They meet with parents, any advocates and family prior to conference to ensure they understand the purpose of the conference and how it will be conducted.
- The appropriate involvement of parents and children.
- The involvement of any supports is clarified.
- The conference is child focused.
- All issues/concerns are addressed and everyone has the opportunity to share information, concerns and views.
- A debate takes place which examines the findings of reports, risk assessments and analysis is encouraged.
- All options are considered and the conference reaches decisions about whether or not the child/children should/should not be subject of CP plans in a non-discriminatory way.
- The completion and sign off of CP plans within 1 working day of the conference.
- The distribution of Chairs' reports within 20 working days of the conference.

Current Staffing Structure

Responsibility for the activity and development of the Unit lies with the Service Manager for Quality Assurance, who reports to the Service Director for Health and Social Care Commissioning and Quality Assurance. There are 7.1 IRO/child protection conference Chairs plus the LADO and the IRO for Foster Carer reviews. They are supported by the Principal IRO who is responsible for the clinical supervision, support and allocation of work, the Operational Team Manager, 1 senior operational support coordinator, 6 FTE senior clerks and 1 apprentice.

The role of the Senior Clerk is to:

- Arrange, allocate and minute Child Protection Conferences, whilst completing and distributing the new child protection plan within 1 working day of the conference and to ensure the chairs' reports are completed and distributed within 20 working days of conference.
- Complete all other administrative tasks within the Safeguarding Children Unit, including logging and monitoring all missing person notifications from other authorities, whilst liaising with partner agencies, communicating daily with health colleagues, providing all the daily updates, including any changes of new or current Child Protection cases.

- Ensure a comprehensive business support function is provided for MAPPA and LADO, which includes completing and returning MAPPA requests within timescale to Probation HQ, whilst ensuring the data collection of high risk offenders is monitored and updated regularly and all electronic files of live cases are up to date with all the relevant information.
- Supporting the LADO to ensure all meetings, notifications and data is updated and monitored regularly, adhering to timescales and statutory guidelines.
- To maintain and update Carefir st, whilst monitoring performance management and providing statistical information when requested by the Service Manager.
- Key systems and procedures have been reviewed to support better practice, such as allocation meetings and induction packages, with performance being a standard agenda item at the weekly case allocation meeting.

A Senior Operational Support Co-coordinator is in place to manage the activity and performance of the Business Support staff; all the Business Support team work closely with IROs and the Service Manager.

The Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) is also located within this Unit. The post provides a monitoring and development role which involves providing support, guidance, challenge, training and raising awareness across the children's workforce in relation to the management of allegations. LADO activity is shared with the LSCB in an annual report. In addition, an electronic referral process has been introduced and a performance management framework is in the early stages of development.

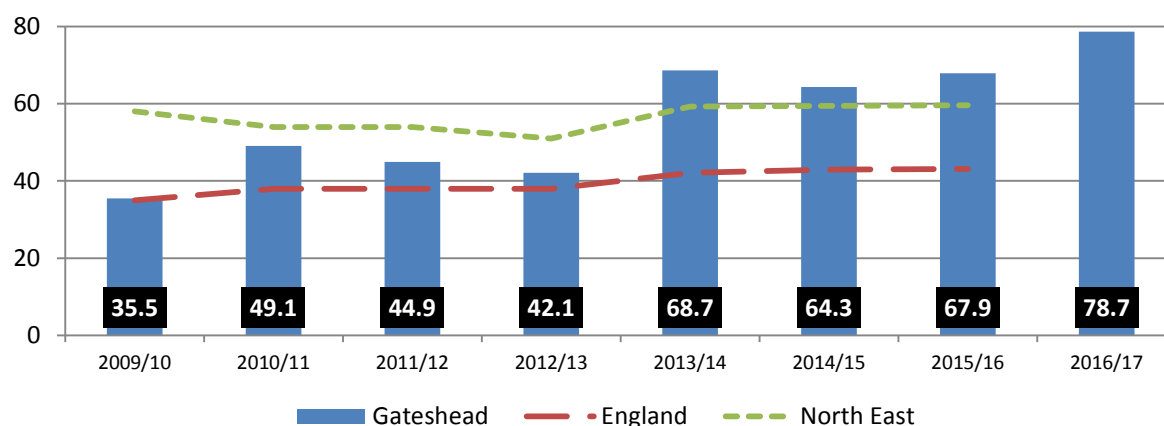
The Safeguarding Children Unit is informed about all Looked after Children and children who are the subject of Section 47 Enquiries which need to proceed to an Initial Child Protection Conference. This ensures that they are immediately allocated a designated IRO/CPC Chair, with the key aim that the allocated worker will remain consistent until the child is no-longer looked after or subject of a Child Protection Plan.

During this period the SCU has experienced a number of challenges in retaining its full complement of IRO's. In February 2017, as a result of these challenges the Interim Chief Executive requested a full review of the service to consider staffing and capacity issues in light of recent legislation and best practice in order that the SCU can more robustly meet the demands placed upon it. It is anticipated that this review will be formally completed within 2 months.

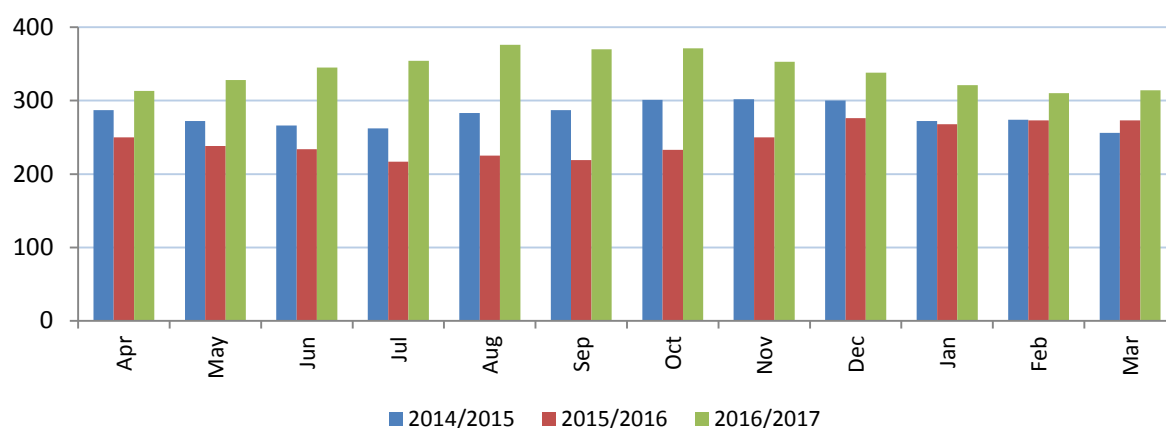
The numbers of children subject to a child protection plan have increased during the year from 273 to 314 at 31st March 2017, an increase of 15%. At a CP rate of 78.7 per 10,000 children, Gateshead remains higher than the national average rate (43.1 per 10k), the regional average rate (59.6 per 10k) and Gateshead's statistical neighbour average rate (56 per 10k) (2015/16 CIN Census).

Performance and Statistical Information

Child Protection Plan numbers per 10,000



CP Numbers



Those children who are subject to a plan as a result of neglect continue to remain the highest proportion at 67.8%, which shows an increase compared to March 2016 when it was 61.9%.

Emotional abuse as a category has also shown some movement, decreasing from 29.7% at March 2016 to 21.3% at March 2017.

The table below provides key monitoring data relating to activity within the child protection process. There has been an increase in activity across all indicators during 2016/17 compared with the previous year, with the exception of rate of referrals which is in line with those experienced in 2013/14.

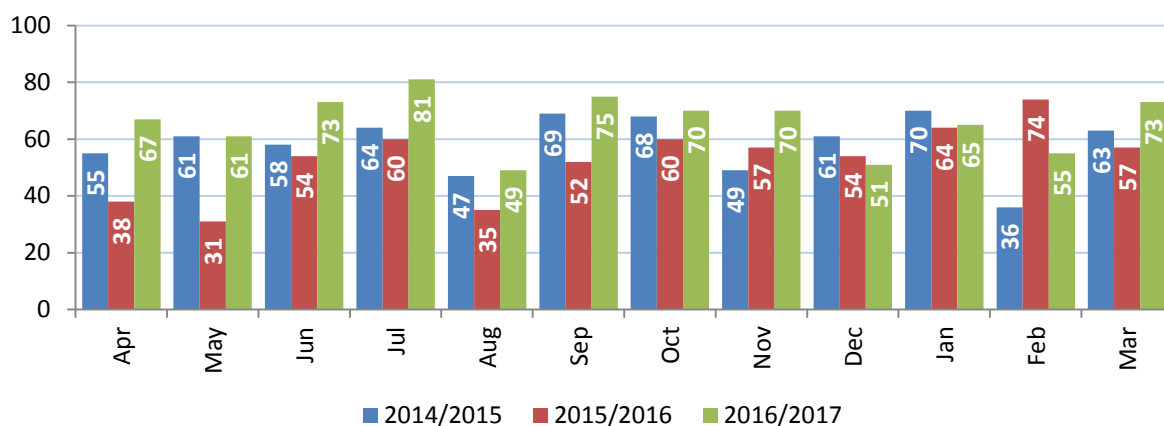
Indicator	Year end 2014/15	Year end 2015/16	Year end 2016/17	Stat neighbour	National average
Rate of referrals to children's social care	436.9 1752	518.7 2080	463.4 1849	700	532.2
Rate of section 47s	120.1 (482)	166.8 (669)	175.2 (699)	151.2	147.5
Rate of ICPC per 10,000	73 (294)	98.2 (394)	114 (455)	74.8	62.6
Rate of CPP per 10,000	64.2	68.1	78.7	56	43.1

Of the 455 Initial Child Protection Conferences held between April 2016 and March 2017, 447 have been held within 15 days of the Section 47 which preceded it (98.2%). Of the 8 conferences that occurred out of timescale, this involved 1 group of 3 siblings, 1 group of 2 siblings and 3 individuals (5 conferences/8 children). One conference was delayed due to non-contact by the family (2 children), one conference was delayed due to a family bereavement (1 child) and one conference was delayed to tie in with the review conference of siblings (1 unborn child). 2 conferences appear to have been delayed because a system process was not followed (4 children in total/1 child and a group of 3 siblings) - however, a weekly report has been set up to ensure this does not re-occur.

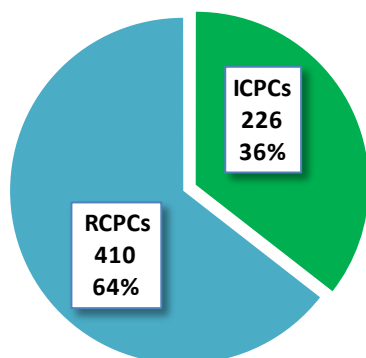
At the same point last year, 394 ICPCs had been held, all but 1 within timescales (99.7%). There has been a 13.5% increase in the number of ICPCs held compared to the same time last year.

Nationally, the figure for ICPCs completed within 15 days stands at 76.7%, regionally it stands at 82.4%, and Gateshead's statistical neighbour average stands at 71.8% (CIN Census 2015-2016)

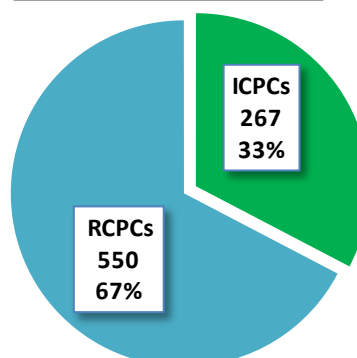
Child Protection Conferences



Child Protection Conferences 2015-2016

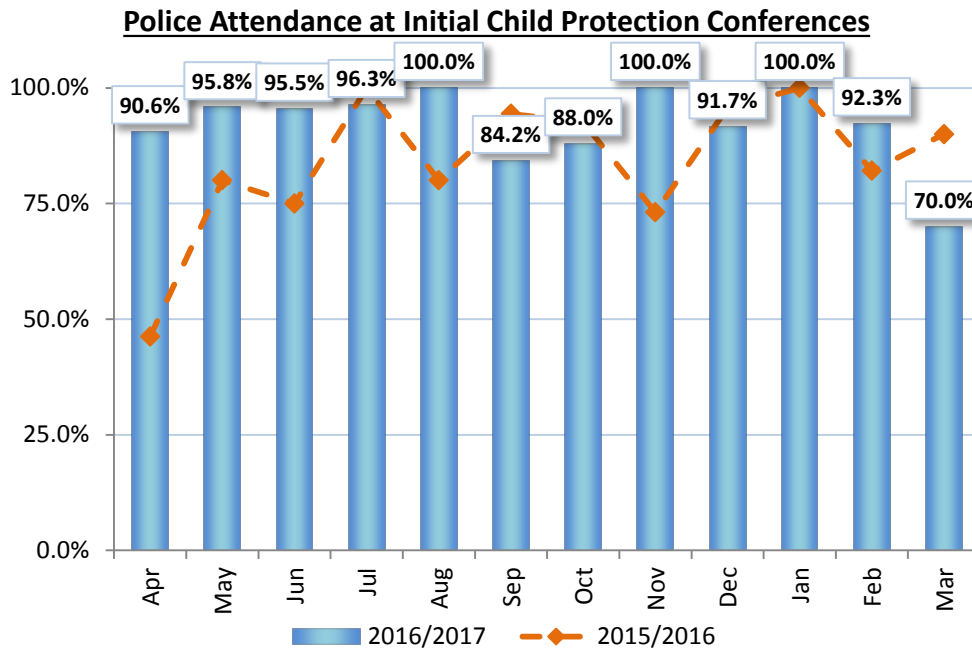


Child Protection Conferences 2016-2017

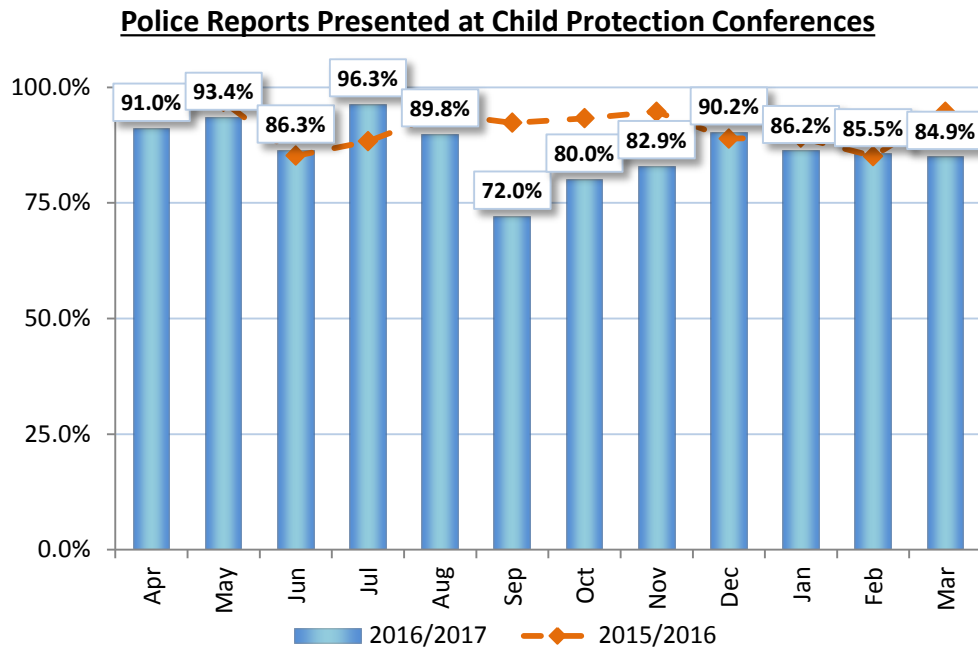


During 2016/17, 455 children were subject to an ICPC; in total, 240 conferences were held and 550 review child protection conferences.

During April 2016 to March 2017, police attended 91.7% of all initial child protection conferences held (211/240 conferences). This represents a small improvement compared to 2015-2016, when 85% of conferences were attended by the police (192/226). It should also be noted that there has been a 23% increase in the number of initial conferences taking place in 2016-2017.

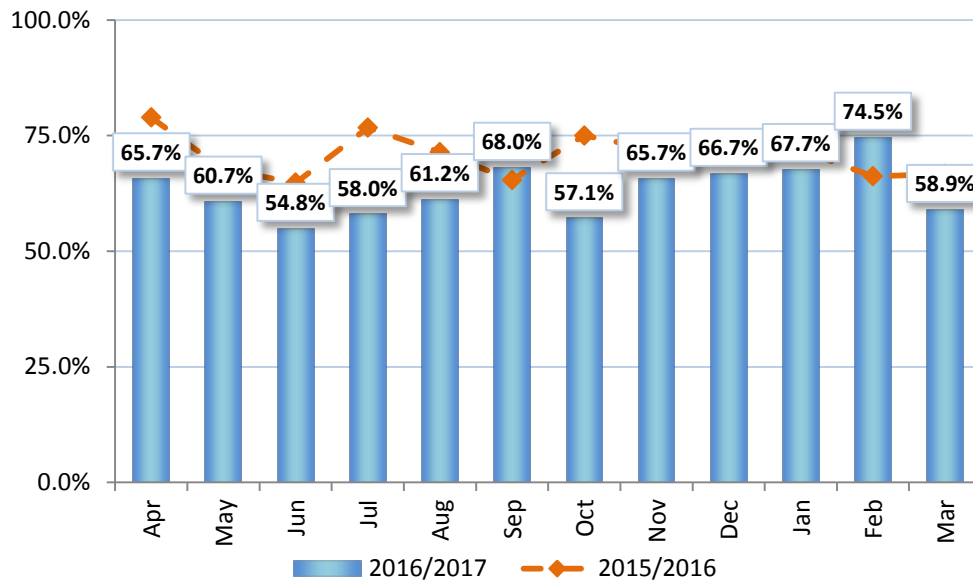


During April 2016 to March 2017, police reports were provided in 88% of all child protection conferences held (695/790 conferences). This represents a small decrease compared to police reports provided during the same period last year, when 91% of conferences had police reports provided (579/636).



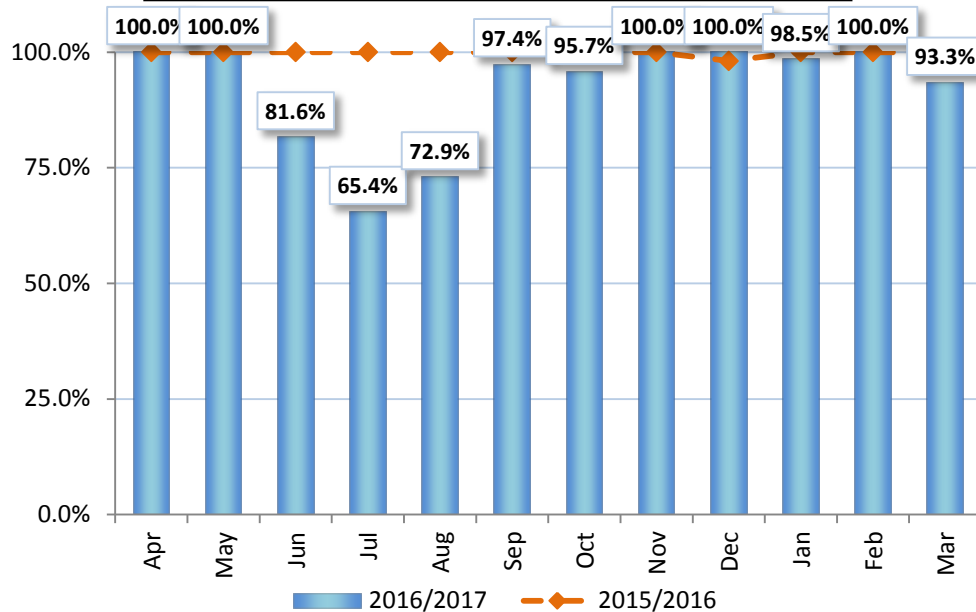
During April 2016 to March 2017, GP reports were provided in 63.5% of all child protection conferences held (502/695 conferences). This represents a decrease when compared to the same period in 2015-16, when GP reports were provided in 70.4% of all child protection conferences held (448/636 conferences).

GP Reports Presented at Child Protection Conferences

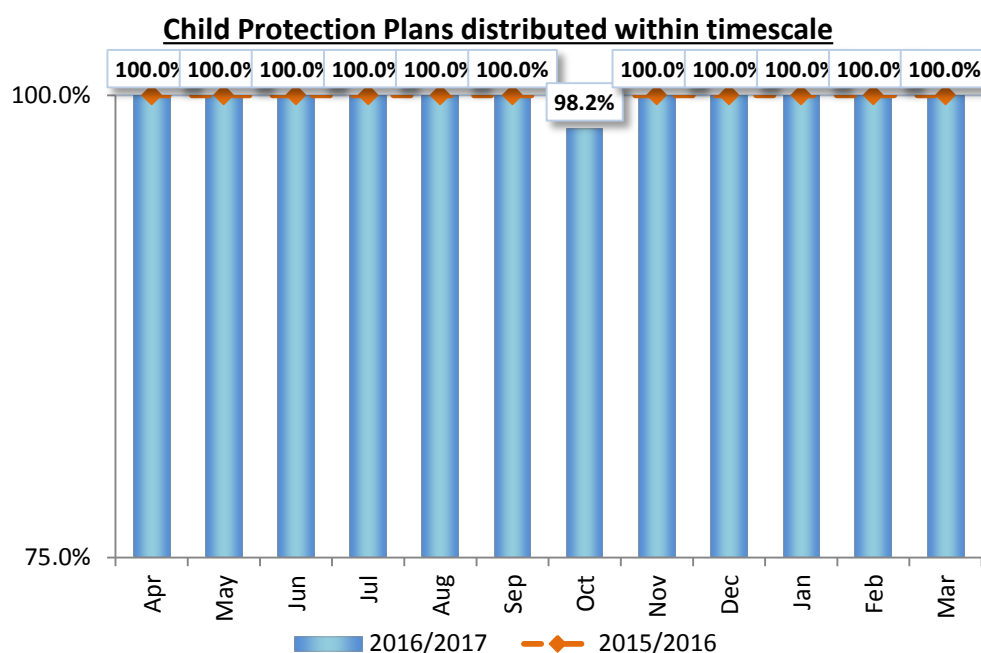


During April 2016 to March 2017, 736 child protection minutes were distributed within the 20 working day timescale (93.5%). Although the figure is lower than last year, there has been a 23% increase in the number of conferences held (790 compared to 643 last year). Consistent weekly monitoring and supervision of these reports has ensured high performance in this area.

Child Protection Minutes distributed within timescale



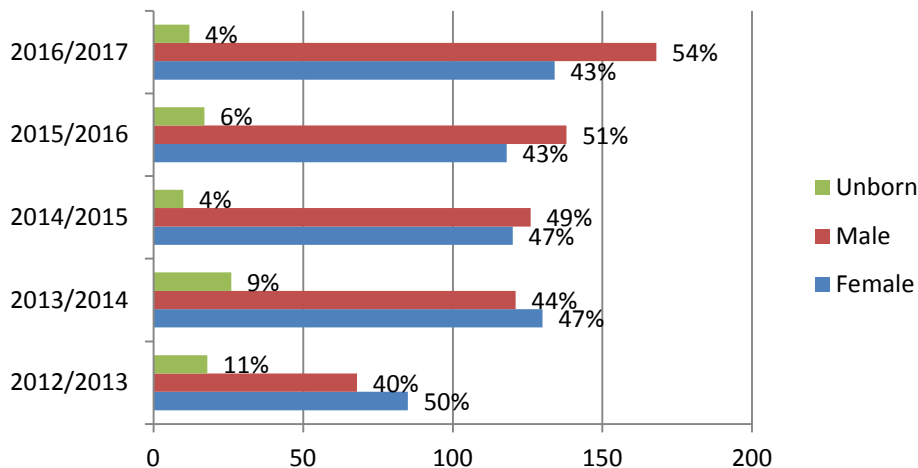
All but one child protection plan have been distributed within 24 hours during 2016-17.



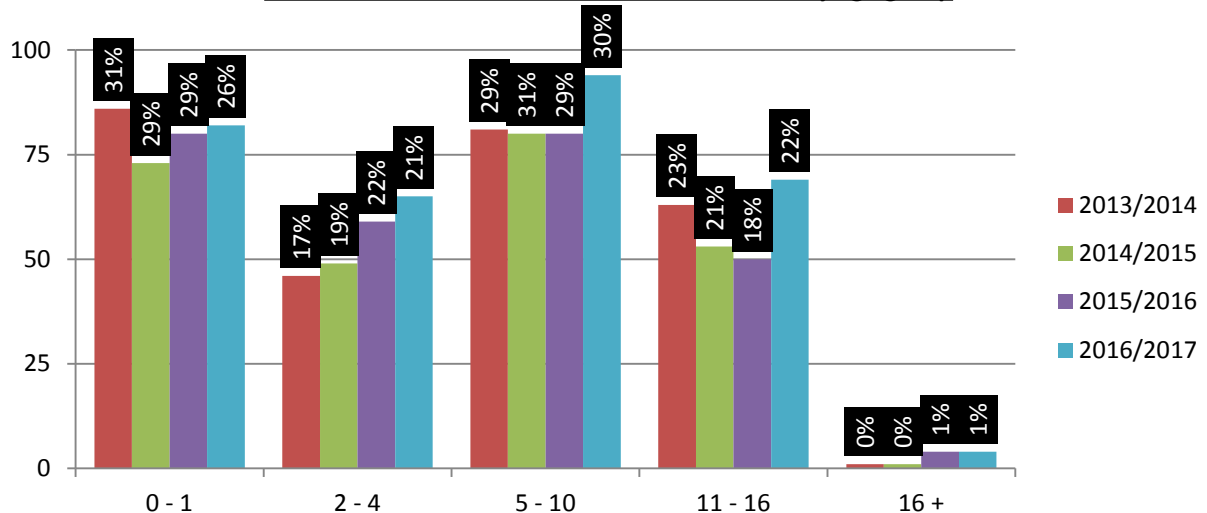
		CP in	CP Out	CP Change	CP as @
2016/2017	April	51	8	43	313
2016/2017	May	39	24	15	328
2016/2017	June	44	27	17	345
2016/2017	July	52	43	9	354
2016/2017	August	32	10	22	376
2016/2017	September	23	29	-6	370
2016/2017	October	39	38	1	371
2016/2017	November	24	42	-18	353
2016/2017	December	17	32	-15	338
2016/2017	January	25	42	-17	321
2016/2017	February	18	29	-11	310
2016/2017	March	33	29	4	314

The chart above shows overall activity in relation to child protection plans, the numbers beginning and ending during the year. In total, 750 child protection plans were either started or discontinued in 2016-17. In total, 397 child protection plans were initiated during 2016-17 compared to 338 in 2015-2016, which represents a 17.5% increase. 353 child protection plans were ended in 2016-17 compared to 321 in 2015-16 – a 10% increase in plans ending.

