

**TITLE OF REPORT: Monitor progress in relation to reducing the number of LAC and children subject to Child Protection Plans**

**REPORT OF: Strategic Director, Care Wellbeing and Learning**

### Summary

The purpose of this report is to seek the OSC’s views on the work that is being undertaken to reduce the numbers of children subject to CP plans and what services are doing to reduce the number of Looked After Children.

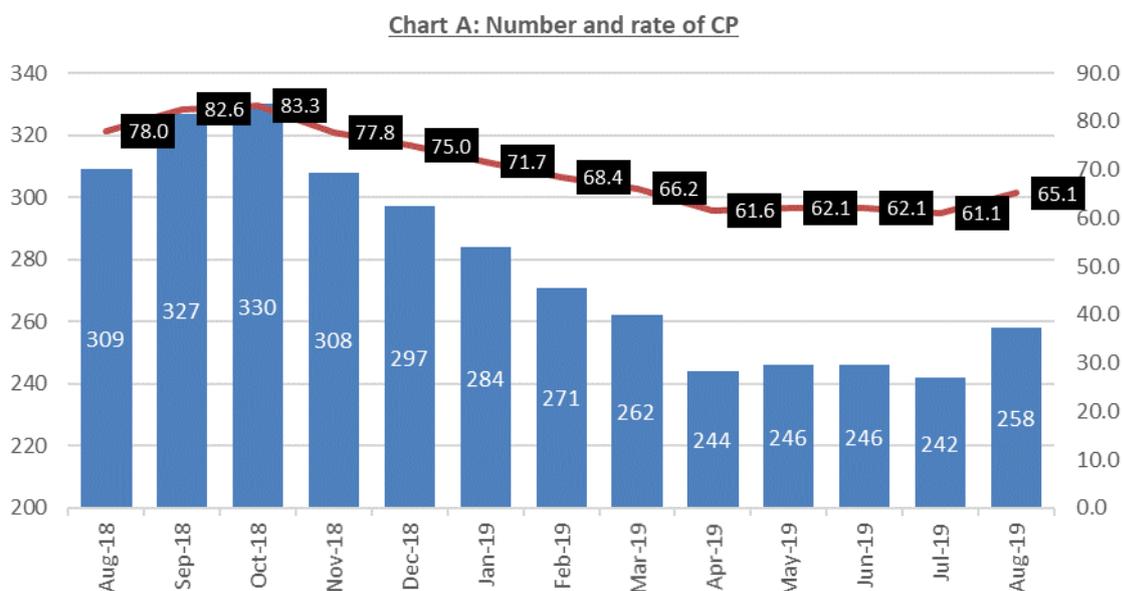
### Background

1. Performance reports have been presented to OSC to demonstrate how we are meeting our performance targets and how we compare both regionally and nationally in relation to children on Child Protection Plans and Looked After Children.

### Children subject to Child Protection Plans

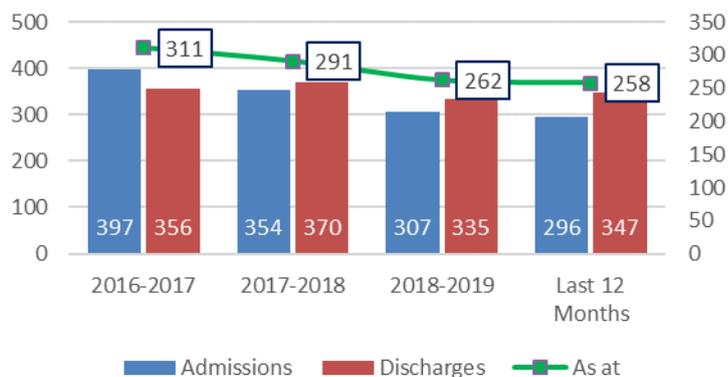
Child Protection Numbers Overview August 2019

2. Chart A shows that in October 2018, there were 330 children placed on child protection plans (83.3 per 10k). As at 31<sup>st</sup> August 2019, this has reduced by 21.8% to 258 children (65.1 per 10k).