Children on Child Protection plans as at 31/03 by gender



Children on Child Protection Plans as at 31/03 by age group

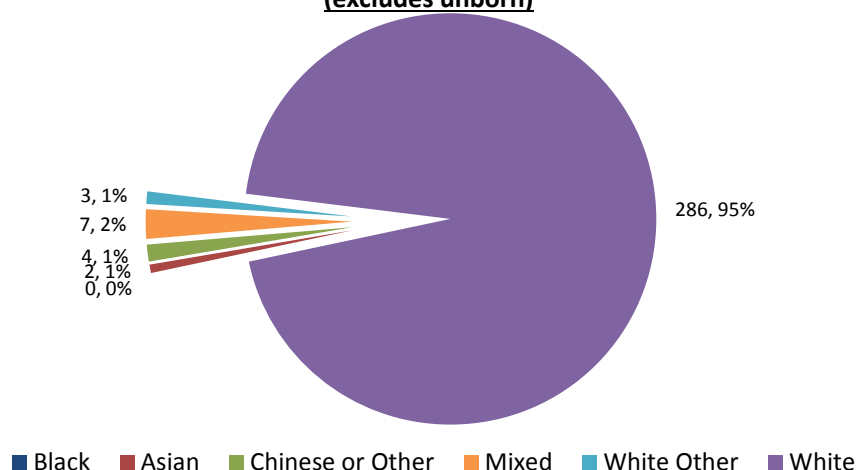


The charts above show that in the last 4 years there has been a change in the gender split with a greater proportion of males becoming subject to child protection plans in the last 3 years compared with the years prior (2012-2014). It is the younger age children who typically account for the largest proportion of child protection cases specifically in 0-1 age bracket which includes unborn babies.

Gateshead has the highest rate of unborn children subject to child protection plans, which is regarded as a good practice as it supports early planning and support for the mother-to-be, to ensure the safety of their baby once born.

In the past year, the number of 11 – 16 year olds on CP plans has increased, accounting for 22% of open CP plans at the end of March 2017.

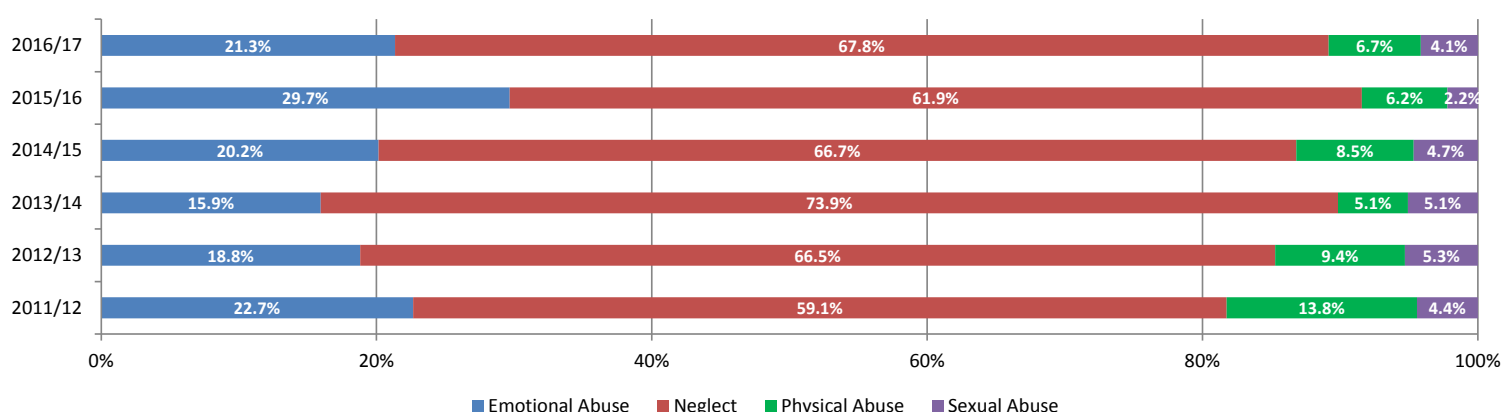
**Children on Child Protection Plans as at 31/03/2017 by ethnicity
(excludes unborn)**



In total, of born children on protection plans at the end of March 2017 (302), 286 were identified as White British (95%). The 2011 census tells us that 93% of the 0-17 population in Gateshead were identified as White British.

Of the 0-17 population in Gateshead, 38,276 children were White, 2000 were from a BME background and more specifically, 819 children were Asian. There do not appear to be communities that are over-represented within the cohort.

Child Protection Plans by Category



Categories given as the reason for the CP plan are an 'on the day' count and thus provide a snapshot picture. Those children subject to a plan as a result of neglect continue to remain the highest proportion at 67.8% - this only shows an increase since the end of March 2016 when it was 61.9%. It is, however, more in line with the percentage reported in March 2015.

Emotional abuse as a category has also shown some movement, decreasing from 29.7% at March 2016, compared to 21.3% at March 2017.

Case Example 1

At a recent ICPC for 2 teenage children, concerns were shared regarding domestic violence, physical abuse and father's mental health difficulties. Mother was noted to have resumed her relationship with the father many times over the years. The children have been the subject of plans previously and the chronology presented to conference highlighted a pattern of parental behavior which would indicate disguised compliance.

Mother presented during the conference as challenging, difficult and lacking in insight as to the concerns from professionals. The Chair felt she was trying to manipulate conference and deflect 'blame' and responsibility to others. It was difficult for the whole conference to remain focused on the needs of the children.

A child protection plan was devised which was clear and unequivocal and focused upon the needs of the children and to which mother agreed.

The Chair alerted the TM and SW to remain focused and not be swayed by mother's behavior or deflection and to be cautious of mother's ability to deflect issues and concerns. The plan recommended a detailed assessment of mother's ability to protect, taking into consideration her previous failures to do so. It also recommended direct work with the children and that they be invited to the next conference.

Feedback from other professionals commended the Chair on her ability to remain focused;

"I've attended many of these meetings over the last few decades and I wanted to say that I thought this was one of the most difficult I've been involved in.

I observed that you were placed in a situation which was very demanding, stressful and difficult for a number of reasons and I wanted to say that I thought you were an absolute ambassador for Gateshead and handled what was a very complex meeting with the highest level of professionalism".

Case Example 2

RB is a 4 year old boy who is the subject of a Child Protection plan under the category of Neglect. He was removed from mum's care one month ago by Police following a referral from a neighbour that he could be heard regularly screaming. RB was placed with Paternal Grandparents. Father agreed to his voluntary accommodation. Concerns include home conditions, unclean presentation of RB, and some challenging behavior from him towards mum including swearing. The Local Authority's plan is to return RB to the care of his mother. The Chairperson expressed her concerns in relation to this plan and the relatively quick turnaround. The Chairperson felt that the Social Worker was overly optimistic in his assessment of the attachment between mother and RB and the changes Mother said she was able to make. Following discussions with Team Managers in Safeguarding and Fostering it became apparent that Mother was not adhering to the plan of contact with RB. It was agreed that a positive assessment of mother's ability to parent was needed to evidence any changes or areas for development and a Legal Gateway meeting needed to be convened for the Local Authority to take legal advice regarding the thresholds needed to initiate Care Proceedings. In addition the Chairperson reminded the Social Worker of the need for multi- agency agreement for a child to return home from being in care. The Chairperson has remained child focused throughout this case whilst retaining a 'respectful uncertainty' with regard to the information presented by Mother. The importance of multi-agency working and adhering to procedural requirements in order to safeguard children has also been reinforced.

Annual Work Programme for 2017/18

The SCU identifies its annual priorities through a number of different sources which includes learning from audits, Serious Case Reviews, research, inspection, legislation and guidance.

The key priorities for the 2017/18 are:

1. **Effectiveness of the SCU** – achieving positive outcomes for children and young people, evaluating performance and driving up improvements in practice.
2. **Voice of the Child** – shaping individual care plans and informing service improvement.
3. **Ensuring safeguarding processes are fit for purpose** – ensuring systems, procedures and processes are effective
4. **Training and development and Learning** – so that SCU staff continuously improve and develop



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ANNUAL REPORT ON CHILDREN & FAMILIES SERVICES COMPLAINTS-COMPLIMENTS- REPRESENTATIONS

APRIL 2016 – MARCH 2017

Introduction

The Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006 sets out the procedure that Local Authorities have a responsibility to follow when a complaint is made about Children's Social Services.

Regulation 13 (3) of this Act states that all local authorities must publish an Annual Report each financial year to identify the number, detail and outcomes to all complaints received.

The information within this Annual Report fulfils Gateshead Council's obligations under this regulation and covers the period from 1 April 2016 – 31 March 2017.

The Procedure

This procedure is for all representations received from children and young people, their parents, foster carers or other qualifying adults about Gateshead Council's Children's Services.

There are three stages to the procedure:

Stage 1 - Local Resolution

This stage is investigated by operational managers. Complaints at this level are expected to be concluded within 10 working days, with an extension of further 10 working days, (with the agreement of the complainant), if necessary. The maximum time for a Stage 1 investigation is 20 working days.

Stage 2 – Investigation

Investigations at Stage 2 are conducted at arms length to the operational service complained about, with full and formal reporting to the complainant by an Adjudicating Officer, (usually at Service Director level), within 25 working days, with extension up to 65 working days if necessary.

Stage 3 – Review Panel

If there is any residual dissatisfaction with the outcome at Stage 2, the complainant can request that the issues are taken to a Review Panel, (Stage 3). Such consideration forms the end of the statutory requirement.

Publicity and Information

Information about the Complaints Process can be made available in key languages and formats. Requests for information in these formats or from customers with sight or hearing impairment are provided via the Council's Communication Team.

There is also a leaflet for children and young people receiving a service. This leaflet was designed with help from the children and young people from One Voice, the Children and the Young People's Forum. The leaflet includes a pre-paid slip that can be completed and posted back free of charge.

When young people are admitted into Local Authority care, part of the 20-day review requirements state that they are to be visited by the Council's Children's Rights Officer. The young person also receives a 'Welcome' pack', which includes information, leaflets and other guidance on how to make a complaint.

Children and young people are now able to use their smartphones or tablet computers to contact the services via Mind of My Own, (MoMo). MoMo is an app which allows the child or young person to comment on their service and if necessary, to raise dissatisfaction.

The Children's Rights Officer, Independent Visitors and Independent Reviewing Officers are important links between the child and the Complaints Manager and ensure that any issues of dissatisfaction are resolved at the earliest opportunity.

Advocacy and Special Needs

The purpose of advocacy in complaints procedures is to ensure that children and young people are given assistance when making or intending to make a complaint. Advocacy is about empowering children and young people to make sure that their rights are respected and that their views and wishes are fully considered and reflected in decision-making about their own lives. It is a legal requirement that any child or young person wishing to make a complaint must always be offered the services of an advocate.

The Independent Element

Under the complaints procedure, there is a requirement to provide Independent Persons for all Stage 2 complaints. There is currently a consortium arrangement with South Tyneside Metropolitan Borough Council and Sunderland City Council, which provides Independent People for Children Act 1989 complaints. There is also a requirement to ensure that Stage 3 Review Panels consist of three members who are fully independent of the Council.

Complaints Investigation Training

Training for Investigating Officers is undertaken on an annual basis. All investigating skills training courses are commissioned from the Local Government Ombudsman, (LGO). This ensures that investigating officers are trained to a specific standard with the focus being on swift resolution, proportionate investigations and appropriate redress. To ensure that all new Managers within Children's Services are fully able to investigate complaints, a LGO Investigating Skills Training Course took place in February 2017. 15 managers from across Children's Services and Children's Support Services attended the training.

Complaint Recording & Resolution in Children's Residential Facilities

All children's residential homes have their own "in-house" complaints process to resolve low level complaints. Residential staff work with the young person and allow them to identify themselves how their issues can be resolved to their satisfaction. Information about low level complaints is retained within the facility and is available in the event of OFSTED inspections.

Complaints and Representations Received

During 2016/17, 32 complaints were received regarding Children's Services. This is an 14% decrease on complaints received during 2015/16, (37).

The number of low level issues received also decreased. During 2016/17, 38 low level issues were received about Children's Services. This is a 32% decrease on the number received during 2015/16, (56). All of the issues received were dealt with directly by either the Team Manager of the service complained about or by the Complaints Section after prior discussion with the worker concerned.

The main theme identified from the low level issues received during 2016/17 was regarding the quality of the support given by either the individual worker or by the service themselves. In most cases, confusion about the role of a children's social worker was at the heart of the issues raised, especially misunderstandings in respect of who the social worker was allocated to.

Key Themes of Complaint

After full consideration of all Stage 1 complaints received during 2016/17, 2 key themes were identified.

1. Quality of Service

The quality of services delivered is consistently the most complained about issue. 59% (19) complaints were regarding the quality of services or support provided to either parents of children receiving a service, foster carers or the child / young person concerned.

Complaints about quality cover a number of issues and can range from low level disputes to significant concerns about the actions or decisions of the services involved.

The key theme identified from the complaints about quality was around the support provided by either the service or individual members of staff, (11). However, after considering these complaints, the lack of effective communication with family members was a key theme. If communication breaks down, parents or carers often feel that they are deliberately being ignored and as a result of this, dissatisfaction often escalates to include other areas of the social work involvement.

Effective and timely communication is key to maintaining relationships with parents or carers as this often encourages families to work with the social worker and with any plans or assessments that are developed. Good communication can also help to resolve any minor issues that may arise at the time, which means that the formal complaints procedure may not need to be invoked.

After investigation, 64% (7) of the complaints about the support offered by either individual members of staff or the service were partly upheld and 9% (1) was fully upheld. 27% (3) were not upheld.

Team Managers should always raise the importance of good communication within their own team meetings and with individual staff members. This will ensure that all are aware of their own responsibilities to maintain communication with families. It should also be reiterated that staff must share any communication difficulties with their line manager during their individual supervision sessions. Alternative ways of contact such as text messaging or emails should also be considered where possible, along with any specific communication needs of the person concerned, such as sensory problems or disability, including mental health issues.

2. Staff Issues

Since April 2015, all complaints which include areas of staff actions or behaviour are recorded under the primary category of "Staff Issues". This re-categorisation does mean that the numbers of complaints received about this area will remain a key theme of dissatisfaction. However, it is important that allegations of poor conduct or practise can be readily identified and measures put in place to minimise any reoccurrence. Therefore Children's Services ensure that any allegations about staff are always placed at the centre of any investigation.

Children's Services have a legal duty to look into all concerns raised about the welfare or safety of a child / children. The Local Authority's duty is set out within "Working Together 2015". It is understandable that this involvement is not always welcomed and because of this, relationships between social workers and families may be very challenging or difficult. It is accepted, that in some cases, families raise complaints as a way to delay any action that may be necessary.

During 2016/17, almost 41%, (13) of complaints were regarding members of staff. After investigation, 54% (7) of all complaints were not upheld and 46% (6) were partially upheld.

54% (7) of the thirteen complaints received about staff cited social work conduct as their primary issue of concern. After investigation, 57% (4) of complaints about primarily about staff conduct were found to be unjustified and 43% (3) were partially upheld.

Other concerns raised were regarding alleged breaches of confidentiality, in most cases, these were about information which may have been shared with other family members during child protection proceedings. In all cases, social workers should consider the implications of sharing information with others beforehand. However, it is agreed that appropriate information sharing is vital where it impacts on the welfare of other children or young people.

The Council have a duty to adhere to the guidance set out within the Data Protection Act 1998, so all social workers should still be mindful of sharing information with those who may not have a right to know.

Complaints about staff often include allegations of bias, especially when dealing with separated parents that are disputing contact or residency. It is very difficult to maintain good relationships with families involved in family proceedings, whether it is child protection action or private family issues. However, the complainants are often requested to raise any issues about bias or social work opinion within the court arena where possible.

All Complaints and Representations Received

Representations	2014 2015	2015 2016	2016 2017
Compliments	74	77	88
Corporate Complaints	3	4	5
Complaint related queries	64	56	38
Data Issues / Breach	5	2	1
HCPC Referrals	0	1	0
Insurance Claims	N/A	N/A	2
LGO Investigation	1	4	1
LSCB CP Unit	N/A	N/A	3
MP Referral	N/A	N/A	1
Stage 1 Complaints	45	37	32
Stage 2 Complaints	3	5	1
Review Panels	1	1	4
Total	196	187	176
Trend %	-1%	-5%	-6

Stage 1 trend	2006 2007	2007 2008	2008 2009	2009 2010	2010 2011	2011 2012	2012 2013	2013 2014	2014 2015	2015 2016	2016 2017
	22	32	18	10	19	29	36	34	45	37	32
%		45	-44	-44	90	53	24	-6	32	-18	-14

- There has been an 14% decrease in the number of Children Act Stage 1 complaints received since 2015/16.
- The number of complaint related queries received has also reduced by 32% since 2015/16. Complaint related queries are issues that must be resolved within 1 working day of receipt.
- Stage 2 investigations decreased by 80%, (1 from 5). It should be noted that the number of Stage 2 complaints received during 2015/16, (5,) was the highest number ever received by the Service. The reduction evidences the additional work that was carried out by Team and Service Managers to try and resolve residual issues after the initial investigation and response.
- No Stage 1 complaint received during 2016/17 progressed to a Stage 2 investigation. The Stage 2 complaint received had progressed from a Stage 1 complaint that was investigated during 2015/16.
- There were four Independent Review Panels during 2016/17. However, all four panels were a direct progression of the Stage 2 investigations that were carried out during 2015/16.

- The number of complaints, (32), represents 18% of all formal contacts received about Children's Services during 2016/17, (176).
- The number of formal contacts received regarding Children's Services decreased by 6% compared with the number received during 2015/16.
- During 2016/17, 50% of all Children's Services contacts were compliments.

Specific Areas of Complaint

Service Area	2014 2015		2015 2016		2016 2017	
Safeguarding, Care Planning	62.2%	28	44.44%	20	53.13%	17
Looked After Children Services	8.8%	4	13.33%	6	18.75%	6
Referral & Assessment	11.11%	5	13.33%	6	18.75%	6
Out of Hours Duty Team	2.2%	1	2.22%	1	0%	0
Children with Disabilities	8.8%	4	6.67%	3	0%	0
Fostering Team	6.6%	3	0%	0	6.25%	2
Reviewing Unit	0%	0	2.22%	1	N/A	N/A
Total		45		37		32

- 53% (17) of complaints were regarding the Safeguarding, Care Planning Teams. This was a decrease of 15%, from 2015/16.
- Almost 19% (6) of complaints were regarding the services provided by the Referral and Assessment Team. However, the number of complaints about Referral and Assessment have stayed at the same level as the number received during 2015/16, (6).
- Almost 19%, (6) of complaints were about the Looked after Children's Teams.

Main Complaint Issues	2014 2015		2015 2016		2016 2017	
Quality	100%	45	40.54%	15	59.38%	19
Staff Issues	0%	0	40.54%	15	40.63%	13
Delay	0%	0	2.70%	1	0.00%	0
Refusal of Service	0%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0
Lack of Service	0%	0	16.22%	6	0.00%	0
Total		45		37		32

- During 2016/17, the number of complaints about staff decreased by 13%. However, although this decrease is positive, the Service still ensure that any issue which is predominately about specific concerns about a worker's professional actions or behaviour will be recorded under that category.
- 54% (7) of the complaints about staff issues cited attitude or conduct as their main concern.
- After investigation, 57% (4) of these complaints were found to be unsubstantiated and 43% (3) were partly upheld.
- Where there is evidence that workers did not always follow their service's processes or procedures, the matter is addressed with the staff member concerned and appropriate measures put in place to prevent any reoccurrence. If these measures do not resolve the problem, alternatives can be considered, which can also include invoking the Council's internal employment procedures.
- Quality of Service complaints increased by 27%.
- Quality of service includes:
 - Missed or late contact visits;

- Contact visits that are cancelled at very short notice;
 - Conflicting or incorrect information by workers;
 - Quality of support from the services involved in individual cases;
 - Poor communication between the workers and family members.
- 58% (11) of the complaints about the quality of the service, related to the standard of the support provided by individual workers. In particular, complainants felt that the social worker should spend more time supporting the needs of parents rather than the child or children. Although Social Workers do try to support parents with their own issues where possible, it is important that the wellbeing of the child or children remains at the centre of all Children's Services involvement.
 - Communication problems were often cited as secondary issues within the complaints received during 2016/17. Non return of telephone calls or lack of updates about individual cases were the key issues complained about. The Social Work Teams do have administrative support who can share information with parents and carers where appropriate. However, it can be difficult for social workers, dealing with a high volume of cases, to keep individuals updated on key events themselves. This issue is regularly discussed in team meetings and during workers individual supervision sessions.

Equalities Monitoring

Gateshead Council recognises that equality monitoring of service delivery is crucial for effective planning and scrutiny of the services that it provides. This monitoring can identify which groups are using services and gauge their level of satisfaction. This information can then be used to highlight possible inequalities, investigate their underlying causes and address any unfairness or disadvantage.

- During 2016/17, there were no formal complaints from members of the BME community. Two complaint related queries were received which related to disputes regarding Section 47 reports.
- There was one complaint related queries from a member of the BME community. After consideration of the issues, there were no issues regarding racial discrimination.
- Two compliments were received from members of the BME community.

Methods of Complaint

Method of Complaint	2014 2015		2015 2016		2016 2017	
Complaint Form	6.6%	3	8.11%	3	6.25%	2
E - mail	29%	13	29.73%	11	21.88%	7
Children's LAC Leaflet / MoMo	0%	0	0.00%	0	3.13%	1
Letter	24.4%	11	32.43%	12	25.00%	8
Personal Visit	15.5%	7	8.11%	3	9.38%	3
Telephone	24.4%	11	21.62%	8	34.38%	11
Total		45		37		32

- Email and letters are the main method of complaint referral accounting for 47% (15) of complaints. This is a 35% reduction of the number received during 2015/16, (23).
- During 2016/17, 34% (11) of complaints were received by telephone. Complaints of this nature are from those who want an immediate resolution to their problem, in particular those who disagree with information within reports that they have just received.
- Complaints brought by relatives of children receiving a service accounted for 84% (27) of referrals.

Complaints and Concerns direct from Looked after Children

- Three complaints were received directly from looked after children.
- After investigation, one complaint was partially upheld and one complaint was fully upheld. The third complaint was closed after informal resolution by the service.
- Two complaints received were letters from looked after children. One complaint was via the MoMo (Mind of My Own) app.
- Five complaint related queries were also received from looked after children. All issues were resolved by the services concerned.

Timescales and Outcomes

Complaints Resolved within 20 Working Days	2014 2015	2015 2016	2016 2017
Not Resolved	22	16	17
Resolved	23	19	15

- The statutory timescales for resolution is 10 working days. This can be extended to 20 working days with the complainants' agreement.
- Six complaints were completed within 10 working days.
- Fifteen complaints were completed within 20 working days.
- Seventeen complaints were not completed within 20 working days.
- As it is a statutory duty to respond to complaints within the prescribed timescales, the Service are to consider how they can improve performance in this area.

Outcomes of all categories of complaints	2014 2015		2015 2016		2016 2017	
Outstanding	0		2		0	
Closed or withdrawn	4.4%	2	14.29%	5	3.13%	1
Not upheld	42.2%	19	34.29%	12	43.75%	14
Partially upheld	44.4%	20	40.00%	14	50.00%	16
Upheld	8.9%	4	11.43%	4	3.13%	1
Total		45		35		32

- In 2016/17, almost 44% (14), of complaints were not upheld after investigation.
- This is a 17% increase on the number of complaints that were found to be unjustified in 2015/16.
- 50% (16) of all complaints were partially upheld. Complaints that are partially upheld often include a number of varied issues. After investigation, some of the issues may be found to be justified, but other issues may show that the service / worker has acted appropriately.
- In all cases, where there has been evidence of service failure, however minimal, the complainants will receive a written apology within their response.

Stage 2 and 3 Complaints

	2014 2015	2015 2016	2016 2017
Stage 2 Complaints	3	5	1
Stage 3 Complaints	1	1	4

- One complaint was registered at Stage 2 of the Complaints Procedure.
- This is a 80% decrease from 2015/16, (5).
- The Stage 2 complaint received resulted from a Stage 1 complaint which was responded to during 2015/16.

- This means that no Stage 1 complaint received during 2016/17 progressed to Stage 2 of the procedure.
- The complaint received was regarding a number of issues, but primarily around disputes about information included within a Children in Need Assessment and the conduct of the Social Worker involved. After investigation, some elements were found to be justified. However the investigation concluded that the initial action by the Council's Referral and Assessment Team was warranted due to the nature of the referral.
- As required within the statutory complaints process, the Stage 2 complaint investigation was shadowed by an Independent Person. Independent Persons cannot be employed by the Council as they are responsible for ensuring that the complaints investigation at Stage 2 is fair and transparent.
- As Independent Persons must be external to the Council, their involvement does have a financial impact on Children's Services. During 2016/17, the costs for Independent Person fee was £854.00.
- Four complaints were considered by Independent Review Panels. Two of these complaints were from members of the same family.
- The respective Review Panel members considered the information within the Stage 2 investigations and the additional information provided by the complainants and subsequently made their recommendations. Recommendations for individual cases included;
 - Developing Section 20 information and guidance for parents;
 - Updating case files;
 - Reviewing historical information to ensure that the correct process had been followed at the time;
 - Providing apologies for any areas that had been found to be inadequate.

All improvements from Stage 2 investigations are included within this report.

Safeguarding Unit Complaints (LSCB)

During 2016/17, three complaints were received which were around the management of the Child Protection Conferences. Two issues were about the conduct of the Conference Chair. Both complaints were investigated and responded to. One of the complaints was closed after the complainant refused to engage with the complaints procedure. The other complaint was partially upheld as it was felt that information or statements had been wrongly interpreted which had caused the complainants to feel uncomfortable during the Conference.

One complaint was regarding the accuracy of the information within the Child Protection Conference minutes. This issue was investigated and found to be upheld. The service agreed to amend the minutes with the correct information.

One complaint regarding the Referral and Assessment Team and one complaint regarding the Safeguarding & Care Planning Team also included issues about the Child Protection Conference Chair.

Complaints in relation to the Data Protection Act 1998

- During 2016/17, one formal complaint was received about the Access to Records Process. The complaint was in relation to delays receiving personal records. Complaints of this nature are not responded to through the statutory procedure. However, a full investigation is still carried out and a response sent to the complainant. The response will also inform the complainant of their right to progress their complaint to the Information Commissioner should they remain dissatisfied.
- After investigation, the complaint was upheld. The complainant received a full explanation and apology for the delay. The Service also reimbursed the £10 Subject Access Fee.

Learning from Complaints

At the end of every investigation the Investigating Officer is responsible for identifying any improvements or recommendations resulting from the complaint. Changes can include policy, procedure or staff development.

Complaints about individual practice or failure to follow procedures are dealt with by reinforcement of processes and reiterating customer care standards through Service / Team meetings or individual supervision sessions. In addition to this, if it is felt that additional or refresher training, which includes the mandatory data protection training, is required for either workers or teams, this will be progressed by the relevant Team Manager.

In all cases, if it is found that an employee has deliberately acted inappropriately or maliciously, the issue will be dealt with in line with internal employment procedures. During 2016/17, no complaint about staff conduct had resulted in any formal employment action against an individual worker.

Improvements to Service:

- A Review of the internal procedures for the Child Protection Unit has taken place. The procedure now instructs Senior Clerks to verify information shared within child protection conferences in respect of family members before it is recorded within child protection minutes.
- That the Child Protection Unit use the contact information provided by family members on the attendance sheet, to check alongside the child's electronic records. This will ensure that all child protection plans and minutes are sent to the correct address to maintain confidentiality.
- The Child Protection Unit have reviewed and refreshed the Conference Agenda to include a section which prompts Senior Clerks to confirm factual information in relation to current addresses, post codes and dates of birth. It also prompts staff to confirm information in relation to any GP's that are involved with the child or significant others.
- A number of recommendations were made in respect of a complaint from a looked after child. Although these were specific to the child's case, it did highlight that social workers should ensure that they listen to the views of children / young people and, where necessary, assist them to formally raise concerns.
- That workers are sensitive of the words they use when speaking to families of children receiving a service. They should also understand how the situation may affect those who are experiencing mental or emotional issues due to the challenging situation.
- If families of children receiving a service are agreeable, the Service could ensure that they are informed of any significant information or health appointments relating to their child by either text or email.
- Across the Service, consideration is now given to alternative methods of communication / special arrangements being put in place in such circumstances where an individual has parental responsibility and specific communication needs.

All improvements and recommendations identified are set out within the complaint response letter where possible. This feedback helps to reassure the complainant that the services do use the outcomes to complaints and dissatisfaction to improve Children's Services.

All improvements highlighted within this report have been verified and have been implemented.

Compliments

There was a 14% increase in all compliments received, (88 from 77). 50% of all representations about Children Services were compliments.

- 39 compliments were regarding the Fostering & Adoption Service;
- 18 of these were about the Adoption Process;
- 21 were in respect of the services provided by the Fostering Team;
- 16 compliments were regarding the Children with Disabilities Services including Grove House Children's Respite Facility;
- 21 compliments were regarding the Safeguarding and Care Planning Teams;
- 8 were regarding the Referral and Assessment Team;
- 2 compliments were regarding the Looked after Children Team;
- 1 compliment was about the quality of care from a children's home;
- 7 compliments were direct from looked after children and were about the quality of their service or social workers.

Conclusions

Complaints about Children's Services decreased by 14% in comparison with the number received during 2015/16, (37). There were no Stage 2 investigations progressing from a Stage 1 complaint received during 2016/17. This means that 100% of complaints received were resolved at Stage 1.

Stage 2 complaints also reduced by 80%. This decrease is due to the willingness of Children's Services Managers offering further resolution to those dissatisfied with the outcome of their Stage 1 investigation.

Quality of services provided continues to be the most complained about area and attracted the most complaints. However, the majority of the issues raised within these complaints tend to be around support from the service or worker concerned. When Children's Services become involved with children or young people, parents and carers often misunderstand the social workers role and often assume that the worker is allocated to the adults. Although it is very important to always do a full holistic assessment of the family circumstances and consider what support may be required, the key focus of involvement must always be the welfare of the child or young person concerned.

Children's Services positively encourage feedback about their services and always ensure that publicity about complaints and compliments is available in public areas and to all families receiving a service. It is also evident that the services are generally well received as during 2016/17, 50% of formal contacts about Children's Services were compliments.

ANNUAL REPORT ON

ADULT SERVICES COMPLAINTS-COMPLIMENTS-REPRESENTATIONS

1 APRIL 2016 – 31 MARCH 2017

Introduction

The Local Authority Social Services and National Health Service Complaints (England) Regulations 2009 came into force on 1 April 2009. This legislation sets down the procedures that Adult Social Care Services and National Health Services, (NHS), must follow when complaints or representations are made.

Representations may not always be complaints; they might also be positive remarks or ideas that require a response from the Council. Enquiries or comments about the availability, delivery or quality of a service, which are not criticisms, also constitute representations.

As part of the responsibilities set out in the Act, local authorities must produce an annual report on all complaints and representations received. This report fulfils Gateshead Council's obligations and provides information on all representations received about the Council's Adult Social Care Services from 1 April 2016 – 31 March 2017.

There are two steps to the Statutory Complaints Process;

1. Informal (Local) resolution by the Council;
2. Independent consideration by the Local Government Ombudsman, (LGO).

All complaints must be assessed and given a grading. Categories of complaint are:

- Green Low-level or minimal risk for either the service user or the Council;
- Amber Moderate or medium risk;
- Red Serious complaint graded as high risk.

There are no prescribed timescales for resolution as the quality of the investigation and outcome is significantly more important than attempting to adhere to a stipulated period for response. However, it is very important that all investigations are proportionate to the issues complained about and that the complainant is always kept up to date on the progress of investigation.

Publicity and Information

Publicity on how to complain can be provided in several formats, encouraging and facilitating easy access to the complaints process. All new service users receive a complaints leaflet in their information pack. A leaflet is also provided when a service user receives the outcome to an assessment / reassessment of need.

Independent Element

The Council operates an internal investigation procedure. Complaints administration should be fully independent of any form of service delivery to ensure fairness and impartiality.

Advocacy and Special Needs

Vulnerable people receiving a Social Care service are encouraged and supported to express their views and to access the complaints procedure if they wish. In all cases advocacy is offered if it is felt that the complainant would benefit from this service.

Individuals who wish to complain about a Public Health service can obtain free independent advocacy support. This advocacy is Government funded and is exclusively for Health Service complaints.

Training and Employee Development

Training for Investigating Officers is provided on an annual basis. All Adult Social Care Team Managers / Service Managers are expected to have undergone investigating skills training.

The Investigating Skills Training Course is facilitated by the Local Government Ombudsman. This training concentrates on defining, investigating and resolving complex complaints. It also emphasises the need to identify any improvements that may be necessary as a direct result of individual complaints.

A Local Government Ombudsman Investigating Skills Training Course has been arranged for April 2017. The training is mandatory for all Adult Social Care Managers to ensure that all are trained to the Ombudsman's investigation standards. The training will also focus on resolution and meaningful remedies for the complainant.

Equalities Monitoring

Gateshead Council recognises that equality monitoring of service delivery is crucial for effective planning and scrutiny of the services that it provides. This monitoring can identify which groups are using services and gauge their level of satisfaction. The information can then be used to highlight possible inequalities, investigate their underlying causes and address any unfairness or disadvantage.

Information about the complaints process can be made available in key languages and formats. Information for customers with sight or hearing impairment can also be provided.

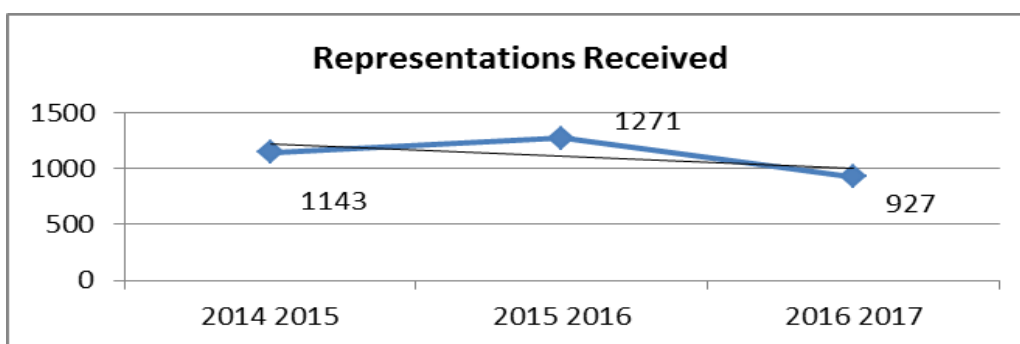
Representations Received from 1 April 2016 and 31 March 2017.

During 2016/17, 53 complaints were received regarding Adult Social Care Services. This is a 15% decrease on complaints received during 2015/16, (62).

The number of low level issues received have continued to decrease and 2016/17 saw a 47% decrease on the number received during 2015/16, (23 from 43). The majority of low level issues were dealt with directly by the services concerned and were resolved to the customer's satisfaction. In some cases, all that was required was a discussion between the complainant and either the Social Worker or the Team Manager to clarify issues or to identify what was required to put things right. Before closure, the complainant is always asked to confirm that they are satisfied that the issue had been resolved.

Details and numbers of Complaints and representations over the past 3 years

All Formal Contacts	2014 2015		2015 2016		2016 2017	
Commissioned Service - Own investigation	1.22%	14	1.34%	17	0.22%	2
Corporate Complaints	0.09%	1	0.16%	2	0.11%	1
Adult Services Complaints	5.60%	64	4.88%	62	5.72%	53
Complaint Related Queries	4.99%	57	3.38%	43	2.48%	23
Commissioned Services Issues	5.60%	64	4.01%	51	11.87%	110
Compliments	80.14%	916	84.50%	1074	77.67%	720
Data Breach	0.17%	2	0.00%	0	0.00%	0
Health & Social Care Joint Investigations	0.44%	5	0.24%	3	0.43%	4
HCPC Referrals	0.09%	1	0.00%	0	0.00%	0
Insurance Claim	0.26%	3	0.08%	1	0.00%	0
Inter-Agency Concerns	0.35%	4	0.16%	2	0.43%	4
Local Government Ombudsman	0.17%	NA	0.47%	6	0.00%	9
MP / Councillor Responses	0.17%	2	0.24%	3	0.97%	1
Safeguarding Alerts	0.44%	5	0.31%	4	0.11%	0
Solicitor Responses	0.09%	1	0.00%	0	0.00%	0
Whistle Blow	0.17%	2	0.24%	3	0.00%	0
		1143		1271		927



Complaint Categories	2014 2015	2015 2016	2016 2017
Green	7	4	7
Amber	56	57	45
Red	1	1	1
All	64	62	53

Key Points of Interest

- There has been a 27% decrease in all formal recorded contacts about Adult Social Care since 2015/16.
- Overall, Adult Services complaints decreased by 15% compared to 2015/16 figures.
- The number of complaints assessed as Green (minimal risk to the Council or service user) accounted for 13% of the total number of complaints received.
- Amber complaints, which are medium risk to the Council or the service user, accounted for 85% of all complaints received. This evidences that complaints received do have a degree of complexity. Amber complaints can often include a number of issues which are deemed as moderate risk to either the service user or the Council.
- The number of complaints that are assessed as Red, (high risk to the Council or the service user), has remained constant since 2014/15.
- Complaint related queries decreased by 47%. Complaint related queries are low-level representations that must be resolved within one working day after receipt.
- The main theme from low level issues received during 2016/17 was regarding the quality of worker support, in particular about the quality of the information provided or about poor communication. All low level issues were responded to by either the service concerned or by the Complaints Section.
- Almost 78% of representations made during 2016/17 were compliments and only 24% were concerns or formal complaints.

Themes of Complaints Received

There were three main themes of complaints received during 2016/17.

1. Quality of Service

Quality of service remained the main theme of complaint.

41%, (22), of complaints received during 2016/17 were regarding the quality of the services being provided.

Issues raised within complaints about quality included:

- The quality of support given to individuals;
- Lack of or poor communication from either the service or individual workers;
- Allegations that assessing officers had not informed clients or family members about the charging policy;
- Inappropriate sharing of personal information;

- Disputed care charges / invoices;
- The quality of residential care.

After investigation, 33%, (6), of complaints about the quality of the service were unjustified. 17%, (3) were partly justified and 50%, (9) were found to be fully justified. All improvements or recommendations as a result of these complaints are included within this report.

2. Staff Issues

10 complaints that were received were regarding the behaviour of individual members of staff. From this figure, 9 complaints cited the conduct of the worker as the main issue complained about.

Every complaint received by Adult Social Care that cites inappropriate staff conduct as the main concern is fully investigated by the service. In all cases any conduct issues that are found to be justified are addressed with the staff member concerned and processes put in place to minimise the risk of reoccurrence. These measures could include monitoring behaviour / performance via individual supervision sessions or by providing additional or refresher training. If the service felt that the issues were serious enough and found to be justified, the Council can also invoke their own internal employment procedures.

3 Appeals after Assessments / Reviews

11 complaints were received that were regarding changes to care packages after an assessment or review. To ensure that the assessment / review had been fair and had included all relevant information to inform the decision making, the service re-evaluated each individual case. As a result of the re-evaluation, the Service had reinstated either in part or in some cases, the original care packages for 4 complainants.

Complaints Service Area

Service Area	2014 2015		2015 2016		2016 2017	
Assessment & Personalisation	40.63%	26	54.84%	34	67.92%	36
Care Call	7.81%	5	6.45%	4	3.77%	2
Commissioning & Quality Assurance	23.44%	15	6.45%	4	7.55%	4
Finance & ICT	0.00%	0	3.23%	2	0.00%	0
Health & Housing Support	12.50%	8	8.06%	5	N/A	N/A
Provider Services	15.63%	10	20.97%	13	20.75%	11
Total		64		62		53

- During 2016/17, almost 68%, (36), of complaints were about the Assessment & Personalisation service.
- This is a 6% increase on the number received during 2015/16, (34).
- 31%, (11) of complaints received by Assessment & Personalisation were appeals after an assessment or review of need.
- After fully reviewing each individual case, 4 complaints were found to be justified. As a result of this, services were reinstated.
- Complaints about Council Provider Services decreased by 15% (11), since 2015/16.
- Provider Services include Promoting Independence Centres, Shared Lives Services and Council homecare.
- 27%, (3), of complaints about Provider Services were about the alleged lack of preparation when clients were transferring from Council provided home care to commissioned services.
- After reviewing each case, it was agreed to reassess one client due to a change in their personal circumstances.

All issues complained about

Issues of Complaint	2014 2015		2015 2016		2016 2017	
Appeal Changes after Care Needs Review		N/A		N/A	20.75%	11
Council Policy		N/A		N/A	5.66%	3
Delay	3%	2	6.45%	4	3.77%	2
Lack of Service	5%	3	11.29%	7	9.43%	5
Quality of Service	80%	51	53.23%	33	41.51%	22
Refusal of Service	6%	4	0.00%	0	0.00%	0
Staff Issues	6%	4	29.03%	18	18.87%	10
Total		64		62		53

- 41%, (22), of complaints were around the quality of services received. This area remains the greatest cause for complaint.
 - Quality of service involves alleged failure of service delivery, for example:
 1. Missed or delayed social work visits / appointments;
 2. Non return of telephone calls;
 3. Poor communication;
 4. Poor response after a request for service.
- 4 complaints were regarding the quality of the worker support provided.
- 3 of the complaints about worker support were upheld. Areas complained about were regarding poor communication, failure to record events on case records, and lack of action after a request for service. Any improvements as an outcome to these complaints are outlined within this report.
- 10 complaints received were regarding the conduct of individual workers.
- 9 of these complaints cited staff attitude as their main issue.
- After investigation, 6 complaints about attitude or behaviour of staff were not upheld.
- 3 were partially upheld.
- 1 was fully upheld. This complaint resulted in additional training for all of the team concerned.

Outcomes

Outcomes of complaints	2014 2015		2015 2016		2016 2017	
Outstanding		8		6		5
Closed or withdrawn	1.5%	1	12.50%	7	0.00%	0
Not upheld	41%	23	28.57%	16	52.08%	25
Partially upheld	22%	18	35.71%	20	18.75%	9
Upheld	25%	14	23.21%	13	29.17%	14
Total		64		56		53

- 52%, (25), of all complaints were not upheld after investigation.
- 48%, (23) of complaints were either fully or partially upheld during 2016/17.
- This is a 11% decrease on the number of complaints that were either fully or partially upheld during 2015/16.

Timescales

- 33 working days was the average time to investigate complaints during 2016/17. This is a 18% decrease on the response times during 2015/16, (40 working days).
- Although there are no statutory timescales for response, the Council expects all complaints to be completed within 30 working days of receipt. However, as complaints now include numerous issues across adult services and other agencies, it is often difficult to provide a full and thorough response within this timescale. However, if the complainant is regularly updated on the progress of the investigation, any extended timescales are generally accepted.

How complaints were received

Method of Complaint	2014 2015		2015 2016		2016 2017	
Service Feedback Form	7.9%	5	4.84%	3	1.89%	1
Complaints Form	0%	0	3.23%	2	0.00%	0
Email	31.3%	20	33.87%	21	24.53%	13
Letter	39.1%	25	27.42%	17	32.08%	17
Personal Visit	4.7%	3	9.68%	6	1.89%	1
Telephone	17.2%	11	20.97%	13	39.62%	21
		64		62		53

- Letters and emails continue to be the main method of referral accounting for 57%, (30), of all complaints received.
- Personal visits are now rare, with complainants preferring to either submit written complaints or complain by telephone. Complaints received by telephone are generally in response to immediate issues, such as missed care visits or disputes regarding invoices for care.
- Relatives, including relative carers, continue to make the most representations, and accounted for 75%, (40) of complaints made.

Equalities Monitoring

Ethnic Status	2014 2015		2015 2016		2016 2017	
White British	96.88%	62	98.39%	61	94.34%	50
Black/ Black British	0.00%	0	1.61%	1	0.00%	0
Chinese	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0
Mixed	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0
Asian / Asian British	1.56%	1	0.00%	0	3.77%	2
Other White	1.56%	1	0.00%	0	1.89%	1
		64		62		53

- 2 formal complaints, 2 complaint related queries and 7 compliments were raised by members of the BME community.
- All compliments were regarding the quality of the services provided by Adult Social Care.

Specific Areas of Complaint within Adult Social Care

Commissioned Care Services – All issues received

Commissioned Services	2014 2015	2015 2016	2016 2017
Formal Complaints	10	1	4
Complaint Related Queries	8	7	2
Commissioned Service Issues	64	51	110
Commissioned Service – Own Response	14	19	2
Compliments	N/A	4	6
Insurance Claim	1	0	0
Moved to Safeguarding	Na	3	0
Whistle Blows	2	2	0
Total	99	83	124

- During 2016/17 representations regarding commissioned services increased by 49%, (124).
- 4 formal complaints were received, which were investigated by Contract Management Officers.
- 2 were regarding a home care provider, 1 regarding the Direct Payment Support Service and 1 about the quality of care provided by a commissioned care home.
- After investigation, both complaints about commissioned home care were upheld.
- The complaint regarding a commissioned care home was partially upheld
- In all cases, Contract Management Officers carried out additional monitoring of the service to ensure that they were complying with their contractual obligations with the Council.
- The complaint regarding the Payroll Service was not upheld.

Commissioned Service Issues are concerns received by other professionals on behalf of service users, which are shared with the providers. The providers are then responsible for looking into the issues and providing effective resolution for the client concerned. During 2016/17, 110 commissioned service issues were received. This is a 116% increase on the number received during 2015/16, (51). All responses received direct from the provider are shared with the relevant Contract Management Officer to ensure that all issues have been fully addressed.

- During 2016/17, 77 commissioned services issues were received about commissioned home care.
- Concerns about late, missed or short home care visits remains the main theme of issues received.
- 32 commissioned services issues were about commissioned care homes.
- Issues received regarding care homes highlight;
 - hygiene / housekeeping concerns;
 - Lack of action after requests by residents or family members;
 - The quality of the food provided

Once complaints are resolved, Contract Management Officers are expected to ensure that any proposed actions or improvements to service are carried out and fully monitored. Any feedback, which includes dissatisfaction, is helpful to inform the Commissioning Team of how the current care services are operating and how they could be commissioned in the future.

- During 2016/17, 6 compliments were received about the quality of the work carried out by individual Contract Management Officers.

Health & Social Care Joint Investigations

The statutory complaints process covers NHS and Social Care Services.

All complaints that are received which are about services provided by both Health and Social Care are co-ordinated by either the Council's Complaints Manager or the Complaints Manager responsible for the Health Service area subject to the complaint. The organisation responsible for the majority of the complaint will take the lead in the investigation and will ensure that a combined response letter is sent to the complainant within the agreed timescales.

During 2016/17, 4 complaints were received which included concerns about services provide by Health and Social Care during 2016/17. This is an increase of 33% (3), since 2015/16.

2 complaint investigations were led by Adult Social Care managers and 2 investigations were led by colleagues at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital.

Adult Social Care issues complained about mostly focused on the discharge process. However, 1 complaint included an element which was regarding the Council's home care workers.

All 4 complaints were fully responded to by the relevant managers within Adult Social Care. After investigation, all of the issues regarding Adult Social Care, which had been included within all 4 complaints, were found to be unjustified. In each case, it was evidenced that workers or the service had acted appropriately and followed standard social work practice.

Local Government Ombudsman

During 2016/17, 9 complaint referrals were received from the Local Government Ombudsman. This is an increase of 80% on the number received during 2015/16, (5). However, this is in line with the increase in Ombudsman referrals across the region.

During 2016/17, the Ombudsman requested information about 9 complaints, which had previously been responded to through the statutory complaints procedure.

- 6 referrals were regarding services provided by Assessment & Personalisation;
- 1 referral was around the management of the Safeguarding Adults Process;

- 2 referrals were around the aids and adaptations process, in particular the refusal of major building works.

Detailed information and responses for each individual case was provided to the Ombudsman to allow them to investigate the circumstances and to make a decision on whether the Council had followed processes and procedures.

The Ombudsman has since provided their decision on 7 referrals;

- 2 referrals were closed after initial investigation:
- 2 were closed after the Council offered the complainant local resolution to the issues complained about;
- 2 were closed after investigation. The Ombudsman did not find any injustice to the complainant or any malpractice by the services concerned;
- The findings from 1 investigation resulted in a judgement of maladministration with injustice.

Although the main issue of complaint was found to be unjustified, the Ombudsman did feel that the communication with the complainant had been poor and that this had caused unnecessary uncertainty and misunderstandings. The Council accepted the Ombudsman's findings and agreed a financial disbursement of £250.00 for the injustice that had been caused to the complainant.

- 2 referrals regarding the refusal of major building work are still under Ombudsman investigation

Public Health Complaints

During 2016/17, there were 2 formal complaints received by the Council regarding Public Health Services. 1 was investigated and responded to through the Public Health Complaints Procedure and 1 complaint was dealt with through the Council's Corporate Complaint Procedure. Both complaints were not upheld.

All services commissioned by Public Health are required to have their own complaints procedure and are responsible for the management of any complaints that they receive. The numbers of complaints and compliments for each service are forwarded to the Council on a quarterly basis.

During 2016/17, there have been 3 concerns and 65 compliments received by services commissioned by Public Health.

Public Health Concerns & Compliments	2015 - 2016		2016 - 2017	
	Compliments	Concerns	Compliments	Concerns
Gateshead Evolve	11	3	5	1
Platform Gateshead	3	0	0	0
South Tyneside Foundation Trust	123	7	21	0
Integrated Sexual Health	62	7	0	1
Live Well	0	2	18	0
Rape Crisis	Na	Na	21	1
	199	19	65	3

Learning from Complaints: Examples of Service Improvements

Learning from complaints is critical to prevent recurrence of the cause(s) of the original complaint. It is important that we make sure that people's experiences help the Council to improve services where possible. Changes can include policy, procedure or employee development.

Complaints about individual practice or failure to follow procedures are dealt with by reinforcement of processes and reiterating customer care standards through service / team meetings or individual supervision sessions.

In all cases, any justified issues regarding attitude or conduct of staff are dealt with in line with the Council's internal employment procedures.

Improvements after a complaint include:

- The Shared Lives Service now ensure that all service user's or their representatives are formally advised that in the event that a service or Shared Lives session needs to be cancelled, that they must inform the Council as soon as possible as failure to do this may mean a charge is still imposed.
- Bereavement training sessions have been arranged for the Adult Social Care Direct Team so that staff are better prepared and more able to understand and consider the wider needs of the family in times of crisis. Part of the session will focus on communication skills to ensure the ASCD Team provide a high level customer service.
- To ensure that service users' case files are up to date, all Adult Social Care workers should ensure that all significant events, incidents or difficult conversations are recorded on service user's case files as soon as possible.
- Team Managers have improved the handover procedure for when agency workers leave the Council. This will ensure that Care and Support Plans are not returned to workers who may have since left. The Care and Support Plan can then be allocated to another worker in a timely manner.
- It has also been reiterated to all staff of the need to update their own, or in the event of leave, another Team Manager, of the priority of their Care and Support Plans to ensure that all service users receive an outcome as quickly as possible.
- When it is identified that the service user has capacity, family members and friends should still have a level of involvement in an individual's care if the service user consents to this. A form has been developed so workers can ask service users who they would like to be involved and informed about their care. The service user's views will then be formally recorded and placed on their case file.

Promoting Independence Centres

- That when arranging a service user's discharge from a Promoting Independence Centre, (PIC), the Service will ensure that written correspondence is sent to the service user's primary carer to advise of discharge arrangements including the date, time and transport arrangements.
- The PIC Standard Operational Procedures has been updated to reflect the requirement to identify an appropriate professional within discharge planning meetings. The identified professional will then be required to facilitate a coordinated discharge.
- That minutes from multidisciplinary planning meetings will be sent to all attendees as soon as possible. This will help to clarify any individual actions that may be required or agreed.
- All PIC staff have been instructed to ensure that they always use up to date agreements and documentation.
- A review of residency agreements has been undertaken. This review has ensured that the documents for both intermediate care and assessments clearly state the current charging rates. The admitting officer must also verbally explain fees and charges to service users and/or their carers.
- All service users and/or their carers must be given a copy of the signed residency agreement for their own records at the time of admittance.
- That PICs should ensure that all who attend Planning meetings receive a copy of the minutes as soon as possible after the meeting has taken place.

START, (now PRIME) Service

- START now have a formal handover process to ensure continuity of care when taking over either in part or in full, a care package from a long term commissioned provider.
- A medication risk assessment is now completed for all service users of START who require support with their medication, irrespective of whether there are identified concerns at the point of referral.
- All START care staff will be reminded in team meetings and formal supervision sessions that if they record recommendations, (in particular about necessary equipment identified to support service users), within the daily feedback reports, they must bring this to the attention of the Reablement Officer.