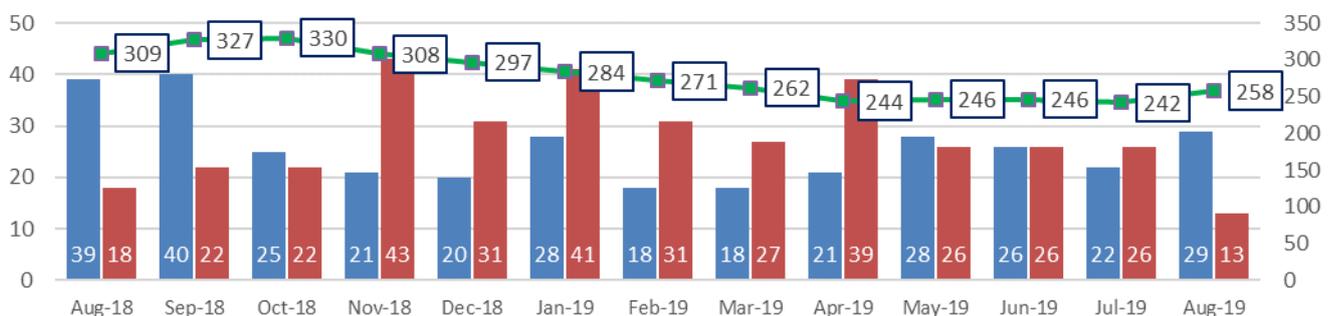
- Chart B shows that over the last 12 months, consistently more CP plans have ended than started – which has helped to reduce the as at figure (258). There has also been year on year reductions in the number of plans starting – with plans starting in the last 12 months showing a 25% decrease compared to 2016-2017. The current number of children subject to CP plans is at its lowest level since July 2018 and, it is felt, attributable to two main reasons; the re-focusing of our social work teams, so that work with the family begins earlier with the families concerned and targeted work to reduce the numbers of children on CP plans for longer than two years.

**Chart B: Child Protection Plans starting and ending**



- Chart C shows plans beginning and ending over the last 13 months – November 2018, January 2019 and April 2019 all stand out as being months when much higher numbers of plans were ended than started, which has helped see the overall figure drop. August 2019, however, did see a larger number of plans starting than ended, which explains the recent increase in the figure.

**Chart C: Child Protection Plans starting and ending**



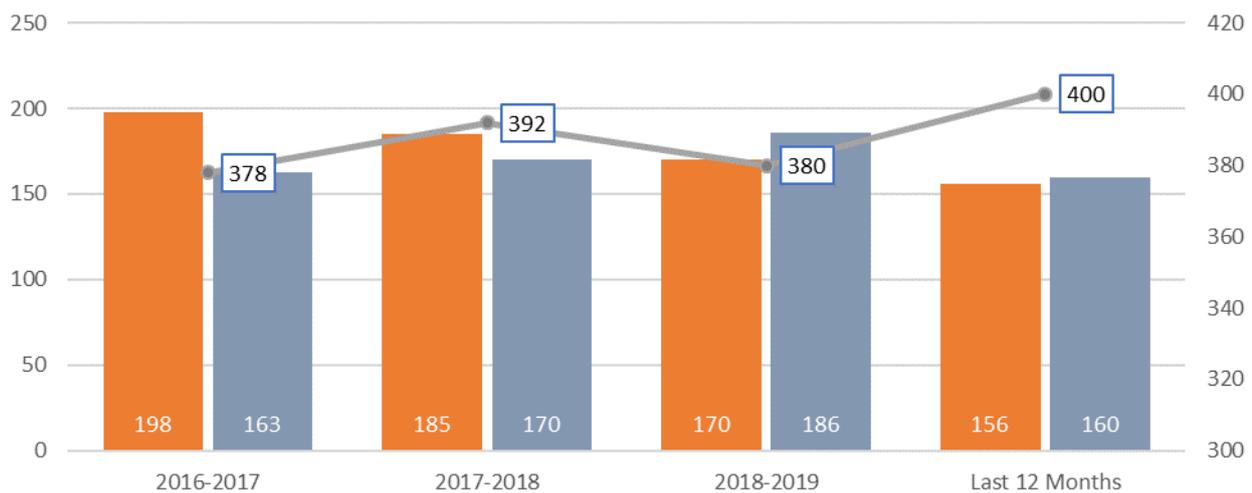
### What is the service doing?

- Since January 2019, there have been significant changes to the arrangements in the Assessment and Intervention Service (previously known as Referral and Assessment) and the Safeguarding and Care Planning Teams. Previous arrangements were that Referral and Assessment would simply complete a Child in Need (CIN) assessment and then transfer the case to Safeguarding and Care Planning to complete any work, either on a CIN basis or under child protection processes, and for the most serious cases, ultimately agreeing a plan of permanence for the child/ren through the courts.

6. The current arrangements are that the Assessment and Intervention Service both assess families and continue to work with them under CIN arrangements. Investment in training in systemic and relational social work has meant that social workers are more able to intervene at a CIN level, before concerns escalate and therefore avoid the need to initiate child protection processes. It is felt that this way of working has significantly contributed to the reduction in the numbers of children subject to CP plans.
7. The Safeguarding and Care Planning Service continues to work with families and children subject to CP plans and those cases where a legal framework is required to secure a safe, stable and permanent home for the child/ren.
8. There has been a recent review and launch of the LSCB multi-agency safeguarding thresholds to ensure that children and families are given the right level of protection and support.
9. Our Edge of Care Team continues to work to prevent those teenagers who have difficult family relationships and entrenched patterns of family functioning from coming into care or becoming subject to a Child Protection Plan.
10. We continue to monitor the trends in the numbers of children with CP plans at the monthly Performance Clinics and make appropriate arrangements in response.
11. In June 2019 Ofsted delivered a “good” judgement about the experiences and progress of children who need help and protection. Ofsted reported:  
*“The quality and impact of social work practice is good. Children and young people are seen regularly by their social workers, who know their children well. Social workers spend time understanding children’s lived experiences to provide the most effective support to improve their circumstances. Children and their families benefit from bespoke support from the dedicated family support team. Staff are well trained in delivering a broad range of interventions, including parenting programmes and work to build self-esteem, to improve home conditions and to support children returning home from care.”*
12. Audits that have been undertaken in 2018 and 2019 into the reasons why children stay on CP plans over two years or why they may have been subject to more than one CP plan have identified domestic abuse as a significant factor; it is known that 55% of children currently subject to a CP plan have experienced domestic abuse as a key factor in the case. For children on their second or subsequent plan, this figure rises to 82%. The response to domestic abuse has been strengthened through the merging of children’s and adults’ resources to form a domestic abuse team that is dedicated to supporting the whole family. This is providing a consistent response to domestic abuse across both early help and statutory services; it is recognised, however that we need to continue to find additional solutions for our children and families. As such, we have planned a series of Practice Innovation Groups to look at different ways of working with families who experience domestic abuse, with the aim of ameliorating the effects on children.

## Looked After Children

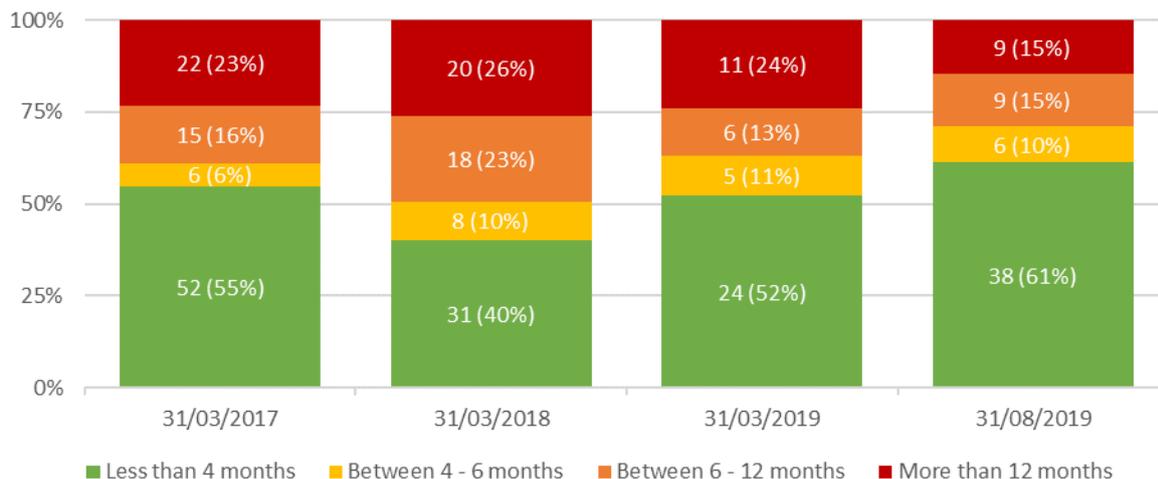
13. At the 31 August 2019, there were 400 looked after children in Gateshead. The below charts illustrate that over the last 12 months, we have had discharged slightly more children than we have admitted (156), resulting in a net loss of four young people. Additionally, Gateshead has admitted around 15% less children in the last 12 months than the three-year average of 184 admissions.
14. During the last 12-month period, the LAC figure has dropped as low as 380 (March 2019), however higher admissions than discharges since April has seen the figure climb back to 400.