Care Call

- Care Call Client reports will now be cross referenced against Carefirst records after Care Call staff have been notified of the death of a service user. This check will determine if other family members are still living at the property who may be receiving a home care service. This will then ensure that key safes or other equipment are not removed in error.
- Care Call staff will also attempt to contact any known next of kin or carers prior to the removal of a key safe wherever possible.

Disabled Facilities Grant

- The Service have reviewed all processes in relation to the appointment of contractors who undertake major adaptation work on behalf of the Council. This review also analysed the contract between the Council and the contractor to ensure that all areas are legally compliant in line with the appropriate procurement and Social Care legislation.

Direct Payment Process

- The Direct Payment Service have now reviewed their systems in respect of how direct payments are transferred. The process now ensures that where clients have separate bank accounts for additional grants or payments, a separate creditor reference is created to guarantee that the direct payment is always paid into the correct account.

Compliments

Information about compliments is fed into all Adult Social Care Services, including the Commissioning Team, to highlight good practice and to identify opportunities for improvements to services.

During 2016/17, Adult Social Care received 720 compliments, which accounted for 78% of all representations received.

- 42% (305), of compliments were regarding the Assessment & Personalisation Team;
- 10%, (31) of the Assessment & Personalisation compliments were regarding the Adult Social Care Direct Team;
- 27%, (172) were about the Physical Disabilities Team.
- 53%, (384) of compliments were about Provider Services;
- 61%, (235) of these compliments were about Council provided home care;
- 39%, (149) of Provider Service compliments were about the care provided by the Councils Promoting Independence Centres.

Conclusions

Adult Services complaints decreased by 15% compared to 2015/16 figures. However, the number of appeals after an assessment or review have increased. This is due to Social Workers or Reviewing Officers robustly applying the eligibility criteria. This is to ensure that those most in need receive appropriate support. In response to the appeals, the service re-evaluated each individual care packages to ensure that they were fair and objective. As a result, 36% (4) of appeals were upheld and the original assessment / review decision was adjusted.

Commissioned Care Services continue to be highlighted in the press and national media and because of this, families and professionals are more vigilant in identifying and highlighting any poor or inappropriate practice or processes. This has resulted in an increase in concerns being shared with the Council's commissioned services. It has also resulted in more stringent monitoring of commissioned services to ensure that they continue to comply with the requirements set out within their contract with the Council

Gateshead Council's Adult Social Care have recently completed a restructure of services and teams to ensure that the Council are able to manage current and future demand for adult social care. The new team and service areas will be reflected within the complaints management system and all future reports will be based on the new service areas.

Adoption Service Annual Report

April 2016 – March 2017

Purpose

This Annual Report provides a summary of the performance of the Adoption Service during the past year. It also includes analysis and comparative data for 2016/17, highlighting progress made over the past year and identifying potential areas for future development in the year ahead.

The Service continues to operate against a backdrop where major structural and procedural reform is being proposed. One of the key challenges for the Service in the forthcoming year will be to ensure the continuing provision of effective services for adoptive families and children requiring adoption, whilst also managing the impact of significant changes for both the Service and its staff.

The Adoption Team has always been committed to doing its best to secure positive outcomes for children and young people and for a small percentage of children, the most effective way to achieve this will be through the provision of new permanent families.

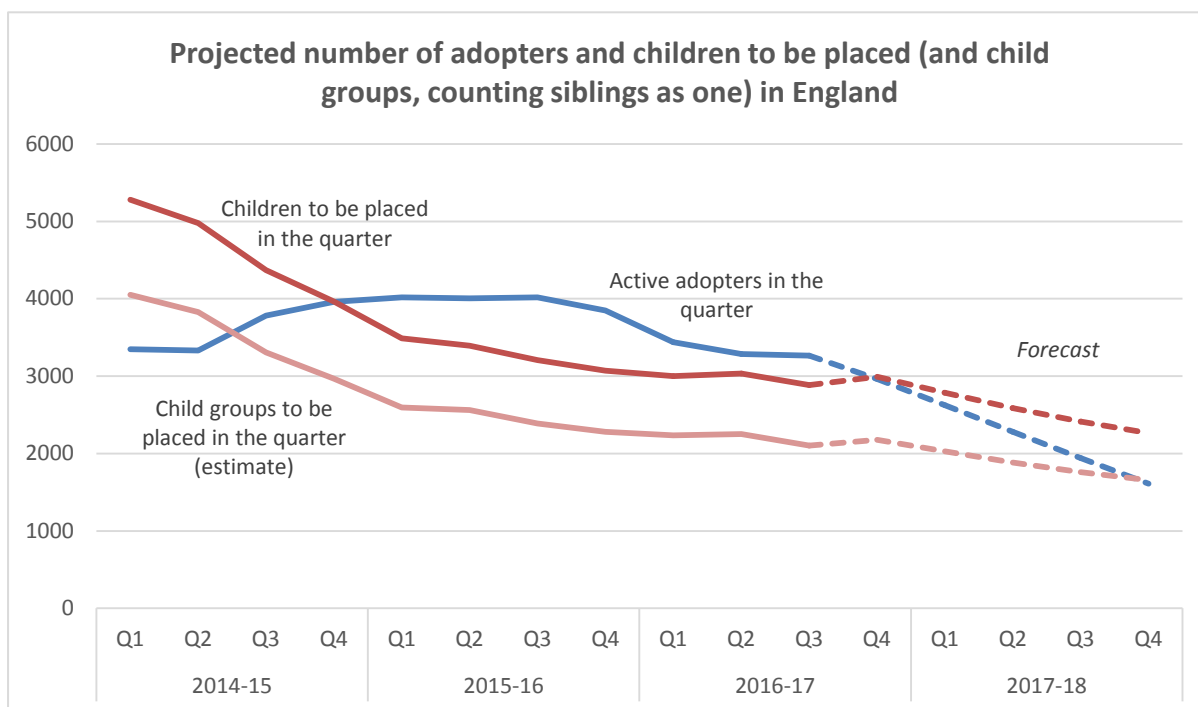
Achieving positive outcomes for children and the provision of effective support for all those affected by adoption is a crucial component of the work of the Adoption Service and fits well within the strategic vision for Gateshead, Vision 2030, which sets out targets for the improvement of the lives of Gateshead residents.

Background

In April 2017 the National Adoption Leadership Board (ALB) published a paper collating data recently gathered from local authority adoption agencies in England. The purpose of this research was to identify current trends in adoption and to provide estimates as to the future numbers of children likely to require adoptive placements and the number of adoptive families potentially available to meet that need.

The ALB model suggests that at any point in time between January and March this year there were approximately just fewer than 3,000 children requiring an adoptive placement with about the same number of approved adoptive families currently active at the same time. The model anticipates a continuing rise in the number of children requiring adoption alongside a corresponding fall in the number of available adoptive families.

If these projections are correct, this will represent the end of a period (since January 2015) of there being more approved adoptive families available than children needing to be placed. Should current trends continue, the number of approved families available in any given quarter will continue to fall faster than the number of children needing to be placed, and will have significant implications in relation to the Service's future recruitment and family-finding strategies.



56% of the children waiting for adoption as at December 31 2016 were part of a sibling group, whilst the preference of the majority of prospective adopters during the same period appears to have been for a single child.

In reality, only a proportion of the 2,160 children identified in the table above as “waiting” to be placed are actually waiting, as this overall figure includes children who have been matched to adoptive families and not yet placed, together with children who have previously been identified as requiring adoption but where the plan has subsequently changed. An estimated 1,220 children do not fall into either of these categories and therefore this will be the more representative figure for the number of children for whom English local authorities were actively seeking adoptive families at the end of 2016.

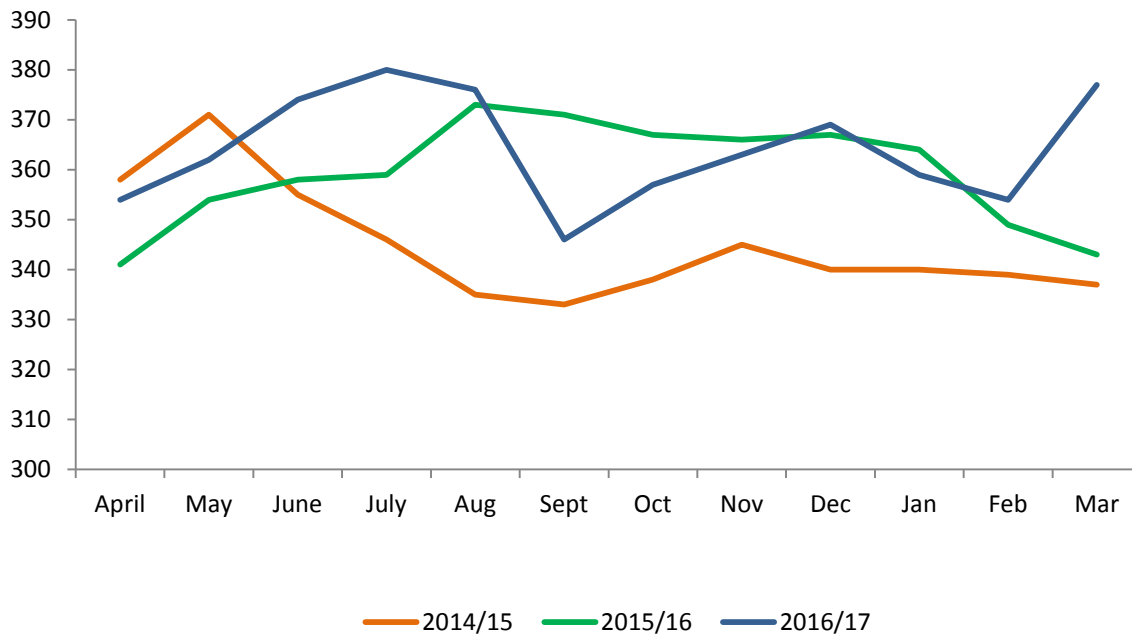
Whilst a “surplus” of adopters might look like sufficiency, consideration also needs to be given to the fact that collectively the families waiting may not be able to meet the needs of many of the children waiting, and this in turn represents a further challenge in relation to future adopter recruitment.

Average figures from the last 4 quarters suggest that a net 840 children are entering the system requiring adoption each quarter against a net 460 adopters. Assuming that placement order numbers remain stable, and these trends continue, far more adopters will need to be recruited and approved in the future than is presently the case, not just by our Service, but by all agencies nationally.

Over the last year the number of Looked After Children in Gateshead has ranged from 346 at its lowest to 380 at its highest. Since the peak of 380, the Looked After figure has fluctuated throughout the year. The Gateshead Looked After rate per 10,000 children still remains high, higher than the regional rate of 82 and significantly higher than the national rate of 60 per 10,000.

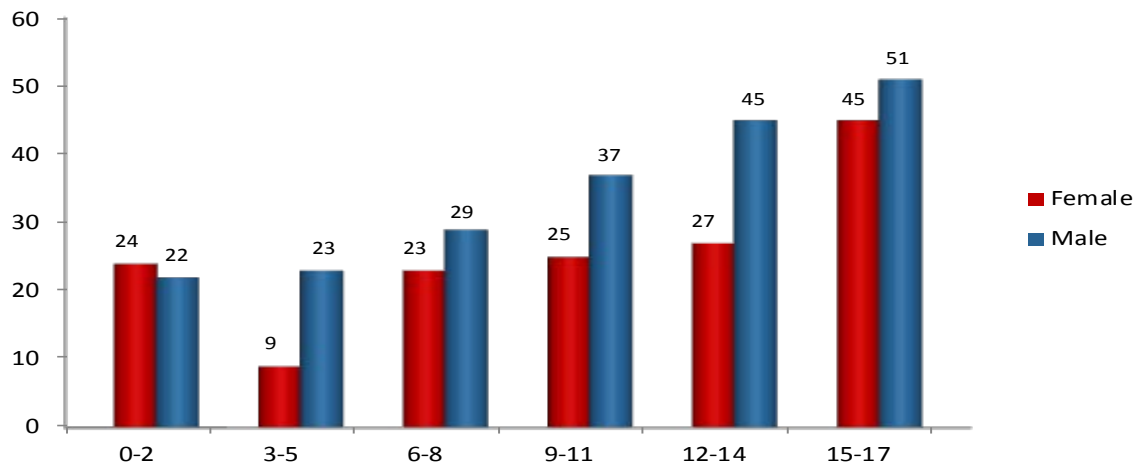
More recently the numbers of Looked After children have increased quite sharply to 377 which will be our 2017 year end figure.

Number of looked after children - April 14-March 17



From September 2016 to February 2017 the number of Looked After children under the age of 2 has decreased and those aged 3-5 have increased quite significantly.

Age of LACs at 13th February 2017



The number of Placement Orders granted has remained constant during the latter part of the year. At 31 March 2017 there were 377 Looked After Children of whom 31 had a Placement order granted (8.2%). This represents a slight change in trend as previously the declining number of Placement Orders had a significant impact on the number of adoptions achieved and adopter recruitment generally.

Continuation of this new trend together with increasing numbers of Looked After Children will undoubtedly have implications for effective adopter recruitment in the year ahead, coupled with the ongoing need for the Service to broaden the pool of available families by attracting more prospective adopters able and willing to consider older children, sibling groups, and children with more complex needs.

Our performance April 2016 - March 2017

Children adopted

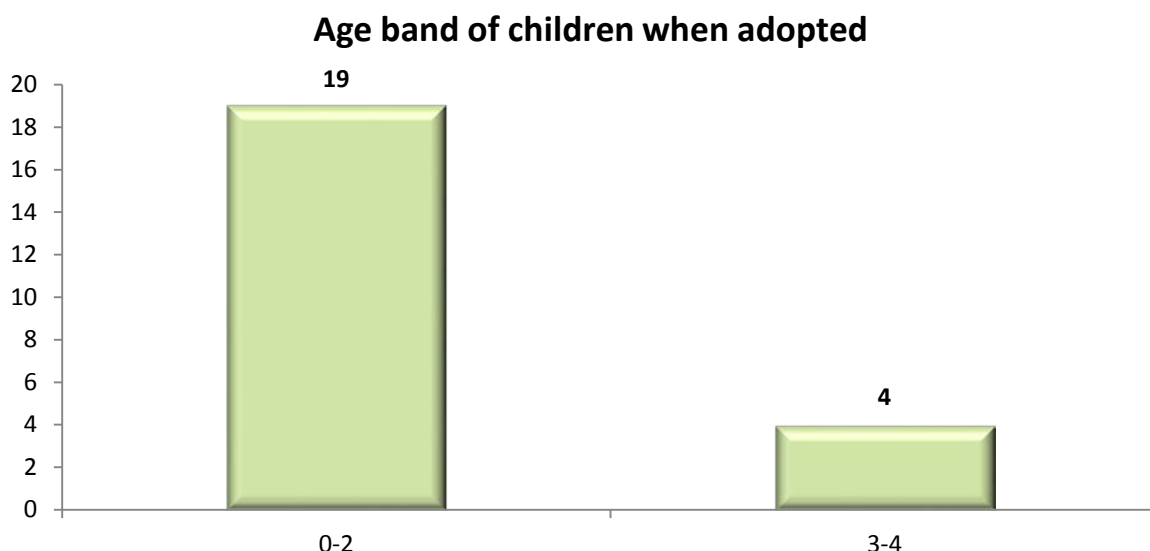
At the year end March 2017, 23 children placed for adoption by Gateshead Council had been successfully adopted, and a further **18** children were also in placement with their adoptive families, awaiting hearings for adoption orders. In addition, members of the team were also actively family finding for a further **11** children.

For some of this latter group the Service had already predicted that it would need to look outside of its own internal resources, given the children's' specific needs or a requirement to place geographically outside the north-east.

Of the **23** children adopted during the year 2016/17

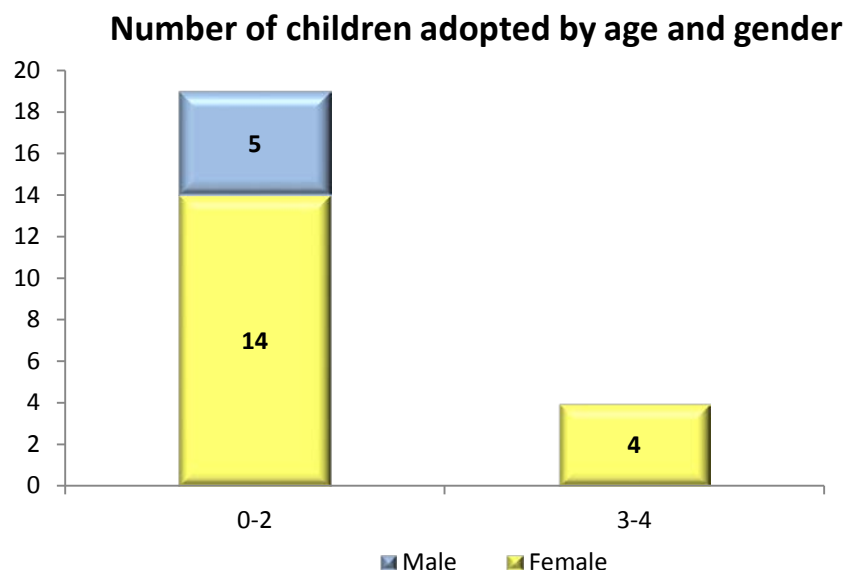
- **5** were boys and **18** were girls.
- **14** children were placed individually and **9** children were part of a sibling group.

The average age at adoption in England for the year ending 31st March 2016 was 3 years 5 months, two months older than in 2015. The ages of the children placed for adoption by Gateshead Council and adopted during the same period corresponds well with the national picture.



Whilst there has always been a high number of younger children adopted, in 2016/17 all our children were aged 4 or under when they were adopted. This is a change from the previous year when 28% of our adoptions were for children over 4, including some slightly older children for whom the Service was successful in finding families and a foster carer who successfully adopted an older child with complex needs who had been in their care from a very young age.

Figures for England reveal that 53% (2,490) of children adopted during the year ending 31st March 2016 were boys and 47% (2,200) were girls. The figures for Gateshead for the same period show the opposite, with more girls than boys being adopted.



For the year April 2016 to March 2017 **23** adoptions took place of which **20** (82.6%) were within the best interest timescale of taking no more than four months between obtaining the legal authority to place a child for adoption and the agency making its decision on a match. This is a considerable improvement in performance from the previous year end at which there were **26** adoptions of which (69.2%) **18** were in timescale.

Where cases were out of timescale during the year April 16/March 17 the Service was able to identify the reasons, which included:

- Children having very complex backgrounds.
- Complex needs which impacted significantly on family finding, e.g. one child with considerable developmental delay.
- issues of uncertainty, such as potential of FASD.
- issues in relation to achieving suitable placements of siblings together in a way that most effectively met the children's needs, e.g. where an older sibling was already in foster care and the plan for their unborn sibling also became adoption. Initially it was not possible to place the younger sibling in the same foster placement as their older sibling. Following the identification of a suitable foster placement together where both children's needs could be met a period of time was required for them both to settle and establish their sibling relationship before their subsequent move together to an adoptive placement.

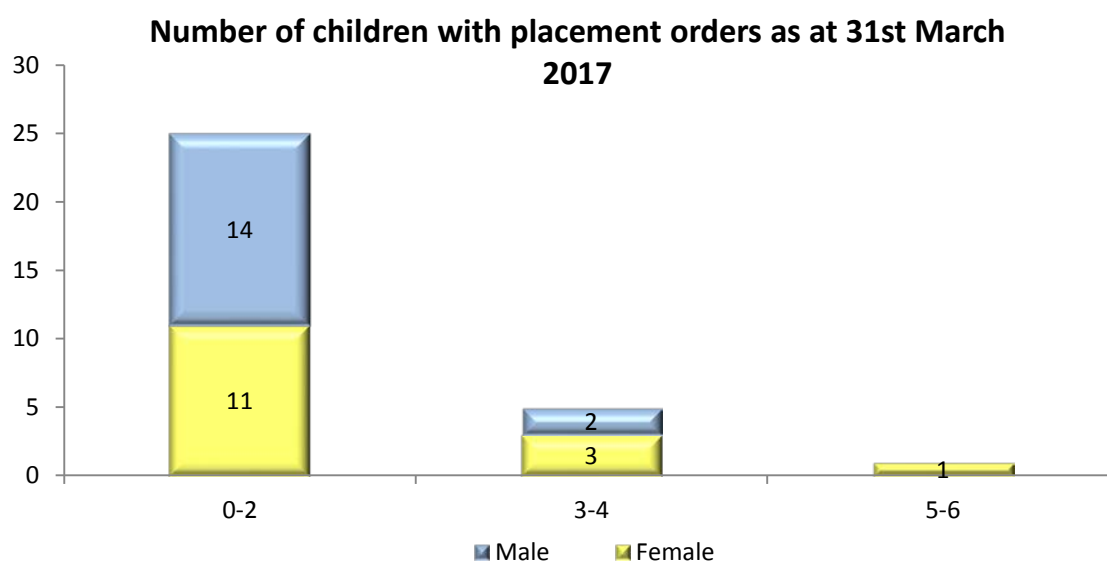
Gateshead Key Indicators	Average time between entering care and moving in with adoptive family (days)		Average time between court authority and deciding on a match (days)		Number and percentage of children adopted from care	
	2015/16	2016/17	2015/16	2016/17	2015/16	2016/17
	633	409	172	108	26 (12.5%)	23 (14.2%)

In relation to timescales for entering care and moving in with the adoptive family (14 months) there has been an improvement in these figures from the previous year. For **13** of the **23** adopted children this timescale was achieved and for those outside of timescale the reasons are similar to those outlined above. In addition, in some cases the court process took much longer than anticipated to conclude and necessitated adjournments and/or additional requests for further assessments and reports.

Of the **23** children adopted from care in 2016/17 91% (**21**) were matched with adopters assessed and approved by Gateshead and **2** were placed with adopters assessed by external agencies.

For several years the Service has been able to provide at least two-thirds of the families for Gateshead children requiring adoption from within its own internal resources. However, the figure for 2016/17 represents a very substantial increase on this.

Whilst this proportion of “in-house” placements is much higher than previous years this could be more reflective of the earlier down turn in the number of adoptive placements required and the agency having a larger than usual pool of available adopters waiting, and should not be taken as indicative of any need to reduce our efforts in any way with regard to the future recruitment of prospective adopters.



Adopters for whom no suitable matches can be identified with Gateshead children within 3 months of their approval will continue to be encouraged and supported in their consideration of appropriate and suitable links with children from other agencies, and to submit their details to the Adoption Register, which is not only of benefit to children elsewhere in the country waiting for adoption but also assists the Service to offset some of its costs in purchasing external placements for children when needs cannot be met via our own resources. At the time of writing this report we currently have two families whose details are on the Register for whom there are no suitable in-house links but who are still awaiting a suitable link from the Register.

Where we are unable to meet needs from within our own resources we will continue to proactively make use of external resources such as the Adoption Register to locate families for children. At the time of writing this report there are currently 708 active children on the Register, of whom 26 are from the North-East region, including 7 children from Gateshead.

The level of family finding being undertaken within the Service has increased since year end March 2016 and the Service is currently in the process of attempting to identify prospective adoptive families for 12 children and also has advance notice in respect of a further 22 children whose cases are currently in court proceedings, or due to enter proceedings, and depending on the final outcome may potentially require adoptive placements.

Adopters approved

Within the year April 2016 to March 2017 Gateshead Council Adoption Panel recommended approval for 24 prospective adoptive families recruited and assessed by the Adoption Team. This is a 100% increase on the previous year's figure, which was lower as a consequence of the earlier reduction in the number of Looked After Children being granted Placement Orders and a reduced need for adoptive placements.

Quarter	Apr/June	Jul/Sept	Oct/Dec	Jan/March
Number of families approved	11	3	7	3

During the year ending 31 March 2016 in England 89% of children were adopted by couples and 11% by single adopters, 9.6% of children were adopted by same sex couples. Gateshead figures for the same period evidence that 96% of our children were adopted by couples and 4% by single adopters. During the same period the agency approved 23 prospective adoptive families; the majority (74%) were couples but this cohort also included 3 same sex couples (13%) and 2 single adopters (9%).

"We really appreciate all the amazing support you have given us over the adoption journey. You have been so professional and honest whilst also being caring and we have felt prepared for all stages of the process. We have felt you have been so easy to talk to and we always felt we could open up to you and obtain support. We will miss you and can't thank you enough. You really are a special person".

Adopters June 2016

It is also pleasing to see that two sets of adopters approved during the year were "second time adopters" i.e. adopters who had previously adopted a child via Gateshead Council and had subsequently applied to us to adopt again.

The current assessment process is a two stage process with the expectation that the first stage is completed within two months and the second part within four months. Just over half the assessments presented to Panel within the past year have been completed within the 6 month timescale. Where the Service has been unable to meet this deadline we have been able to identify the reason. In the main this has generally been due to our awaiting the return of essential information from other agencies, such as police and health checks, without which it is not possible to proceed.

	Apr/Jun	Jul/Sept	Oct/Dec	Jan/Mar
Assessments completed	10	3	7	3
Within timescale	7	2	3	Nil
Outside timescale	3	1	4	3
Reasons	1 delayed by staff/adopter holidays 1 delayed as awaiting return of checks and references 1 delayed due to staff leaving the service and change of social worker	Awaiting return of references and checks/ annual holidays	1- Adopter requested break in process 2- Awaiting checks and references 1- Impact of Adopter and staff holidays	2- Awaiting return of checks and references 1- Report deferred by panel

At the date of writing this report the Service currently has 7 prospective adoptive families under assessment, with a further 13 adoptive families already approved and awaiting placements. There are links already in progress for a number of these families so it is anticipated that several Gateshead children currently requiring adoptive placements should be matched and placed with some of these families in the next few months.

'Thank you for all the months of advice, support and help. Our family is now complete and without you this would not have been possible.'

Adopter November 2016

Matches

During April 2016 to March 2017 Gateshead Adoption Panel considered matches for 26 children with their prospective adoptive families, one less than the previous year. This figure includes 20 children placed individually and three sets of sibling groups of two. Eight of the 26 children were adopted during the year April 2016 to March 2017 and a further 17 of these children are currently placed with their adoptive families, awaiting their adoption.

Matches per Quarter	Apr/June	Jul/Sept	Oct/Dec	Jan/March	TOTAL
Total	14 children	2 children	4 children	6 children	26
Individual children	8	2	4	6	20
Sibling groups	3 groups of 2 siblings	nil	nil	nil	6
Matched In-house	8 children in total 1 sibling group x 2 6 individual children	2	1	5 children	16
Matched with External adopters	6 children in total 2 x 2 siblings 2 single children	nil	3	1 child	10

The overwhelming majority of the matches, 62%, were made with adopters recruited and assessed by Gateshead Adoption Service. This performance is in line with, and similar to, our performance over a number of years.