## Admissions

15. Children being admitted to care under a section 20 agreement accounts for 66% of our admissions, Interim Care Orders account for 23% and the other 11% are either Full Care Orders or Emergency Protection Orders.

### Current S20 cases by duration



16. The above chart shows the duration that children have been subject to a section 20 agreement (s20). At the end of August 2019, 61% of children had been subject to s20 for less than four months and 15% had been subject to s20 for more than 12 months. This shows a reduction compared to previous year end dates, as in 2017, 23% had been subject to s20 agreements for more than a year. This has been achieved by ensuring there is robust management oversight of these cases to ensure that accommodation under s20 is appropriate and there is no drift and delay in permanence planning. The young people who remain on s20 over 12 months are primarily older adolescents, including UASC and some children with disabilities.

### Discharges

17. The number of discharges over the last three years has increased from 163 in 16/17 to 186 in 18/19. The reasons for discharge have also changed over time, with fewer young people returning home. There have, however, been increases in children leaving care after being placed on a Child Arrangement Order and Special Guardianship Orders. Adoptions have remained consistent at 15%. It is noted that the last 12 months is showing a slightly different picture, however by the end of the financial year we are envisaging the statistics to be similar to last year.

#### Reasons for discharge

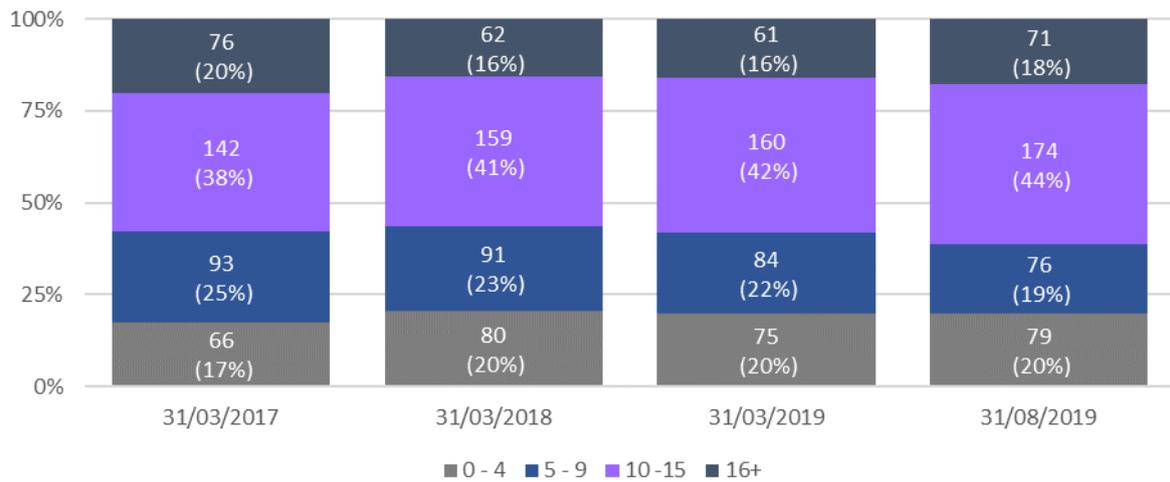


### Current LAC

18. The gender split of looked after children in Gateshead has remained fairly consistent, with males representing 56% of our current looked after cohort.

19. 44% (174) of our current LAC are aged between 10 and 15 years old. Whilst the proportion was similar at the end of March 2019 it is much higher than in March 2017 when 38% of looked after children were in that age band. There are less 5-9 year olds in care now than there were in March 2017, but more 0-4 year olds.