'For all your time and support through matching panel and the introduction week, we cannot thank you enough. Knowing you were always at the end of the phone or email and then talking to you about our little joy - we couldn't have wished for a better support worker! And we are over the moon with our child – they are ACE!'

Adopters June 2016

Life Appreciation Days have been held for children over the age of 3 and a complex sibling group in order to help inform the prospective adopters of the childrens' background and history and likely needs following placement.

Adopter Recruitment

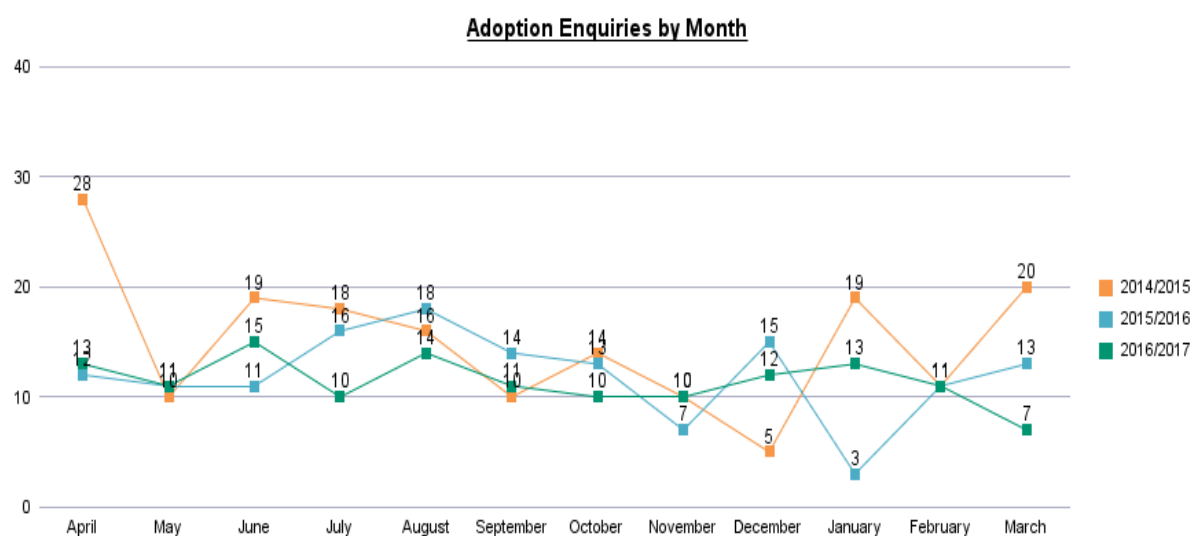
The Service has utilised various methods to recruit adopters during the past year including:

- Radio campaigns
- Regional outdoor (billboard) advertising
- Public Transport advertising

The graph below provides information of the trends in enquiries for the past three years, and although at a higher level than previous years 2012-2014, the numbers of enquiries received by the Service do appear to have fallen more recently, perhaps in line with national trends previously referred to in this report.

“When I contacted Gateshead the lady I spoke to was lovely.”

Prospective adopter – February 2017



During the early part of 2016 the service did experience some increase in referrals from neighbouring local authorities, mainly from adopters interested in adopting very young children and where their own local authority was not prioritising this type of recruitment.

“We researched different ways in which to adopt and spoke to voluntary agencies as well as local authorities. We felt that Gateshead stood out from other agencies in terms of their initial response and the information pack.”

Prospective adopter – February 2017

Table – Enquiries by month.

Enquiries by Month	2012/2013	2013/2014	2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017	Total
April	13	3	28	12	13	69
May	5	6	10	11	11	43
June	5	7	19	11	15	57
July	6	4	18	16	10	54
August	8	4	16	18	14	60
September	9	3	10	14	11	47
October	8	6	14	13	10	51
November	6	10	10	7	10	43
December	8	2	5	15	12	42
January	10	26	19	3	13	71
February	13	26	11	11	11	72
March	7	11	20	13	7	58
Total	98	108	180	144	137	667

Out of **137** enquiries received in 2016/17 we issued **19** registrations of interest forms. This represents a conversion rate of **13.8%**; which equates to nearly 1 in every 8 enquiries progressing to the stage of being invited to register an application. This is a reasonable outcome given we know that a high proportion of enquirers will approach a number of agencies before finally deciding on which agency to register their interest with.

The table below evidences the origin of the enquiries received by the Service. Given that one of the service aims is to offer an assessment to potential adopters within a fifty mile radius we will continue to promote Gateshead Council across a broad geographical area in order to attract prospective adopters from outside the Council boundaries. This is particularly pertinent as there are occasions when the Service needs to identify options for children requiring placements outside the immediate vicinity.

Table – Enquiries by Area

Enquiries by Area	2012/2013	%	2013/2014	%	2014/2015	%	2015/2016	%	2016/2017	%	Total
County Durham	2	2.04%	5	4.63%	15	8.57%	7	4.86%	9	6.87%	38
Cumbria					1	0.57%	1	0.69%			2
Gateshead	49	50.00%	53	49.07%	98	56.00%	54	37.50%	59	45.04%	313
Glasgow City									1	0.76%	1
Hartlepool					1	0.57%			1	0.76%	2
Newcastle Upon Tyne	4	4.08%	4	3.70%	9	5.14%	13	9.03%	16	12.21%	46
North Tyneside	3	3.06%	3	2.78%	12	6.86%	9	6.25%	8	6.11%	35
Northumberland	3	3.06%	6	5.56%	1	0.57%	12	8.33%	7	5.34%	29
Redcar and Cleveland					1	0.57%	1	0.69%			2
Slough					1	0.57%					1
South Gloucestershire			1	0.93%							1
South Tyneside	10	10.20%	9	8.33%	7	4.00%	10	6.94%	10	7.63%	46
Stockton-on-Tees									1	0.76%	1
Sunderland	3	3.06%	6	5.56%	13	7.43%	15	10.42%	3	2.29%	40
Not Recorded	24	24.49%	21	19.44%	16	9.14%	22	15.28%	16	12.21%	99
Total	98	100%	108	100%	175	100%	144	100%	131	100%	656

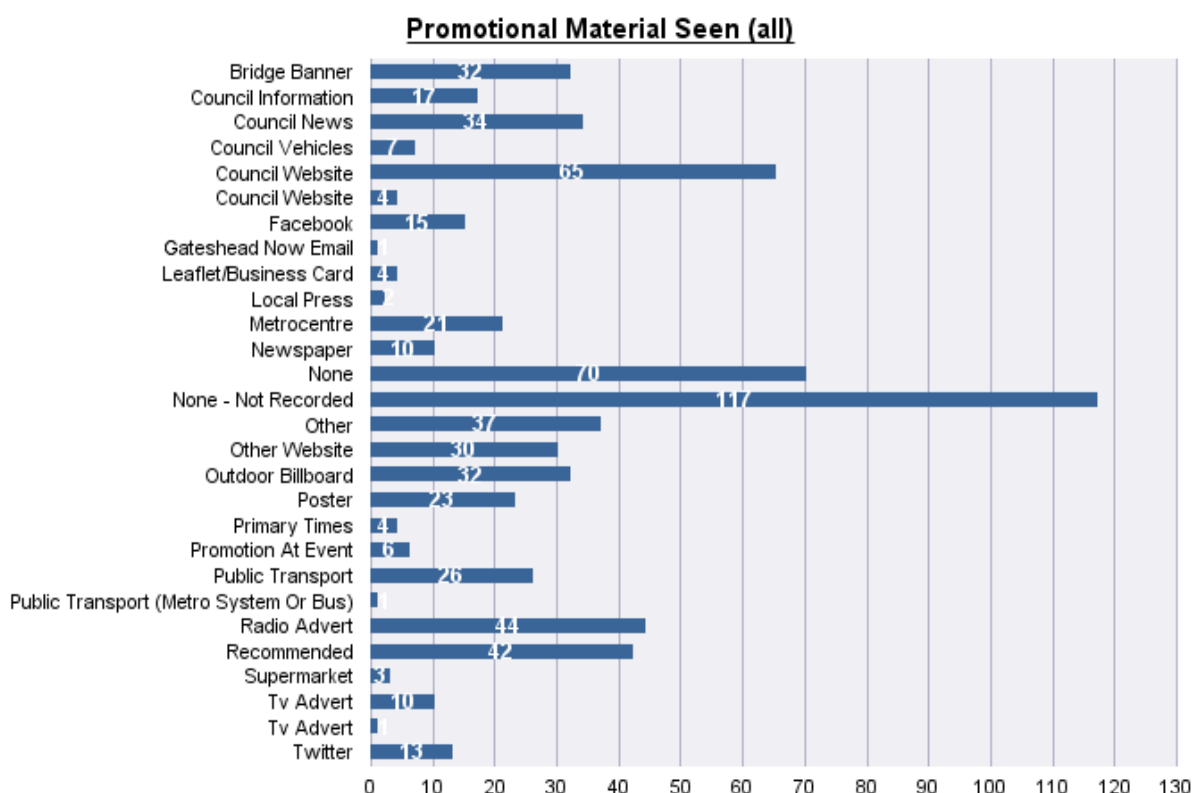
The majority of enquiries continue to come from within the Gateshead area but more input into recruitment from outside the area will need to be put into place for the year ahead in order to offer a wider number of placement options for children. To ensure that the high level of adopter recruitment from within the immediate locality is also maintained we will continue to make full and effective use of “Free of charge” tools such as Council News, Council Website, Council Info and Gateshead Now.

In order to monitor the effectiveness of our recruitment activity we routinely ask all our enquirers which of our promotional materials they have seen. The table on the following page shows all of the promotional materials which have been seen and used by enquirers during 2016/17.

The top six channels cited are:

- Council Website and Council News
- Radio Adverts
- Bridge Banners/Billboards
- Public transport
- Recommended/word of mouth

Table - Promotional Materials



31 individuals commented that they came to us “by word of mouth” and indicated that Gateshead Council had been recommended to them by friends, colleagues or professionals. As a result we have seen an increase in recommendations in 2016/17. Further feedback also indicates that a large proportion of enquirers have found the sections on adoption on the Council website very informative and helpful. This feedback will also be utilised to help inform and improve our communication and recruitment plans for the year ahead.

“Recommended by a friend of friends. Impressed at the information evening and also by the Ofsted rating.”

Adopter - June 16

The Service has held six information evenings and quarterly training sessions for prospective adopters in the past year and it would be our intention to maintain this level in the year ahead.

“Fantastic course leaders, friendly and understanding – great team, thank you”

July 2016 Training Participant & Prospective Adopter

Family finding for children

The service will continue to utilise a wide range of family finding methods for children such as the Adoption Register, Adoption Link, Be my Parent, Parents for children and access national and voluntary sector resources as required. Members of the team will also continue to be involved in regional family finding events and meetings such as Activity days and as and when required the Service will host its own “You, Me, Us” profiling events.

Future family finding

If we take an average of the last two years as a benchmark for the number of Looked After Children who might require adoption then one could estimate that at the very most 10% of our Looked After Children may need adoptive placements.

However, one would also need to continue to monitor these figures on a regular basis to see if trends change.

For comparison,

- if we predict that 10% of our Looked After Children will need adopting then we would need to recruit adopters for at least 36 children.
- if we predict that the figure is nearer to 7 or 8 % then we would need to recruit adopters for between 25 to 29 children respectively.

It would therefore seem sensible to plan our recruitment strategy for the year ahead to meet a minimum need for **29** placements, similar in number to the number of children currently with a placement order in place as of 31st March 2017.

There will always be identified placement needs which simply could not be met from within our own resources and for which the agency will need to seek external placements from either regional or national partners.

Similarly, there will be the continuing need to monitor the level of recruitment of in-house adopters on a regular, ongoing basis and have suitable contingency plans in place to broaden the choice of suitable placements in the event that the agency experiences further rises in the number of placement orders and/or Looked After children for whom the plan may become adoption.

Recruitment of adopters in the year ahead will need to focus on prospective adopters able to consider young children and young sibling groups, but given the trends suggested by the work of the ALB and the increasingly complex background of children being placed for adoption, the Service will need to re-evaluate its earlier recruitment activity with a view to identifying new ways and methods to better attract additional applicants able to consider placements of older children and sibling groups, as well as very young children with complex developmental and health issues.

Foster for Adoption

We have incorporated information about Fostering for Adoption into all our information and publicity for prospective adopters and into the preparation training. Fostering for Adoption will not be suitable for all adopters so this is an aspect that would be robustly explored with prospective adopters both during the assessment process and following approval. Effective links are also in place with the Fostering Service to provide additional input and training with regard to the fostering requirements for prospective adopters who might be interested in offering such placements.

Since the implementation of Fostering for Adoption the Service has been able to offer a small number of Foster for Adoption placements. The background circumstances of each placement have been very different and the experience of the adopters involved to date has been varied, partly as a result of requirements of the courts

“Fostering to adopt is a relatively new initiative that is successfully achieving permanence through adoption for children. One fostering-to-adopt couple spoke positively of how they were able to care for a new-born baby through early medical treatments in hospital. The baby had the opportunity to form early attachments from birth.....This is a very positive start and the Service is actively promoting this initiative as part of the options for adoption in all recruitment activity.”

Ofsted inspection report - March 2016.

Adoption Support

In 2015-16 the government invested £19.3 million towards the creation of the National Adoption Support Fund (ASF). The fund came into operation on 1st May 2015 and is intended to be used for payments for therapeutic interventions to help support adoptive families. Recent announcements have confirmed that the ASF will continue to operate with increased funding every year until 2020, following which it is hoped plans will be in place to ensure its future sustainability.

Since the inception of the Adoption Support Fund the Adoption Service has made several applications to the Fund and has been successful in obtaining funding for all but one of the applications, which was deemed not to meet the necessary criteria.

The average amount received per application has been in the region of £1,700 and has been used to commission services such as therapeutic life story work and counselling for adoptees, therapeutic parenting sessions for adoptive parents, and therapeutic respite and short-breaks for children in adoptive families.

Since implementation the remit of the fund has been further expanded and access to funding for therapy is now available to Special Guardians of children who were previously Looked After. This will require the agency to review and update current application processes, and identify the capacity for dealing with a potential increase in the number of applications and requests for support, once details of increased access to the fund becomes known more widely and publicly.

The Service will continue to review and consider what changes can be made in terms of its existing service provision to help develop and enhance the current "Gateshead adoption support offer".

We already have in place a well-established support group and the facility to offer a parenting skills group courses for adopters. We will also continue to run our annual "Summer Fun Day" for adopters in July each year. This day provides a great opportunity for adopted children and their parents to get together and enjoy activities and provides an excellent informal support opportunity as adoption social workers are also available on the day.

In addition to information sessions and training for prospective and approved adopters, new group sessions were introduced during the year 2016-17 specifically for extended family members of prospective adopters who were likely to provide support to placements. The aim of these sessions is to relay information about the nature of adoption, the likely background factors for children requiring adoption and offer advice as to how family members can best help support their adopters. Two sessions were run last year, both of which received positive feedback from participants, and further sessions will be offered in the year ahead.

'Thanks for letting me know and I'll look forward to hearing about other sessions. As I said on the phone, I found the session I attended really helpful and left me with plenty to think about. As I hope you are aware, we were both more than happy with the training and general 'adoption process' we went through. However, all the training in the world couldn't really prepare you for the realities especially as the youngsters get older.

Adopters July 2016

The service has also maintained its involvement in local initiatives, such as the Sage Music Project, which not only provides support to adopters, but helps children's development and attachment through the use of music, and we will continue to be involved in any future discussions with the project in relation to further project development.

We also continue to work alongside other adoption agencies in the region to run a monthly "Waiting Adopters Group". This group provides support to approved adopters who are waiting to be matched with a child or children. These groups are generally well attended by Gateshead adopters alongside staff from the Adoption Team.

Our post adoption contact post-box system currently manages 467 different contact agreements involving both adopters and birth families. Each separate contact agreement can include several individuals in addition to birth parents and adopters, e.g siblings, grand-parents etc. Consequently the amount of information involved in such exchanges, and people affected by post adoption contact who may need support, will vastly exceed this figure. Capacity to manage this will become more pertinent given the number of arrangements continues to rise each year, and currently is up by a further 24 agreements on the previous year's figures.

As well as dealing with an increased number of contacts our input and support to birth family members affected by adoption and adopters requiring support post adoption also appears to be increasing. There has been a rise in the referrals from

families who are resident in Gateshead but who adopted children via other adoption agencies. Once that agency's statutory responsibility for providing support has ceased it becomes the responsibility of the agency where they are residing.

"I want to thank you for all you've done - taking time to help, any information or place you thought would help you contacted on my behalf. Alas it did not reap any benefits but your effort and time and kindness was much appreciated".

Adoption support case – request for access to records, July 2016

Our existing Service Level agreement with After Adoption currently enables us to pass on a small number of adoption support and access to birth record cases and to offer families requiring a support service the option of input that is independent of the local authority, thus adding capacity and flexibility to our adoption support offer.

Disruptions, adopters withdrawing, changes of plan for children.

At the latter part of the year end 2016/17 the Service was involved, along with other teams in the agency, in working with several adoptive families experiencing difficulties with children mainly in teenage years/early adolescence. These families included children who had been placed by other agencies with families living in Gateshead but also a couple of children who had been placed by Gateshead and had been living with their respective adoptive families for several years.

Many of the children in question had very complex needs, some of which became more apparent and intensified following their placement in their adoptive family. At an appropriate point in time in the year ahead it will be beneficial for the Service to undertake an intensive review of at least one of these cases in order to help identify any points of learning and areas for future service development.

"There are minimal disruptions, with one break down in 2014-15. This demonstrates the quality of matches for children and the post-adoption support available. The potential lessons from a review of the disrupted placement have been reflected on by the service and the Adoption panel"
Ofsted inspection report - March 2016.

For the year 2016/17 four potential adoptive families withdrew from the process. Three families withdrew prior to their assessment being completed. Registrations of Interest had been accepted but could not be progressed beyond Stage One. In all of the cases this was as a result of issues in relation to statutory checks and references. One set of approved adopters with a birth child who had been awaiting a placement for some time also decided to withdraw from the process, due to a significant change in life circumstances for their family.

During the year 2016-2017 the plan for adoption was subsequently changed in respect of seven children, where authority to place for adoption was not obtained or the plan became long-term fostering or placement with member of the extended birth family.

Complaints and compliments

For the year 2016/17 the Council's Complaints section has no records of any formal complaints in relation to the Service which needed to be addressed. More positively, the Complaints Section has received 18 compliments from a variety of sources including social workers, applicants going through the process and those who have successfully adopted. A selection of some of these comments has been incorporated into various sections of this report.

"Thanks again for all your support. Gateshead has to rank at the top of Adoption support!"

Social Worker, CoramBAAF August 2016

Central List membership for Adoption Panel – April 2016 to March 2017

The following members of the Central List have attended at least one meeting of the Panel this year:

Ian Gates, Independent Chair
Paul Forbes, independent, (Vice Chair)
Councillor Peter Mole
Karen Wilson, Social Worker, Fostering Team
Shauna Garrett, Assistant Team Manager, Fostering Team
Debbie Wilkinson, Team Manager, Safeguarding and Care Planning Team
Janet Dugdale, Team Manager, Safeguarding and Care Planning Team
Jill Smith, Clinical Psychologist
Ann Forster, Adopter
Sharon Jones, Adopter

Neil Carr, foster carer, left the Central List in May 2016.

Medical Adviser and Panel member: Dr Helen Palmer/Dr Carole Mason

Panel Advisers

Janice Cook, Angela Simmons-Mather/Legal Services
Anne Roberts, Adoption Team Manager

Panel Administrator Sonia Forster (Samantha Shannon for 1 panel)

"The adoption panel is suitably robust and carefully considers recommendations for approvals and the quality of matching children with adopters. The agency decision maker makes timely decisions and, where required, pursues additional information to inform well-considered decisions for children."

Ofsted report – March 2016.

Adoption Service Quality Assurance Framework

The Adoption Service has a robust quality assurance system in place to ensure that feedback is received at various stages of the adoption process. All feedback is collated and used to inform service planning. The table below outlines each stage of the quality assurance process:

Adoption Service Quality Assurance Framework		
Stage	Mechanism	Person completing assessment
1.	Training Evaluation Form	Completed by prospective adopter following attendance at training
2.	End of Stage 1 meeting with Team Manager	Discussion led by Team Manager and outcome agreed
3.	Quality Assurance Visit (Pre Adoption Panel)	Adoption Team Manager or Senior Practitioner
4.	Adoption Panel Attendance Feedback Form	Adopter and Child's Social Worker
5.	Satisfaction Survey completed following adoption order.	Adopter and Child's Social Worker

During the past year the majority of the feedback received through these processes has been extremely positive. The comment below is reflective of the type of feedback received.

"We were kept up to date throughout the process. Our Social Worker was open and honest with us throughout the assessment. She spent time getting to know us which was invaluable during panels and the matching process. Both our social worker and the children's' social workers have been incredibly supportive and reassuring since placement. We would recommend Gateshead to anyone thinking of entering the process."

Adopter – November 2016

Key Issues and aims for the year ahead

In 2016/17 the key issues for the Adoption Service will be to:

- To build on our recruitment approach to attract potential adopters from within a 50 mile radius of Gateshead, and to increase the numbers of enquiries from potential adopters, particularly those who might wish to consider older or more complex children or sibling groups.
- To explore opportunities for continued collaborative working with other Local Authorities and voluntary adoption agencies in order to maximise placement choices for children.
- Meet the increasing demand for post adoption support as children with more complex needs continue to be placed for adoption. Evaluate and develop the existing post adoption support that is on offer and make effective use of the Adoption Support Fund. Ensure the provision of access to the fund as appropriate for Special Guardians of previously Looked After Children.
- Continued exploration and development of “fostering to adopt” opportunities in order to reduce delay for children.
- To continue to managing the changes and the requirements of the Adoption Reform agenda, and the implications of the “regionalization of adoption” which will require all local authorities in England to move to a system by 2020 whereby adopter recruitment, family finding for children and adoption support will all be delivered on a regional basis.
- Continued monitoring of our performance and systems to effectively analyse outcomes and identify potential areas for future service development

Conclusion

The Service has achieved several positive outcomes during the past year. Twenty-three children have been successfully adopted and a number of children are currently placed with their adoptive families awaiting adoption. We managed to recruit a sufficient number of adopters to meet our needs during the year and placed several children for adoption with a low level of placement breakdown. We continued to promote initiatives such as fostering to adopt when appropriate. The Service has also continued to develop its adoption support offer, making sensible use of the adoption support fund. Furthermore members of the Service have played a full and constructive part in much of the regional work that has been undertaken by local authority and voluntary sector partners in respect of the development of a Regional Adoption Agency, (Adopt NE).

FOSTERING ANNUAL REPORT 2016/17

INTRODUCTION

As Lead Member for Children and Young People in Gateshead and Chief Executive/Interim Strategic Director of Care, Wellbeing and Learning we hold the responsibility to ensure that children requiring fostering receive good quality services which will support them.

Our Fostering Service and team of foster carers work in partnership to ensure children live in safe, nurturing family homes where they can achieve their potential and enjoy their childhood.

This 2016/17 Fostering Annual Report of Gateshead Council highlights the progress the Fostering Service has made over the past year. **28** new foster carers have been approved, and our carers continue to achieve success in their Level 3 Diploma qualifications and Training Support and Development Standards. This year we also celebrated an exceptionally high number of foster carers receiving long service awards, with one foster family receiving an award for forty years' service.

The national trend shows that over the next five years between 10 and 15 percent of older foster carers will retire and therefore it is a priority for us to ensure that we recruit enough new carers to replace those retiring but also to continue to increase the overall numbers of fostering households to between 200 and 230.

This year we will focus on:

- Further developing the Staying Put Scheme to allow young people to stay with their foster families beyond the age of 18.
- Increasing the number of foster placements for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children, Teenage Placements and Sibling Group Placements.
- Ensuring the recruitment strategy is effective enough to provide a range of placements.
- Reviewing the training and support package offered to foster carers considering caring for teenagers with complex needs.
- Maintaining placement stability.
- Further reducing the number of Independent Fostering Placements we use.
- Monitoring and evaluation the Fostering Service to ensure that the best performance and outcomes possible are achieved.

We are extremely proud of the work that the whole Fostering Team does in order to provide the best possible service and opportunities for our Looked After children in Gateshead and this work will continue. We are acutely aware that children in our care deserve the very best and colleagues and foster carers alike are to be commended for, not only the work they do but for their dedication and commitment.

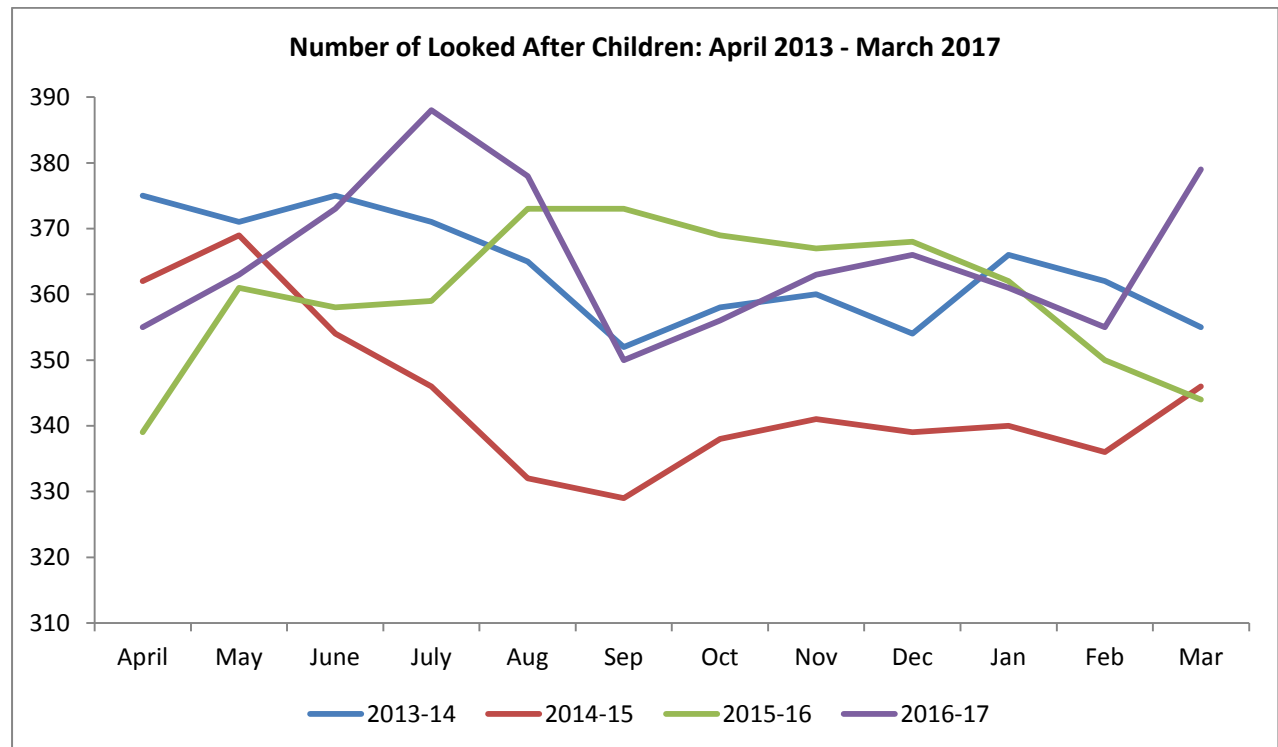
We thank you all for everything you doevery day.

Councillor Angela Douglas
Cabinet Member for Children and Young People

Sheena Ramsey
Chief Executive and Interim Strategic Director of Care, Wellbeing and Learning

The Fostering Service

The Fostering Service staff team is made up of the Team Manager, 2 Assistant Team Managers, 15 Supervising Social Workers, an Education Worker who liaises with the REALAC team and schools in the area, and a Recruitment and Marketing officer. The team is supported by a Business Support unit with dedicated support to foster carer payments, panel and duty administration.



Over the last year the number of Looked After Children in Gateshead has ranged from 341 to 388 with the majority of these children being placed with in-house foster carers.

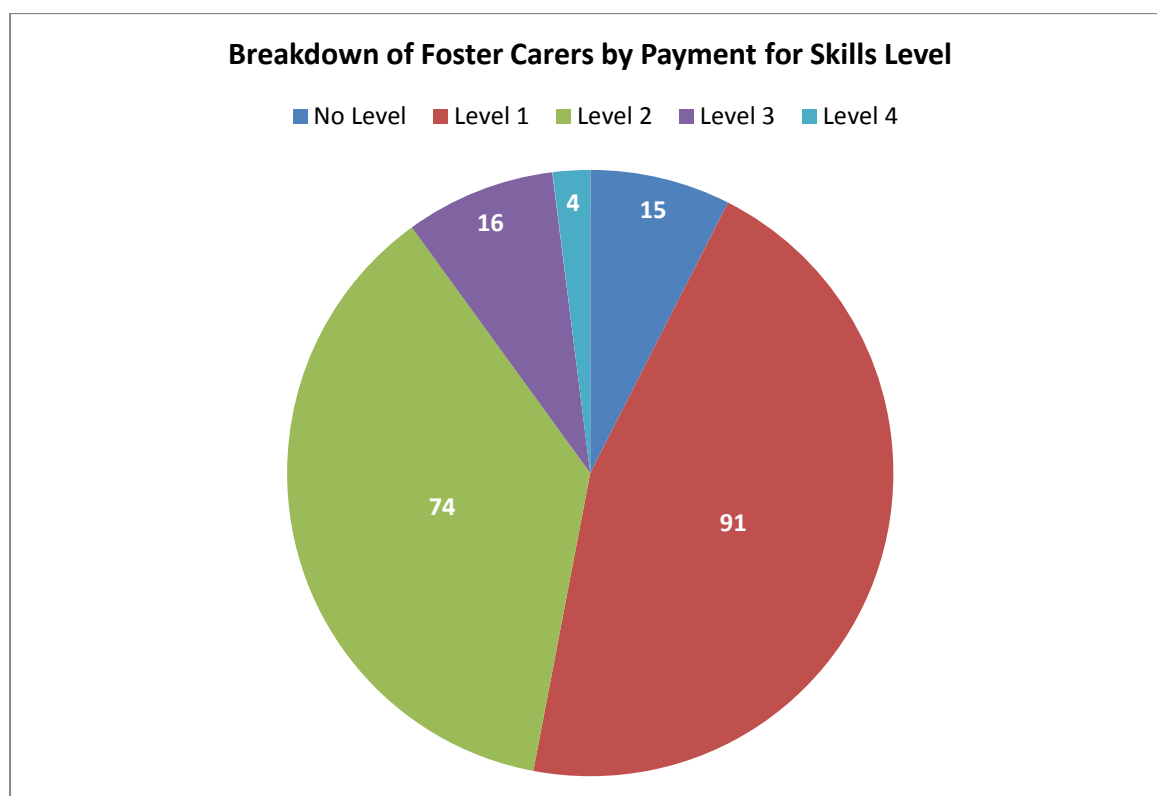
Many of the children leaving care throughout the year are those who are already living with relatives under Fostering Regulations where other legal orders are obtained to secure their permanence with that family i.e. Special Guardianship or Residence Orders. This does not free up any fostering placements within the Service and consequently resources and placements have continued to be limited. This issue of limited placement capacity is not unique to Gateshead as the Fostering Network estimates that there is a shortfall of 8,750 fostering placements across the whole of the U.K.

Payment for Skills

Gateshead Council seeks to continuously improve outcomes for Looked After Children in order to improve their life chances and opportunities. These outcomes are closely linked to the achievement of placement stability and ensuring that children have placement choice and are subsequently matched and placed with the right carers. These factors were at the heart of the Payment for Skills scheme which was developed to operate through a payment model that clearly defines the expectations and in September 2012 the scheme was approved by Cabinet for implementation within the Service.

There are four payment levels within the scheme structure; Level 1 being the lowest level of payment and Level 4 being the highest. The highest level of payment is based on the areas of greatest skills which are required in order to undertake the necessary care tasks. The payment levels were implemented for new and existing foster carers during 2013 and the majority of foster carers are now on one of the four levels, linked to their skills, knowledge and competencies. There is a small number of fostering households, primarily those approved as Connected Person foster carers, who choose not to progress onto Payment for Skills.

This evidence based approach is also being used in the assessment of new foster carers, with the Fostering Panel linking the recommendation of approval of new carers with the Payment for Skills level.



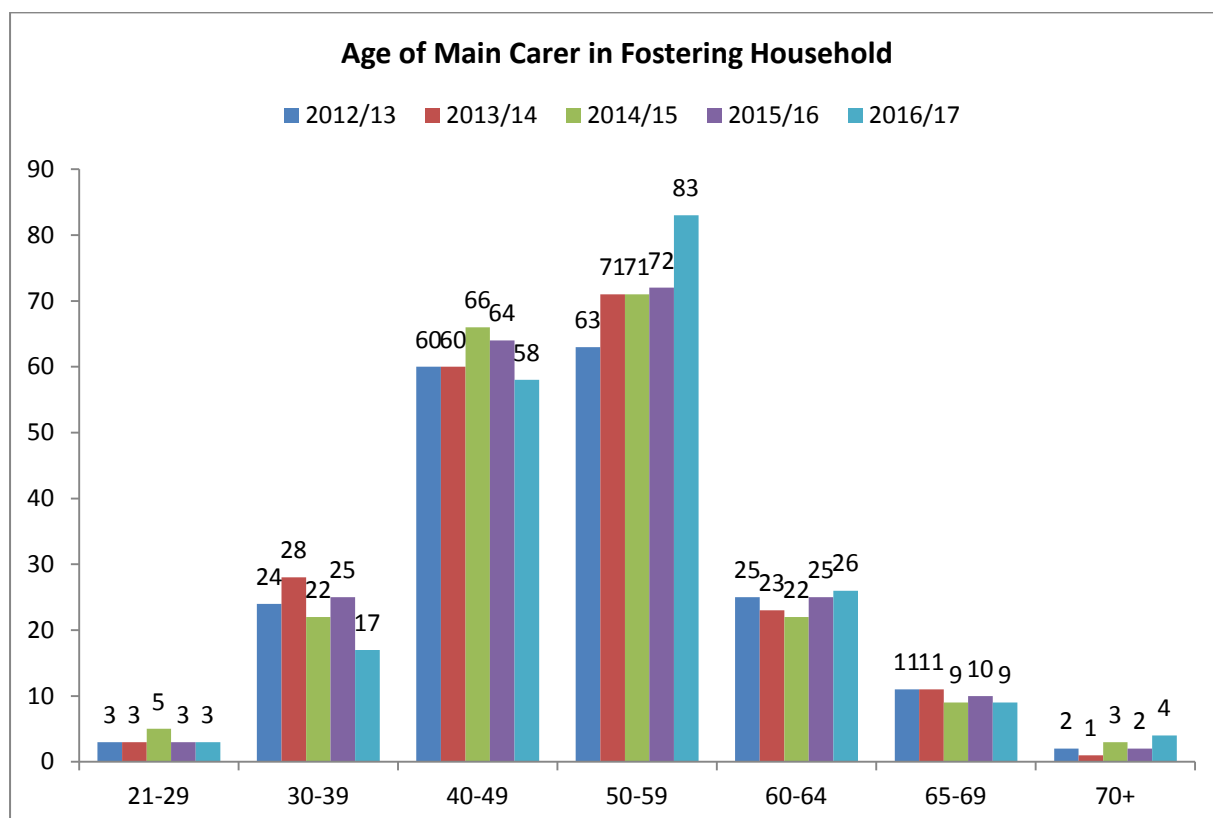
The Foster Carers

At 31st March 2017 there were 200 approved fostering households comprising 349 foster carers, a slight decrease on the previous year. During the year ending 31 March 2017, 28 new fostering households were approved at Fostering Panel, with 26 being deregistered.

The Fostering Service provides a wide range of resources including short break and emergency, short term, task centred and long term/permanent placements for Looked After Children and Young People. The Service also provides short breaks to families who have a child with a disability through the Home from Home scheme and we also have a growing number of foster carers who are providing placements for extended family members or connected children. Many foster carers can offer more than one type of placement, which increases the flexibility within the Service regarding the types of placements we can offer.

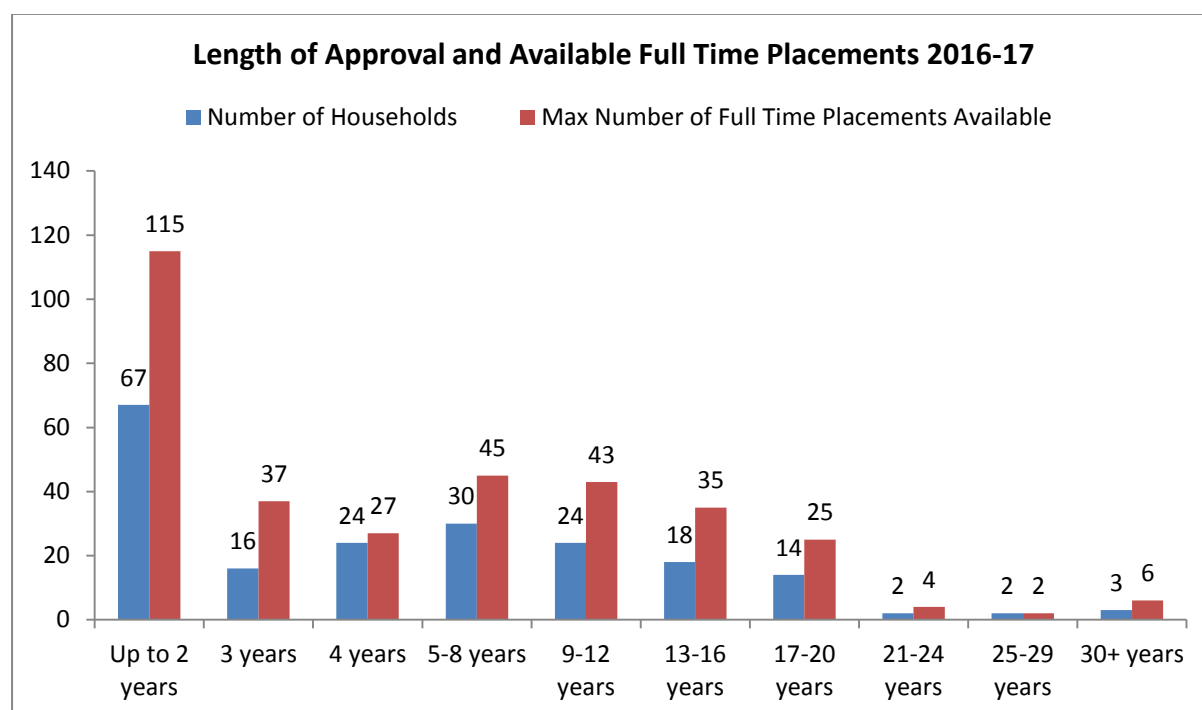
Main Type of Care	Number of Households
Short Break and Respite	2
Short Term and Task Centred	64
Long Term/Permanent	94
Home from Home	11
Connected Person	29

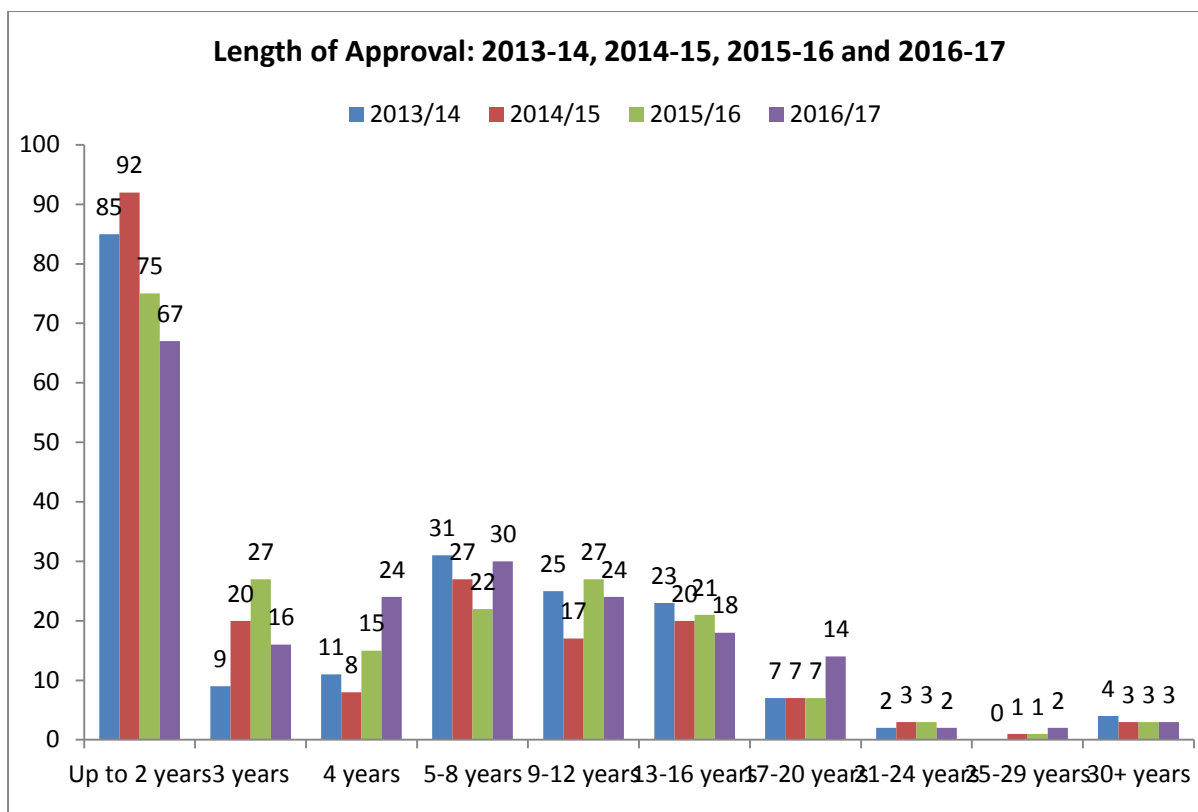
The majority of foster carers (98%) within Gateshead come from a White British ethnic background; however we also have fostering households from the Pakistani and Orthodox Jewish communities. This reflects the shortage of foster carers from ethnic minorities that is experienced nationally. Though a high proportion (91%) of children in placement during the year ending March 2016 were White, our carers also provided placements for those from other ethnic groups.



We continue to have a high proportion of older foster carers within the Service, with the average age of a foster carer being 52 years old. 61% (122) of main carers within fostering households are over the age of 50 and currently provide approximately 62% of the potential available full time placements. This is a sharp increase on the figures last year where 56% of available placements were offered by older fostering households.

The national trend shows that over the next 5 years between 10 - 15% of these older foster carers will retire and therefore it is a priority for us to ensure that we recruit enough new carers not only to replace those retiring but also to continue to increase the overall numbers of fostering households to between 200 and 230. This would provide a significant increase in placement choice and assist in reducing the numbers of children being placed in Independent Fostering Agencies.





The Fostering Service has recruited a number of new foster carers in the last 5 years, with 33% (67) of fostering households having 2 years or less service with the Authority. This number also includes Connected Person carers for specific named children. We also have a cohort of very experienced foster carers, with 15% of our fostering households having over 15 years service. Three households have been fostering for at least 30 years, with one household reaching 40 years in November 2016.

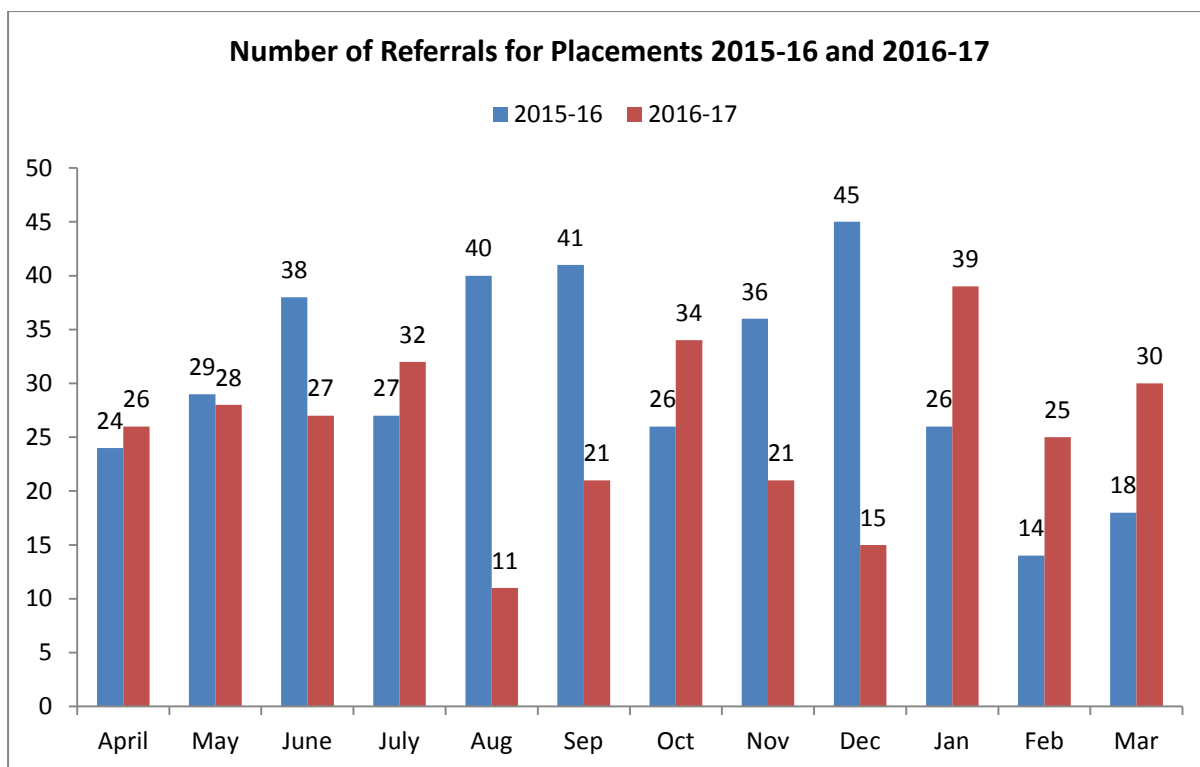
Connected person

This area of work continues to increase as more children are being placed with family members, and given the tight timescales for assessments panel are monitoring these closely to ensure compliance with the regulations. To ensure compliance with regulations, this work is monitored and regularly reviewed by the Assistant Team Manager of the long term team.

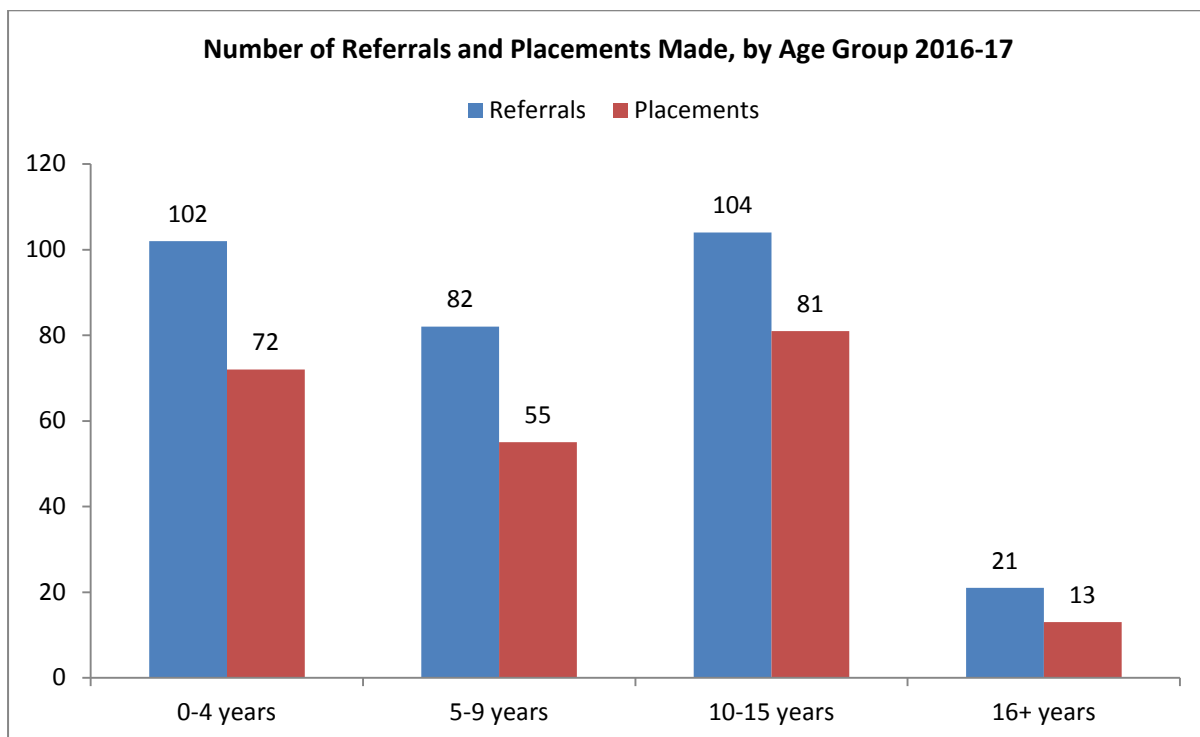
The service recognises that these carers are often dealing with complex family situations and have implemented special support groups for connected person carers. We have also developed strong regional links with the national support group Grandparents Plus, with two of our connected person carers being regional mentors for this group.

Referrals for Placements

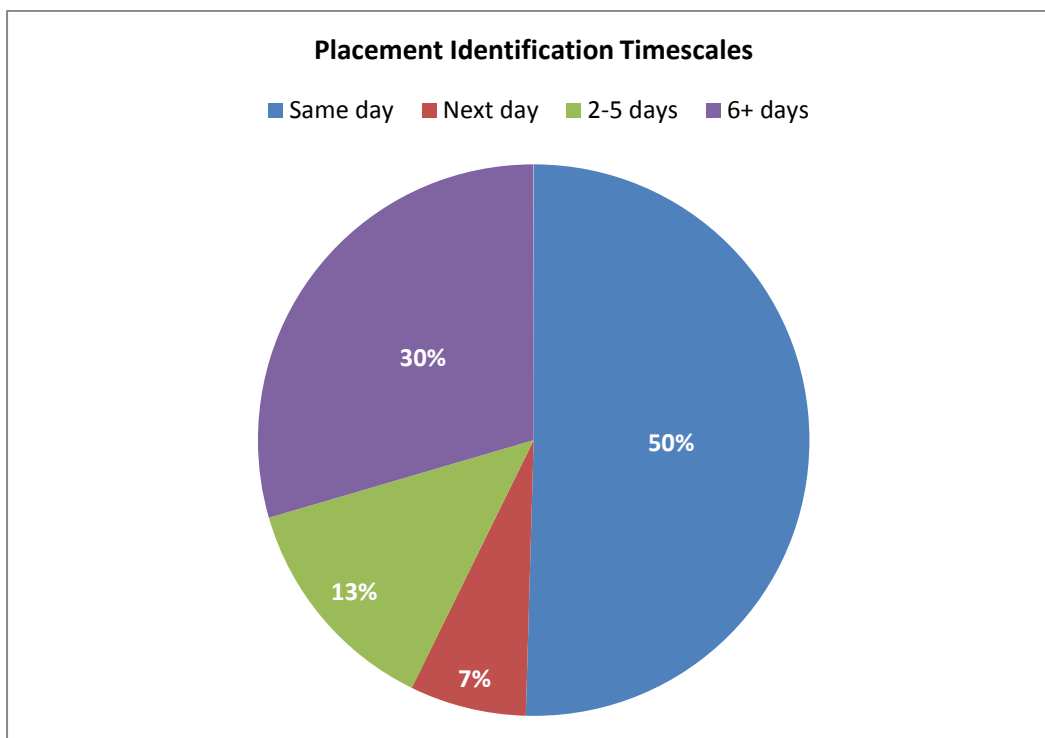
Gateshead's social work teams made 309 referrals to the Fostering Service for placements between 1 April 2016 and 31 March 2017. This is a decrease of 15% on the previous year. Of these referrals, 221 (72%) placements were subsequently made and 88 (28%) were withdrawn by social workers as alternative arrangements were made for the children in question including placements with family or friends.



In contrast to the previous year, the highest numbers of referrals during 2016-17 were received in the first months of 2017. The highest demands for placements during the year continues to be on the 0-4 and 10-15 years range, which continues to influence the marketing campaign to attract more carers for older children in particular teenagers.



The majority of placement referrals from social work teams are for emergency requests where 57% of placements are needed within one working day of the referral being submitted. 7% are needed within 2-5 days and 30% of referrals were needed after six days.



Over the year 49 sibling groups were referred to the Service for a total of 114 children, an increase of 16% on last year. In general requests are primarily to keep siblings together. This is often difficult to achieve given the size of sibling groups referred and has resulted in a number of sibling groups being placed in Independent Fostering placements. However, in the last year the Service has worked on reducing the number of sibling groups having to be split and as a result, there have only been 5 groups placed separately.

Size of Sibling Group	Number Referred and Placed	Number of Groups Placed Together	Number of Groups Split	Total Children
2	30	30	0	60
3	5	0	5	15
4	1	1	0	4

Independent Fostering Placements

Occasionally, due to the type of placements requested and the availability of our own foster carers we are unable to place children in house. In this event the Service commissions placements through external independent fostering agencies, which are more expensive than placing a child with our own foster carers.

All Independent Fostering placements are approved and monitored by the regular External Placements Panel which is chaired by Elaine Devaney, Service Director – Social Work. Every effort is made to keep the use of these placements to a minimum, and also to return children to our own foster placements as soon as possible. However if there are ongoing care proceedings the Service is often directed by Court to leave the children in their placements until these proceedings are concluded.

As of 31st March 2017, Gateshead had commissioned Independent Fostering Placements for 26 children. Of the 22 new placements commissioned during the last financial year, the majority placements were needed for teenagers aged 14 years and older with complex and challenging behaviour where there were no in house foster carers with the necessary skills or space to accommodate them.

Several sibling groups were also placed in Independent placements where the requirement from social workers was to keep the children together and it was not possible to do this within the Service.

However, out of the 22 new Independent Placements commissioned between 1st April 2016 and 31st March 2017, 11 of these also ended during same period. Targeted recruitment has continued to take place over the year in an attempt to increase the number of teenage placements Gateshead can offer and this will continue into the next financial year.

To the period 31 March 2017 Independent placements ended for a total of 20 children which helped the Service's aim of reducing Independent placements.

Reasons for Placement Endings:

	Number of Children
Rehabilitated Home	5
Moved to Supported Lodgings/Independent Living/Staying Put	5
Carers transferred to Gateshead Fostering	1
Moved to In-house Placement	6
Absconded from placement (on bail)	1
Adopted	2

RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

Recruitment Strategy

The service has in place a recruitment strategy spanning the three year period to the end of March 2018 with a target of recruiting at least 30 new foster carer units each year. The marketing plan for 2016/2017 focussed on providing a constant presence across a wide range of media channels with the aim of promoting fostering and adoption jointly, where appropriate, to maximise exposure. Promotional activities were mainly generic in order to reach out to as many potential foster carers as possible throughout the year rather than campaigns aimed at attracting foster carers for specific groups of children, which had previously been unsuccessful.

Promotional Activity

Promotional activity throughout the year has been ongoing and included the use of wider Council resources to target all Gateshead residents. The following outlines the main activity undertaken throughout the year.

Gateshead Council activity:

- Up to date information on the website
- Regular use of council TV screens in the Civic Centre and leisure facilities
- Regular adverts and features in Council News and Council Info
- Bridge banner promotion and civic centre railings
- Banners in the civic centre foyer
- Gateshead Now – direct email to Gateshead residents

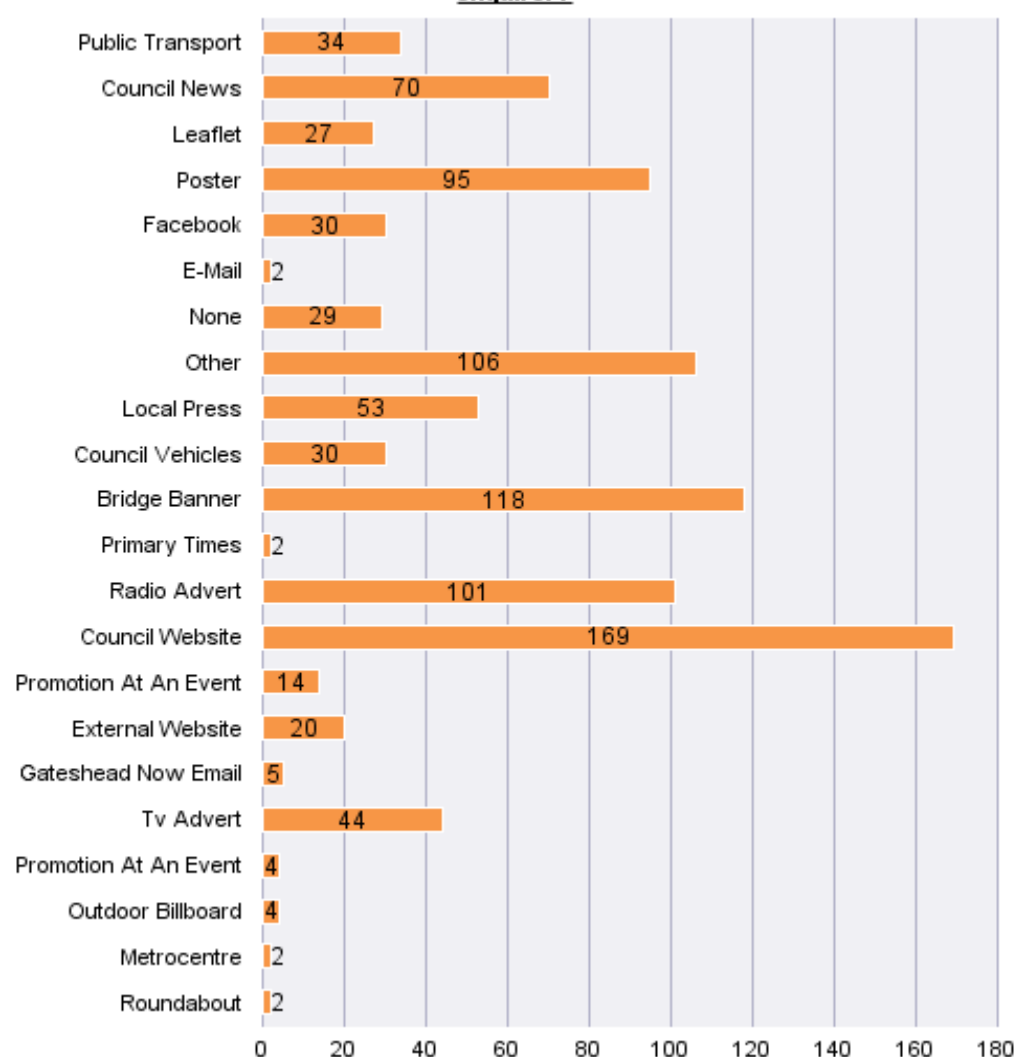
Other external activity:

This focussed on promoting fostering throughout the local region using radio, public transport, outdoor large format poster/digital sites and social media.

So which channels are working for us?

The graph below shows the channels that our enquirers have said they have seen. This information details the responses collected between April 2014 and March 2017 and therefore captures advertising channels used during that period.

Which of Gateshead Council's Fostering Promotional Materials has been seen by the enquirer?



The top six channels cited overall are:

- Council Website
- Bridge Banner
- Radio Advert
- Poster
- Council News
- Local Press

Important note – Bridge banner display is no longer an option available to us as this ceased to be permitted from January 2017.

The graph below highlights which promotional materials the enquirers have seen between 1 April 2016 and 31 March 2017 split into the three years.

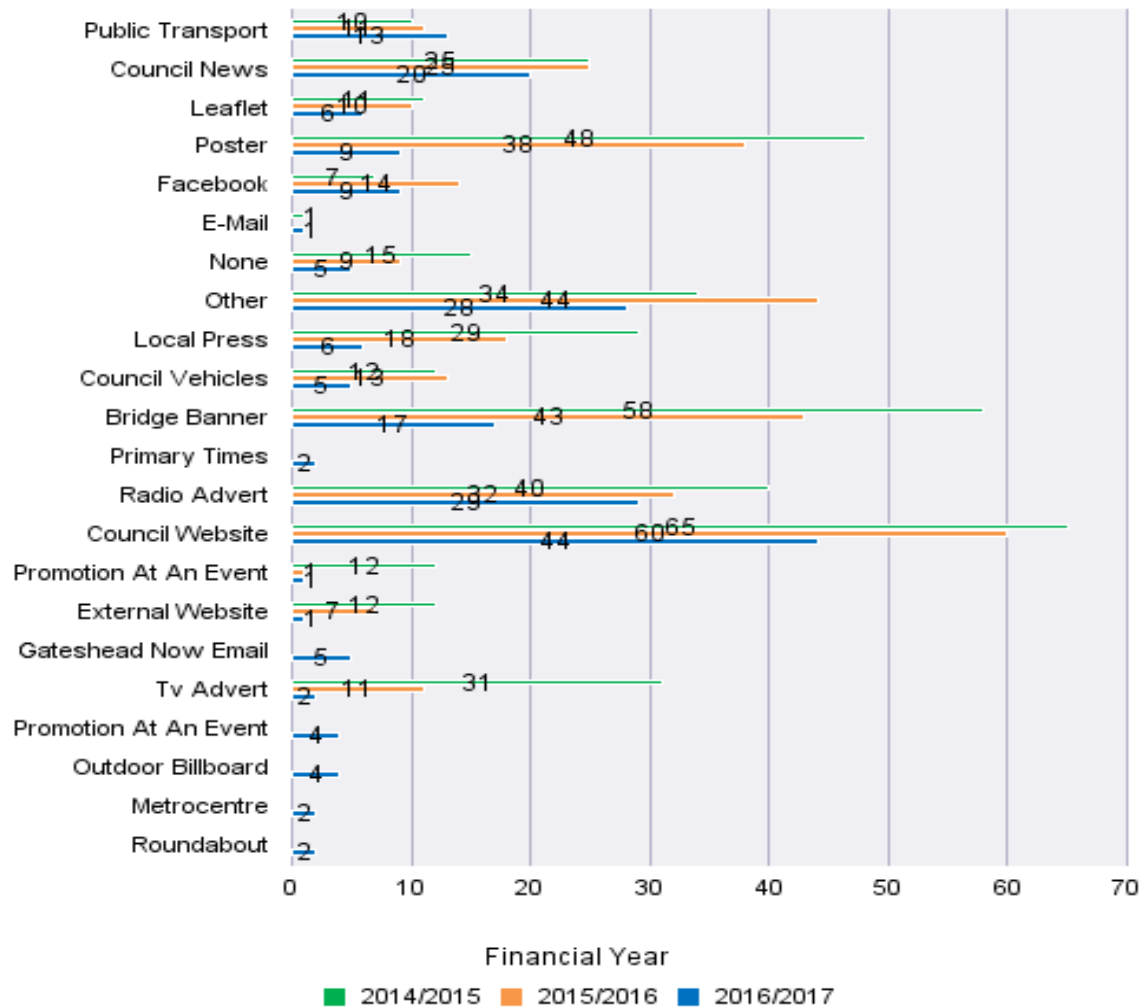
The top six channels cited this year are:

- Council Website
- Radio Advert
- Council News

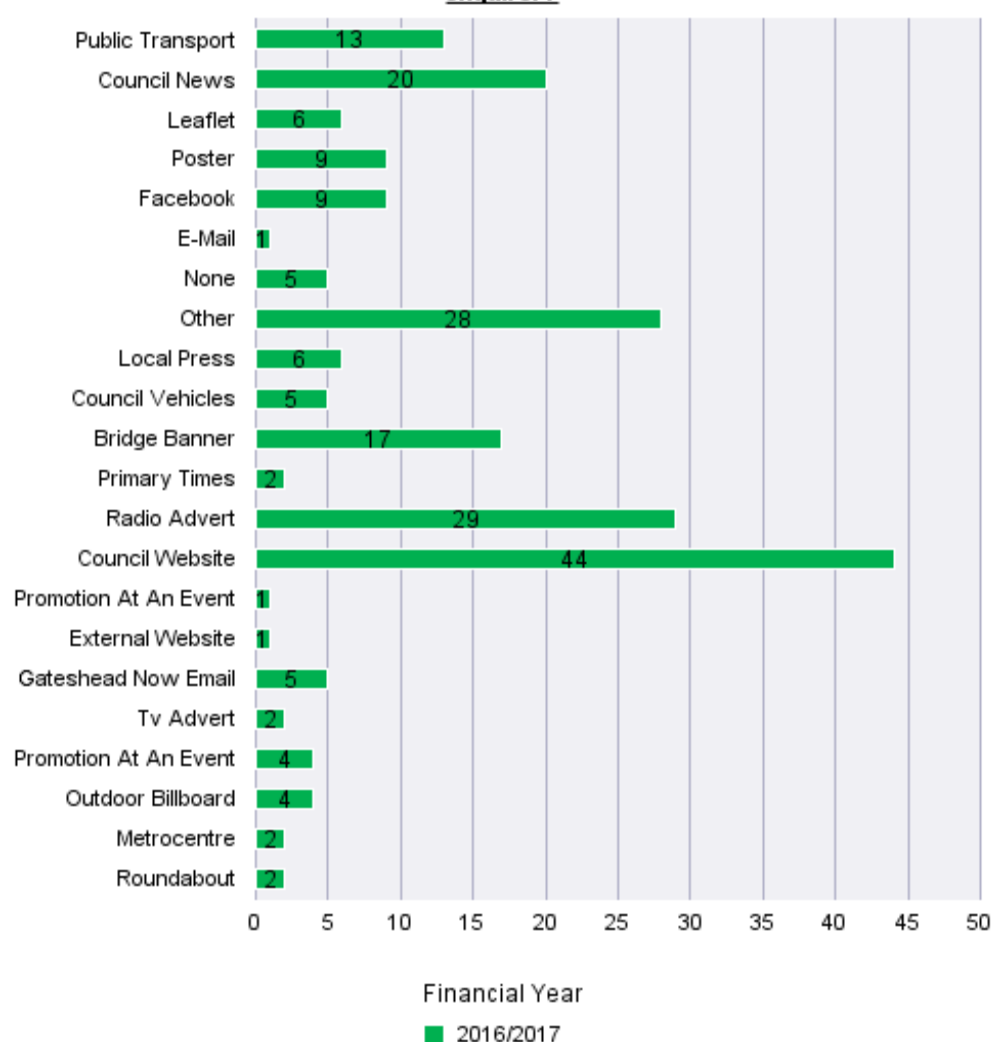
- Bridge Banner
- Public Transport
- Facebook & Poster

The service is making increased use of digital channels and we are starting to see an increase in enquiries via these channels. The radio advertising has been successful this year and we will continue to build awareness via this channel. Public transport advertising is also producing results so should be considered going forward. This information will be analysed further to inform the marketing strategy for 2017/18 and beyond.

Which of Gateshead Council's Fostering Promotional Materials has been seen by the enquirer?

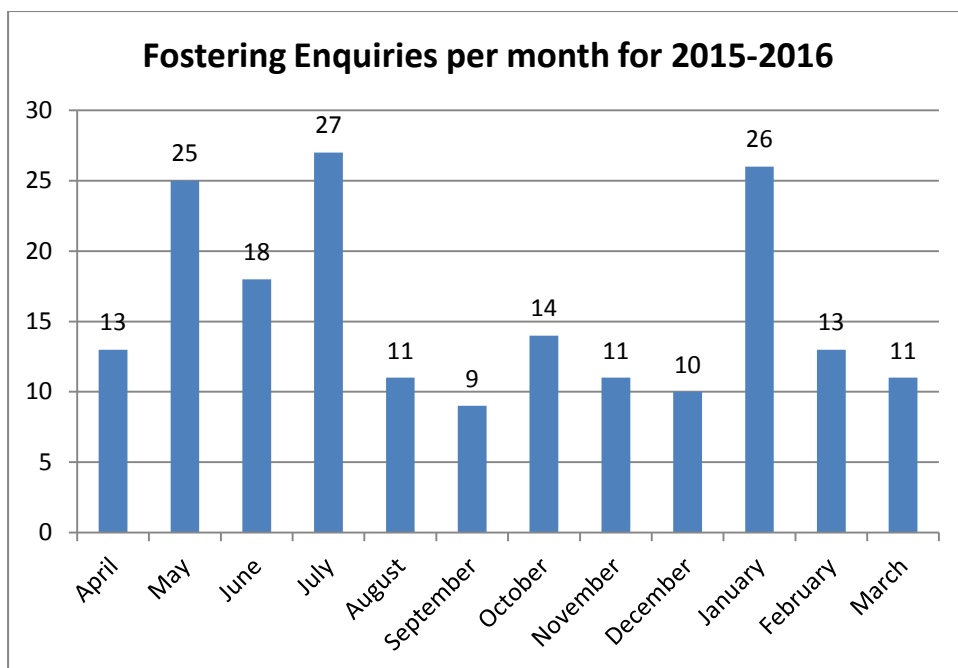


Which of Gateshead Council's Fostering Promotional Materials has been seen by the enquirer?



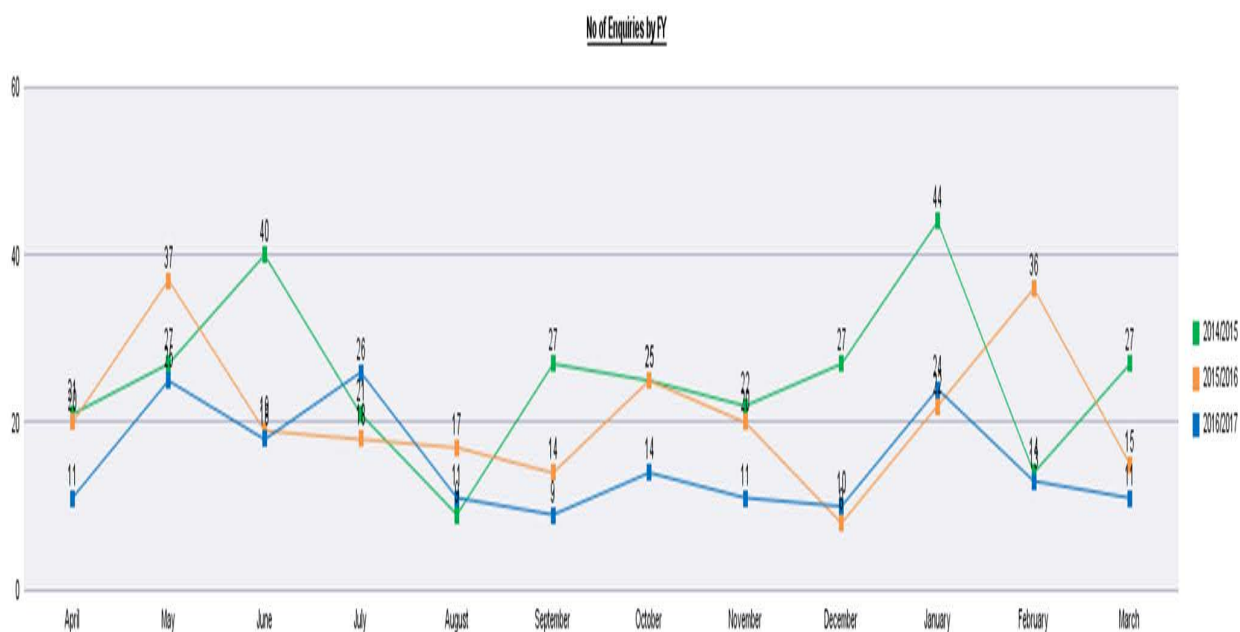
Enquiries

In the year to 31 March 2017 the service received 188 enquiries, a decrease in 27% on the previous year. However, the overall number of fostering households approved at panel increased from 21 in (2015-16) to 28 in (2016-17), though only 16 of these were approved as non-connected person households. The service was therefore extremely close to achieving its target this year despite the decrease in overall enquiries. Going forward however, enquiry levels still need to increase as this will ultimately lead to more foster carers joining Gateshead Council, thus enabling us to have more placements for children who need them. A more robust approach to recruitment will aim to deliver an increase in enquiries.



Conversion Rate

The Local Authority Fostering Service benchmark for 2015 showed that nationally 11% of enquiries proceed to approved carers. The conversion rate for the service during 2016/17 has increased to 14.9 % (based on the number of approvals this year compared to the number of enquiries received). The graph below shows the level of enquiries over the last three years.



The graph shows that we see peak levels of enquiries in May, July and January but that the remaining months have been consistently below the level of previous years.

The next steps

The recruitment strategy requires a full review to ensure it is aligned to the current business goals and robust enough to deliver its objectives. The marketing plan will then be developed outlining how we will achieve the objectives.

The Fostering Service has widened the responsibility for the recruitment and retention of foster carers by involving the senior members of the Fostering Team directly with planning, delivery and reviewing activities. These roles commenced in April 2017 and will ensure we remain clearly focussed on our objectives, which will be more closely monitored and adjusted as necessary. This marketing plan will then be a document which is continuously reviewed.

Our priority will be to increase the number of foster placements for all children but in particular focus will be the need for placements for sibling groups, teenagers and unaccompanied asylum seeking children.

A plan will be developed for the year in order to utilise the “free of charge” marketing tools as well as deliver “paid for” campaigns to ensure that the Gateshead Council’s Fostering Service receives our fair share of the market.

We are hoping to embrace the Fostering Network’s findings from their report “Why Foster Care – The values and motivations profile of newly approved foster carers” - published in 2015, which identified the followings key findings which can help us to understand the current thinking of newly approved foster carers.

- 81% of newly approved foster carer share a common set of “Pioneer” values.
- At a time when the proportion of the UK population with Pioneer values is decreasing, the opposite is true of the foster carer cohort.
- Support available and peer recommendations are two of the primary motivators for selecting a fostering service.
- 41% of assessments are taking longer than eight months.

This research is up to date and therefore extremely important in helping us to achieve our objectives.

RETENTION

Retention of existing foster carers continues to be a high priority for the Fostering Service and foster carers are provided with extensive support and training.

Each fostering household is reviewed on an annual basis, chaired by an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO). This process uses feedback from the foster carers, children in placement and children within the fostering family, as well as the carers’ supervising social worker and social workers for children who are and who have been placed with the foster carers. This feedback is valued by the service and is used to develop and improve service delivery.

As part of the marketing and recruitment strategy, retention of our current foster carers is pivotal in ensuring that we are able to keep our numbers of in-house foster carers to at least a minimum level of 200 households. This will ultimately aid the service in respect of placement choice which then leads to greater placement stability for looked after children. This work is managed and overseen by

the Assistant Team Manager in the short term team who will meet with foster carers who indicate that they no longer wish to foster. Exit interviews with foster carers who resign will also be undertaken to establish what the service could do to reduce the number of foster carers leaving.

Training

The service continues to develop the training offered to all approved foster carers. These include specialist subjects such as Attachment, Child Protection Awareness, Equality and Diversity, Emergency First Aid, Level 1 Food Hygiene, Life Story Work, Promoting Positive Behaviour, Recording Skills and Safer Caring Training. Full time foster carers are expected to complete these courses within the first 12 months of their approval, and Home from Home and respite carers are given 18 months to complete these. Foster carers are also encouraged to attend further training through their fostering career. These courses, as well as any refresher training they require, are identified through discussions with their supervising social worker and forms their professional development plan. This is also linked to the payment for skills criteria and levels.

Following feedback from approved foster carers the service has begun to deliver four of the mandatory training courses for people currently in the assessment process and there is an expectation of any prospective foster carer that they will have completed all four courses by the time their assessment is presented to Fostering Panel.

All foster carers under the Fostering regulations have to complete their Training, Support and Development (TSD) Standards for Foster Carers within 12 months of approval. This year 26 foster carer households achieved this. Preparation training and regular workshops are provided for foster carers to help them with the information they need to be able to complete their portfolio, along with giving them practical hints and tips on gathering evidence and information.

The service also requires all foster carers on Payment for Skills level 2 or above to complete their Level 3 Diploma for the Children and Young People's Workforce. 5

All of the carers who completed their TSD or Diploma were presented with certificates for their achievements at the Foster Carer Awards Ceremony.

The training offered and taken up by Gateshead's carers is monitored and evaluated to ensure we are providing our carers with the skills and knowledge they need in order to support young people and help them achieve the best possible outcomes.

Support Groups

Regular support groups for foster carers have continued to take place covering a wide range of relevant topics including Early Years, Advocacy, Sexual Exploitation, Long Term Training and Delegated Authority, with speakers regularly invited to attend. They have proven to be very successful with positive feedback from both foster carers and invited speakers.

A consultation with foster carers takes place annually to help develop the support groups and to find out what carers would like from future support groups. This information has been used by the service to shape the format and frequency of the groups. Non-attendance at support groups is also monitored by the service with foster carers being regularly reminded by their supervising social workers of the importance of attendance to their professional development along with the expectations of the Payment for Skills model.

Email updates

Regular bulletins to carers about the Service and its recruitment activity have continued throughout the year as well as updates via the Facebook page.

Christmas Party and Summer Family Fun Day

A Family Fun Day took place in July at Cardinal Hume School. Children were able to take part in a range of activities including face painting, bouncy castles and football shoot outs, and there was the opportunity to see a range of insects and small reptiles and be entranced by a magician! This year there were also stilt walking, craft activities and guest appearances from Spider man and Cinderella. Feedback from the carers and young people in attendance continued to be very positive and they welcome the opportunity to spend “quality time” with their families and fellow foster families, as well as colleagues from across the service.

Children enjoyed a visit from Santa at the annual Christmas Party, and carers met for a Christmas coffee morning, complete with mince pies and Christmas raffle. We also held a coffee morning for Foster Care Fortnight to acknowledge the excellent work foster carers do.

Foster Carer Awards Ceremony 2017 – Foster 4 Life

The annual Foster Carer Awards were held on 25 April 2017, at the Lancastrian Suite in Gateshead, recognising the dedication and hard work of all the Council’s foster carers. In Gateshead there are 303 children placed in short term and long term foster placements, including those placed with relative and friend foster carers.

The theme of our annual event, which sees the Council acknowledge the fantastic job our foster carers do looking after the children in their care, was “Foster4 Life”. “Foster 4 life” has a dual meaning; not only does it suggest that fostering is a career for life but it also reflects that it enhances the lives of the children and young people we look after.

This year we celebrated the fact that an exceptionally high number of foster carers reached a significant milestone in the number of years they have been foster carers with Gateshead Council.

We acknowledged that:

- **20** foster families received their 5, 50 or 15 year award,
- **5** foster families received their 20 year award,
- **1** foster family received their 25 year award,
- **2** foster families received their 35 year award, and
- **1** foster family received an award for 40 years’ service.

The presentation of the 40 year long service award to Moira and Les Martin was the highlight of the evening for everyone, as caring for children for forty years is a massive achievement. Gateshead Council is immensely proud of all of our foster carers but Moira and Les Martin received a special mention for their dedication and commitment to fostering services. Moira and Les received their award surrounded by their family and children they have, and currently, look after.

In addition to the above Long Service awards the evening acknowledged the following achievements:

- 20 sets of new foster carers welcomed to the service,
- 19 Sets of foster carers achieving their certificates for Department of Education, Training, Support and Development Standards,

- 12 foster carers achieving a level 3 Diploma for the Children and Young People's workforce,
- 1 foster carer successfully completing the Bridging Units for the Level 3 Diploma.

In addition to these achievements we presented three categories of awards that were nominated by colleagues and other professionals and a set of awards nominated by our looked after children.

These awards were:

- **Extra Mile Award** – Acknowledges foster carers who regularly go above and beyond what is expected of them in delivering an exceptional standard of care. Eight sets of carers received awards in this category. Some of the nominations were for the following:
 - Providing stability to three children via a long term placement arrangement.
 - Ensuring adoption introductions went smoothly.
 - Managing three complex placements and being excellent advocates.
 - Showing resilience and commitment to young people.
 - Never losing focus of the child's needs whilst facing own health issues.
 - Always putting the best interests of the young person first.
- **Unsung Hero Award** – For foster carers who epitomise dedication and drive and always deliver on their promises in an unassuming way. Nineteen sets of carers received awards in this category. Some of the nominations were for the following:
 - Exceptional support to the training programme.
 - Being respected in the local community as a foster carer and for being a brilliant role model.
 - Providing respite care to two children in addition to their two long term placements.
 - Providing exceptional mother and baby placements.
 - Displaying an amazing insight into the needs of children.
- **Outstanding Newcomer of the Year Award** – For foster carers who have joined the organisation since 1 April 2016, who show real drive, exceptional performance, enthusiasm and motivation. Five sets of carers awards in this category. The nominations were for:
 - Accepting placements outside their age range and providing excellent care to children with very complex needs.
 - Providing a long term placement, rather than their preference for short term, and establishing a wonderful relationship with the children.
 - Showing significant insight into the needs of Looked After Children as well as being extremely flexible.
 - Providing a supportive, child centred placement for a young person whilst demonstrating their confidence, motivation and passion for their role.
 - Accepting a sibling placement within two weeks of approval and working hard to enable the children to meet their developmental milestones.
- **Most Amazing Carer** – Nominated by our Looked After Children. Seven sets of carers received awards in this category.

The event was a fantastic experience for all who attended and the following quotes, from children in foster care who nominated their carers demonstrate the real difference foster carers in Gateshead make to the children in our care.

- " Being the best cook and the best mam ever, helping us with our homework and washing our faces, loving us and keeping us safe, driving us to school every day and taking us to hospital appointments even when you feel poorly."
- "They are my family who deal with my problems, buy me clothes, holidays, give me love, teach me manners and spend each and every day of their lives ensuring I am the happiest child in the world. When I am down one hug can say a thousand words."
- "My foster carer always gives me good advice and helps me move into my future. My carer is amazing because she loves me and wants me to have a good life, a better life and a happy

life because my childhood has not been easy until I came to live with my carer and I appreciate it so much.

Fostering Panel

In broad terms the role of the Fostering Panel provides an independent perspective on the business of the Fostering Service, informed by a range of expertise to monitor and quality assure social work practice in the best interests of children and young people in foster care. It provides recommendations to the Agency Decision Maker that accurately reflects the facts of the cases presented.

There is a need for Fostering Services to maintain a Central List of panel members consisting of a multidisciplinary membership of experienced professionals. No business can be conducted by panel unless at least the following people are present:

The Chair or one of the Vice-Chairs

One member who is a social worker (who may or may not be employed by the Fostering Service) with at least 3 years relevant post-qualifying experience

Three other members from the Central List

At least one member of the panel must be independent (this can be the Chair or Vice-Chair) – Regulation 24 (1)

The UK National Standards for Foster Care 2011 (14.8) recommends that:

“...the number, skills, knowledge and experience of persons on the central list are sufficient to enable the fostering service to constitute panels that are equipped to make competent recommendations to the fostering service provider, taking into account the nature of the children and carers that the service caters for”

Gateshead's fostering service continues to operate 2 panels per month, with membership being made up from the central list. Each panel has a consistent membership and is chaired by the same panel chair to ensure consistency and continuity when dealing with all panel business.

All panel members have an annual panel review, where they are consulted about their views, discuss how they are developing their role on panel, identify any areas of development and make suggestions on how panel can be improved. The review is carried out by Sue Holton – panel chair and Alan Clark – agency advisor.

All new Panel members are given induction training, which is held over a half day and covers Panel's statutory function and business as well as the expectations of Panel members. This ensures people are fully aware of the legislation relating to panel, the function and running of panel and the expectations on panel members. People who have attended this training have given positive feedback and feel that it has helped them in their role as a panel member

Training is also provided to all Panel members on a bi-annual basis. This year, the training has primarily focused on the implementation of the new Regulations, the Form F assessment process and analysis, Foster Carer Review paperwork and the long term matching process.

In April 2016 new Service Director Elaine Devaney was appointed as Agency Decision Maker, following the departure of Debra Patterson.

The panel met nineteen times during the year to meet the increasing needs of the service.

Activity	2016-17
Form F assessments	16
Connected person	12
De-registrations of foster carers	21
De-registrations of connected persons	5
Foster carer reviews	47
Matching children and carers	18
Non-progression of Form F assessments	3
Extension to Regulation 24 sixteen week temporary approval period	19

Number of placements

The Service has acquired 16 new sets of non-connected person foster carers who can potentially offer up to 28 full time placements, if siblings can share a room. Panel have been flexible with their approval categories in relation to the age range and have tried to approve people up to the age of 18 if they are in agreement with this. They have recommended preferences in relation to the age range rather than being specific, which ensures carers do not need to come back to panel if they take a slightly older or younger child than their preference. In addition, 12 new sets of connected person foster carers were approved throughout the year, for a total of 16 children. This is a significant increase of 140% on the previous year.

De-registrations

The 'Local Authority Fostering Services in England performance benchmark report 2013/14' shows that nationally 12% of foster carers left their service. In Gateshead 26 sets of foster carers were de-registered at panel, equating to 13%, which is roughly equivalent to this figure. The number of de-registrations in Gateshead has remained at a similar level to the last financial year.

REASON	NUMBER
Resignation	3
Retirement	1
Change of personal circumstances e.g. return to work, new partner	8

Change in family circumstances e.g birth of child, adopted child	1
Allegations/concerns	6
Child Arrangement Order or Special Guardianship Order for carer	2
Connected person – rehabilitation home	1
Impact on Family/Unable to manage fostering task	2
Transferred to another Fostering Agency	2

Panel Feedback Forms

The agency has implemented feedback forms for everyone attending panel. This includes all social workers, prospective foster carers and approved foster carers. This feedback is monitored by the Fostering Team Manager and used to improve panel. The feedback forms have largely identified that people attending panel have a positive experience, they feel that they are made to feel welcome and the questions they are asked are relevant.

Service Development

In addition to working to implement any proposed new governmental reforms to fostering practice, the key areas for development within the Fostering service are:

- Continue to develop the Staying Put Scheme which allows young people to remain in their foster placements beyond the age of 18.
- Undertake targeted recruitment campaigns to increase the number of foster placements specifically around Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children, Teenage Placements and Sibling Group Placements.
- Develop the training and support offered to foster carers who are considering caring for teenagers with complex needs.
- Ensure the recruitment strategy is robust and that there is evidence we are providing a choice of appropriate placements.
- Ensure the excellent work undertaken with regards to placement stability continues.
- Continue in the reduction of the use of Independent Fostering Placements.
- Continue to monitor the Fostering Service and evaluate all activities to ensure that the best performance and outcomes possible are achieved.

educationGateshead

Yearly Report Service and School Performance



Raising achievement for all

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1. Introduction

A key target for educationGateshead is to ensure that all schools are performing well and providing Gateshead children and young people with the best start to life and preparing them for further learning, training or employment. Schools that perform well place children and young people at the centre of all their activity.

Each term the Council's school Inspection team assesses the performance of each school against the criteria identified in the School Intervention and Support Policy (SISP).

The purpose of "SISP" is to identify issues early in schools and to take appropriate action to improve the situation. This process is well established in the service and with schools.

There are three main sources of information that feed into the SISP process when judging the performance of school.

- i. **The latest Ofsted Inspection:** the relevance of the inspection findings are highly dependent on the time that has passed since the inspection.
- ii. **Pupil Performance Data:** our young people are assessed or tested regularly throughout their school careers. All of this data is captured and analysed. This assessment data is extremely important in identifying whether pupils are making good progress but needs to be balanced with an understanding of the context of each school and sometimes with the specific "story" for each child or young person.
- iii. **First Hand Experience:** each school buys into an advice and support SLA that entitles the school to visits from a link inspector. It is the link inspector's role to work alongside the school staff to identify any areas of underperformance and then support the school to take appropriate action.

Performance of educationGateshead

Although the Service consists of a number of teams, all of them contribute, to a greater or lesser degree, to the effectiveness of our schools. This report looks at two "proxy" indicators that provide external objective evidence on the performance of educationGateshead in working alongside schools to give pupils the best possible education.

- i. Pupil Performance Data (Exam/assessment test results) achieved by Gateshead children/young people.
- ii. Ofsted Inspection Results achieved by Gateshead schools.

2. Pupil Performance Data 2015

	2014 % pupils achieving expected learning			2015 % pupils achieving expected learning			2016 % pupils achieving expected learning		
	England	North East	LA	England	North East	LA	England	North East	LA
<i>Communication & Language AOL</i>	77	74	84	80	78	86	82	81	88
<i>Physical Development AOL</i>	86	83	87	87	86	91	88	87	92
<i>Personal, social & emotional development AOL</i>	81	78	84	84	82	88	85	85	89
<i>Literacy AOL</i>	66	62	62	70	67	67	72	71	71
<i>Mathematics AOL</i>	72	67	69	76	72	72	77	76	77
<i>Understanding the World AOL</i>	80	76	80	82	80	84	83	82	87
<i>Expressive arts & design AOL</i>	83	78	82	85	82	88	86	85	90
<i>Good level of development</i>	60	56	57	66	63	64	69	68	68
<i>LA – England GLD Gap</i>			-3			-2			-1

Summary

Over recent years there has been a concerted effort by schools and education in Gateshead to ensure a rise in the proportion of children achieving the expected level in every area of learning.

The percentage of pupils in Gateshead showing a good level of development at the end of the Key Stage has increased from 64% to 68%. This is just below the national figure (68%) and is in line with this year's regional figure (68%). Whilst this figure is pleasing, it is even more impressive when the children's levels of development on entry are considered.

Challenges

The data show that the EYFS attainment in Gateshead is much improved and now broadly in line with national averages. Our ongoing challenge, in all schools, is to ensure that our young children are making good progress from their accurately assessed starting points and greater proportions are achieving "a good level of development". Ofsted inspections commonly judge progress in EYFS to be good. Government policy on Early Years' assessment over recent years has not been consistent and has often left practitioners confused and frustrated.

Key Stage 1 SAT results

Statutory assessment taken at the end of Year 2.

These assessments have radically changed and, therefore, there is no trend data available. Well established “levels” have been replaced with assessments of below or at “expected standard”. The most able pupils may achieve at “greater depth”.

Percentage of pupils achieving the “expected standard”

	Reading	Writing	Mathematics
Gateshead	77	69	74
National	74	65	73
North East	75	68	74

Percentage of pupils achieving “greater depth”

	Reading	Writing	Mathematics
Gateshead	28	17	20
National	24	13	18
North East	24	14	18

Summary

Key Stage 1 data indicates that attainment by the age of 7 in Gateshead is, generally, in line with the national average when considering “expected standard”. Over the last few years attainment overall has increased at a greater rate in Gateshead than nationally and in neighbouring authorities. It is particularly pleasing to see that the proportion of children achieving at a “greater depth” is greater in Gateshead than seen in the region or nationally.

Challenges

Key Stage 1 SAT results are improving and this trajectory needs to continue. While this position is not seen in all Gateshead schools it is a common position. The challenge is to ensure that every school is able to demonstrate that all groups of pupils make strong progress from their starting points.

This is the first year of “non level” assessment at Key Stage 2 and while the picture is very positive further year’s data will be needed to assess the validity of these assessments.

Key Stage 2 SAT Results

Statutory Assessment taken at the end of Year 6 (final year of primary school).

These assessments have radically changed and, therefore, there is no trend data available. Well established “levels” have been replaced with assessments of below or at “expected standard”. The most able pupils may achieve at a “higher standard”.

Percentage of pupils achieving at the expected or higher standard in reading

	Expected Standard	Higher Standard	Progress Score
Gateshead	72	20	1.7
National	66	19	0
North East	68	19	0.6

Progress rank 9 out of 152 LAs

Percentage of pupils achieving at the expected or higher standard in writing

	Expected Standard	Greater Depth	Progress Score
Gateshead	82	18	2.0
National	74	15	0
North East	78	18	1.1

Progress rank 11 out of 152 LAs

Percentage of pupils achieving at the expected or higher standard in mathematics

	Expected Standard	Higher Standard	Progress Score
Gateshead	76	18	1.6
National	70	17	0
North East	73	17	0.8

Progress rank 18 out of 152 LAs

Percentage of pupils achieving at the expected or higher standard in Reading, Writing & Mathematics i.e. all subjects

	Expected Standard	Higher Standard
Gateshead	61	7
National	53	5
North East	57	6

Summary

Gateshead's performance continues to be above the national and regional averages by the end of key Stage 2 on the majority of measures. Gateshead is in a strong position when compared to statistical neighbours and the national picture.

The progress scores (new measure) also show that pupils in Gateshead make very strong progress across Key Stage 2

Challenges

On the majority of performance indicators Key Stage 2 attainment and progress measures are extremely positive. However, a key remaining challenge is to address the achievement gap between pupils eligible for pupil premium funding and their peers at Key Stage 2.

This is the first year of new "tougher" and "non Levelled" assessments. The assessments have been highly controversial and need to improve to allow all 11 year olds to be able to demonstrate what they know and can do in future years. The 2016 results indicate that only 53% of 11 year olds nationally achieved the expected level in all subjects. This compares with the previous year's figure of 82%. It is ridiculous to claim that 47% of children have "failed" their primary education. While we have the challenge to continue to promote high standards, we also must make sure that a flawed assessment system does not label our children failures or tells our teachers they are not good.

Key Stage 4 (GCSE/Equivalents)

These assessments have radically changed and, therefore, there is no trend data available. Essentially, the key assessment measure of the percentage of pupils achieving 5A*-C including English and mathematics, whilst still being calculated, has been replaced by two measures; **attainment 8** – which gives an indication of actual GCSE performance across a range of subjects and **progress 8** – which gives an indication of the progress across a range of subjects the students have made from their starting points at the end of the primary schools.

Average Attainment 8 & Progress 8 Scores

	Attainment 8 Score	Progress 8 Score
Gateshead	49.9	-0.15
National	48.5	0
North East	48.7	-0.16

Summary

The figures suggest that, overall, the typical Gateshead student gets better GCSE grades than students nationally or in the North East. This assertion is supported by using the “old” 5A*-C including English and mathematics measure. However, given their very strong starting points, Gateshead students did not make as much progress as students nationally, although they made similar progress as GCSE students in the North East.

Challenges

Variation in performance between schools remains a significant challenge. Within schools the performance gap between those students that are disadvantaged and their more advantaged peers continues to be an ongoing and complex problem to overcome.

This situation is further complicate by the Council not having the resources to make a significant difference in secondary schools or the mandate as by Christmas 2017 all secondary schools in Gateshead will either be stand-alone academies or part of multi academy trusts.

Post 16 Performance

Post 16 assessment has again seen a significant change in the way it is presented and because of this there is no trend data.

Average Point Score (APS) per Entry

	*APS per Entry
Gateshead	33.62
National	32.41
North East	31.26

* Covers students at the end of advanced level study who were entered for at least one academic qualification equal in size to at least half (0.5) an A level or an extended project (size 0.3), or applied general or tech level qualification during their 16-18 study.

Summary

Until future years' data is collected an analysis of trend cannot be carried out. However the average points per entry figures shows that Gateshead students, per entry, are outperforming their peers both regionally and nationally.

3. Ofsted Inspection Findings

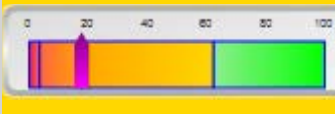

In Gateshead (the following figures refer to the summative grade or “Overall Effectiveness” grade given to each school in its last inspection):

- 82% of all schools are either good or outstanding
- 90% of primary schools are good or outstanding
- 100% of special schools are good or outstanding
- 30% of secondary schools are good or outstanding.
- 38% of all schools are outstanding (20% nationally)
- 3 schools are judged to be inadequate.

The percentage of schools in each school group by their latest Overall Effectiveness Ofsted Judgement

Ofsted Judgements – Overall Effectiveness

Published Judgements up to 31/05/2017

School Group, Type and Status :-	Inadequate	Satisfactory / Requires Improvement	Good	Outstanding	Good or better	Judgement Gauge
All Schools (85 Judgements)	4%	14%	45%	38%	82%	
Primary (67)	0%	10%	52%	37%	90%	
Secondary (10)	20%	50%	0%	30%	30%	
Special (6)	0%	0%	50%	50%	100%	
Other (2)	50%	0%	0%	50%	50%	

Summary

Ofsted inspection judgements, at this time, are far more positive in the primary and special sectors than the secondary by a considerable margin.

This academic year has been particularly bruising for the secondary sector with all but one school inspected by ofsted receiving an overall effectiveness judgement grade lower than the previous inspection assessment. Schools without any ofsted grades i.e. new academies inspected for the first time were also identified by ofsted as not being good schools.

In summary, of the 5 secondary schools inspected 2016/17 (half of the borough's secondary schools) three were rated as "requires improvement" and two as "inadequate".

It should also be noted that using the performance measure of 5 A*-C including English and mathematics that the borough's national ranking went up from 63rd place in 2015 to 55th place in 2016. A greater proportion of pupils achieved 5 good GCSEs including English and mathematics in 2016 than did in 2015.

In the other sectors, the majority of schools inspected retained their good rating by Ofsted. There have been some exceptions with some schools improving and others dropping, but not on a large scale.

A truly "standout" positive figure is that 38% of all schools in Gateshead are judged to be outstanding by Ofsted inspectors. This compares to a national figure of approximately 20%.

Challenges

The achievable ambition is that all schools are good or outstanding in Gateshead. Considerable focus and resource is aimed at maintained schools that are not yet identified by Ofsted to be good schools. This includes the formation of Governor Steering Groups, links facilitated with outstanding schools and increased officer input. Where appropriate the LA works closely with the Dioceses. Schools in this situation commonly making strong progress across a range of issues as they move towards becoming "good" schools. Although, the secondary sector will soon be totally academised the LA must find ways to increase the proportion of schools that are judged to be good or outstanding.

4. Conclusion

Ofsted inspection results and pupil performance data largely support the same finding i.e. the education provision in Gateshead is very strong in the nursery, primary and special sectors. Irrespective of the starting points of our children, they thrive in the nursery, primary and special schools; they make good progress and often leave with standards above the national standards.

More primary schools are judged to be good or better in Gateshead than in the majority of Local Authorities in England. Early Years performance has continued to improve and the proportion of children achieving a “good level of development” is broadly in line with national averages.

The performance of primary schools at the end of Key Stage 2 was outstanding. Although the assessment regime was simply not a fair measure of what 11 year olds can achieve.

Performance in Secondary Schools and academies is more variable than seen within the primary or special sector with a much smaller proportion of schools being judged by Ofsted to be good or better and some performance data being less favourable when compared to national averages, for example, data that shows the progress that pupils are making since leaving their primary schools.

Too few secondary schools in Gateshead are judged to be good. This is a significant concern.

Therefore, if Ofsted inspection results and pupil performance data are to be seen as proxy indicators for the performance of the school improvement function of educationGateshead then the team is working effectively in Gateshead primary and special schools. However, there are clear ongoing challenges for the council and the schools.

- To ensure that we provide the children with the best start in life and continue to assess whether all groups are making at least good throughout their time in school
- To maintain the high levels of attainment and progress recorded at the end of Year 6 and to continue to narrow the gap for those pupils entitled to pupil premium funding.
- To work more effectively with those secondary schools/academies judged by Ofsted to not be good and to work with partners more effectively to ensure all Gateshead young people attend a good school.
- To more effectively challenge and support secondary schools and academies to accelerate progress and raise attainment for those students entitled to pupil premium funding.
- To challenge and support all schools where pupils are not making sufficient progress.
- And while we seek to raise standards to remember that our children and young people have a whole set of abilities and qualities not measured by tests.

Families Gateshead

Annual Report 2016 – 2017

INTRODUCTION

The National Troubled Families Programme (Families Gateshead (FG) is in Phase 2 - year 3 of the 5 year programme due to end in March 2020. Progress to date in Gateshead has been good despite recent negative press in relation to the national programme. In Gateshead we continue to develop the work across the Council and with our partners using the FG methodology to develop the early help strategy and model. The model is based on the Common Assessment Framework (CAF); Lead Practitioner (LP); and Team around the Family (TAF), which is currently in place for Families Gateshead.

PERFORMANCE

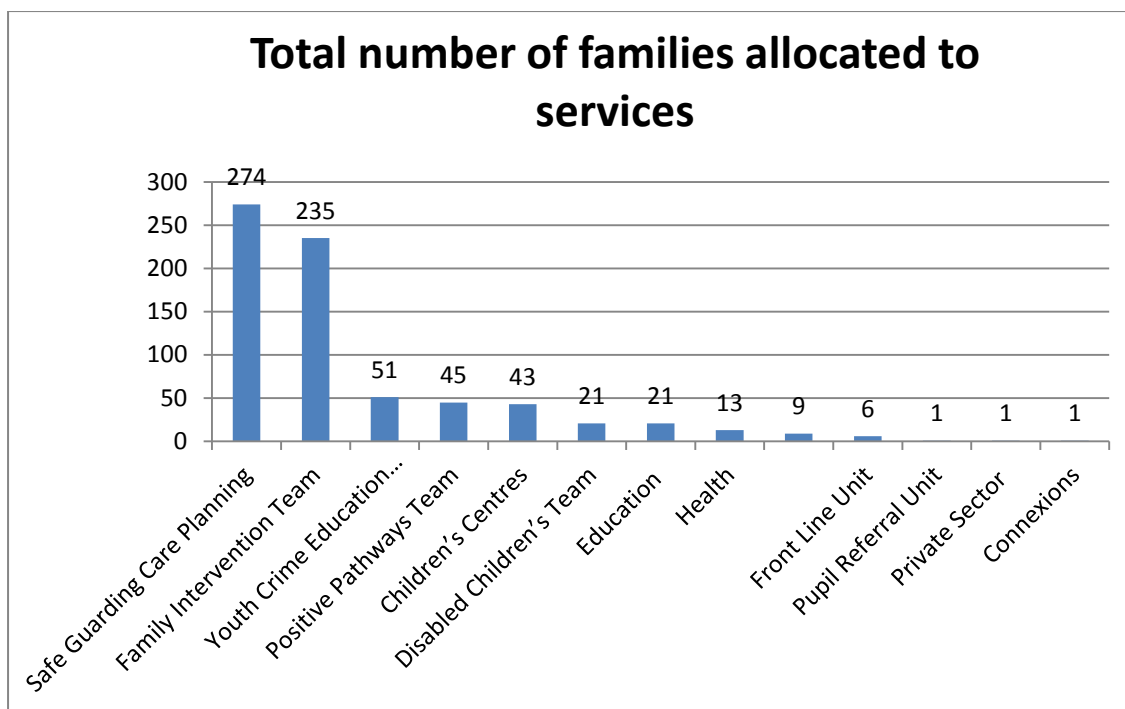
The below table shows a breakdown of the total number of allocations from the start of the early adopter phase of Phase 2 of the programme up to 31/03/2017

Total number of families currently subject to CIN assessment within R&A	Total number of phase 2 families allocated since September 2014	Total number of phase 2 families that remain open to services and in receipt of package of support	Total number of phase 2 families in monitoring <i>(where successful outcomes have been achieved but not yet sustained for the required timescales for claim)</i>
221	1520	723	393

During 2016/2017 Gateshead newly identified a total number of 551 families across services within the local authority.

Quarter	Number of newly identified families
Quarter 1	130
Quarter 2	138
Quarter 3	120
Quarter 4	163
Total	551

(Breakdown of identified families within 2016/2017)



The above table shows the number of families who are currently allocated to services within the local authority. Unfortunately this cannot be broken down any further as families are constantly moving across services.

PAYMENT BY RESULTS (PbR)

The table below shows the current total of payment by result claims which have been made within 2016/2017. In total Gateshead has claimed for 371 families in financial year 16/17.

	Significant & sustained progress	Worklessness	Total
April - 16	0	14	14
May - 16	44	0	44
June - 16	31	8	39
July - 16	22	4	26
Sept - 16	16	3	19
Nov - 16	0	11	11
Dec -16	34	0	34
Feb -17	0	34	34
Mar -17	145	5	150

The payment by result (PbR) claimed for Gateshead for 16/17 was 371 against a target of 402, which left a deficit of 31 families for this financial year. However Gateshead achieved 24% of payment by results target and ensured we were higher than the national average of 18%. Our total payment by results claims to end of March 2017 is 459 families; however this figure is from the start of the early adopter programme which began in September

2014. As a result of this Gateshead is 12th highest local authority to claim for “turned around” families nationally and 2nd regionally.

The table below captures the local authorities within the region and their payment by results (PbR) families.

Local authority	Local Programme Start Date	Maximum funded families up to 2020	Number of families achieved significant and sustained progress as at 28th March 2017	Number of families achieved continuous employment as at 28th March 2017	Total claims for results as at 28th March 2017	% of claims to date
Stockton-on-Tees	Jan-15	1,560	487	5	492	32%
Gateshead	Sep-14	1,930	367	92	459	24%
Middlesbrough	Sep-14	1,860	356	45	401	22%
Hartlepool	Sep-14	1,000	186	24	210	21%
Redcar and Cleveland	Sep-14	1,290	205	31	236	18%
Durham	Sep-14	4,360	623	104	727	17%
Darlington	Jan-15	930	128	17	145	16%
Northumberland	Jan-15	2,120	242	47	289	14%
Newcastle upon Tyne	Sep-14	3,010	350	20	370	12%
Cumbria	Apr-15	3,380	274	24	298	9%
Sunderland	Jan-15	2,540	138	76	214	8%
North Tyneside	Jan-15	1,480	72	18	90	6%
South Tyneside	Apr-15	1,430	16	31	47	3%

KEY PRIORITIES FOR 2017/18

1. Implement the FG methodology into the Early Help Strategy/Model;
2. To continue to develop the FG model across all local authority services;
3. Develop links with the Northumbria Police in relation to serious and organised crime;

4. Strengthen links with the Northumbria Probation Service (NPS) and Community Rehabilitation Company (CRC), in relation to adult offenders;
5. Pilot work with Economic Development to increase the number of adults either going into work or moving nearer to the job market.