## Current LAC by age



**Chart H: Current LAC Duration**



20. A quarter (26%) of our current LAC cohort have been in care for more than five years, which is slightly lower than March 2018 and March 2019 but is generally consistent with previous years. There is also a much larger proportion of children who have been in care for between 2-5years (30%), however less children have been in care for between one day and 12 months.

## Placement type

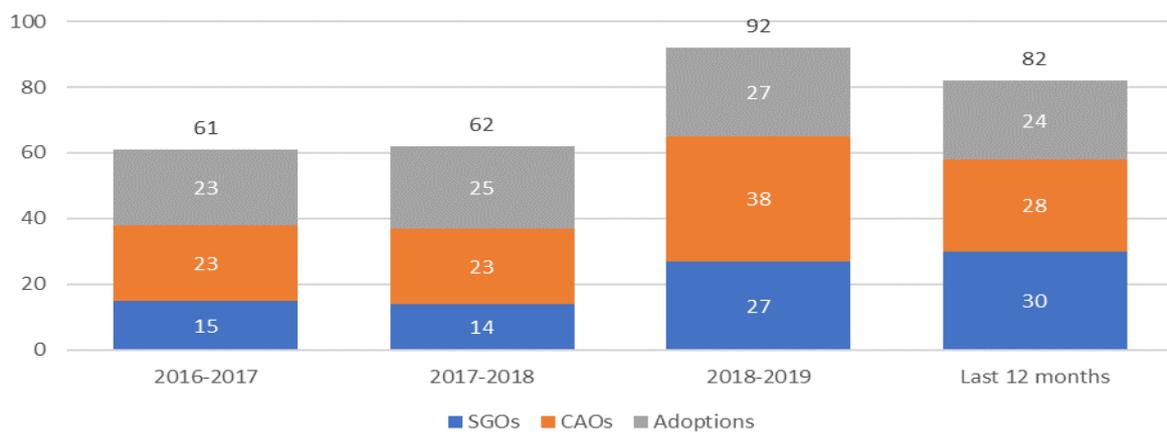
21. The majority of Gateshead's current LAC are placed in mainstream fostering placements (64%). This is a similar proportion that is reported at the end of the last three financial years. Family and friend placements make up 16% of placements, which is a small increase compared to March 2017 (13%). The number of children placed in private residential placements is 8% which is slightly higher than in previous years. Children awaiting adoption has also seen

a drop (3% down from 5%), whilst being placed with parents has increased from 1% to 3% of placements.

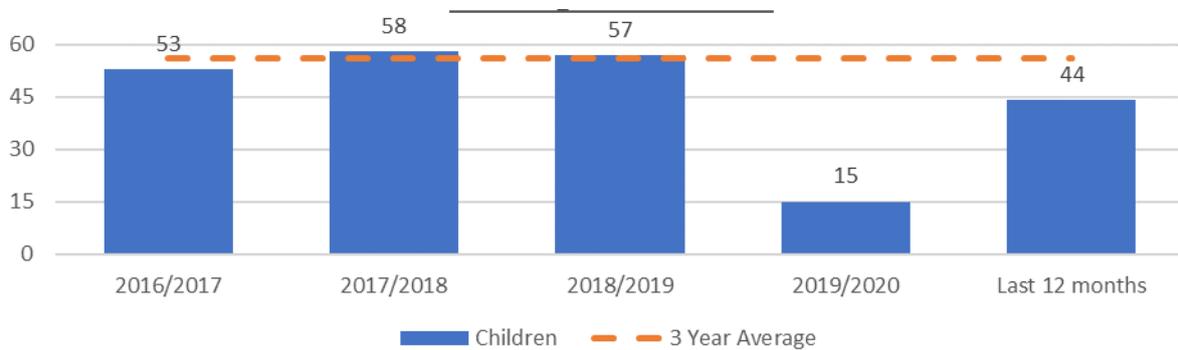
### **Early Permanence**

22. Compared to 2016/17 and 2017/18 more children have left care on Special Guardianship Orders (30 compared to 15) and Child Arrangement Orders (28 compared to 23). There has been a similar number of adoptions (24 compared to 23) over the last 12 months. Currently, there are 24 children on Placement Orders – of which 10 have been matched to an adopter (42%).

### **SGO's, CAO's and adoptions**



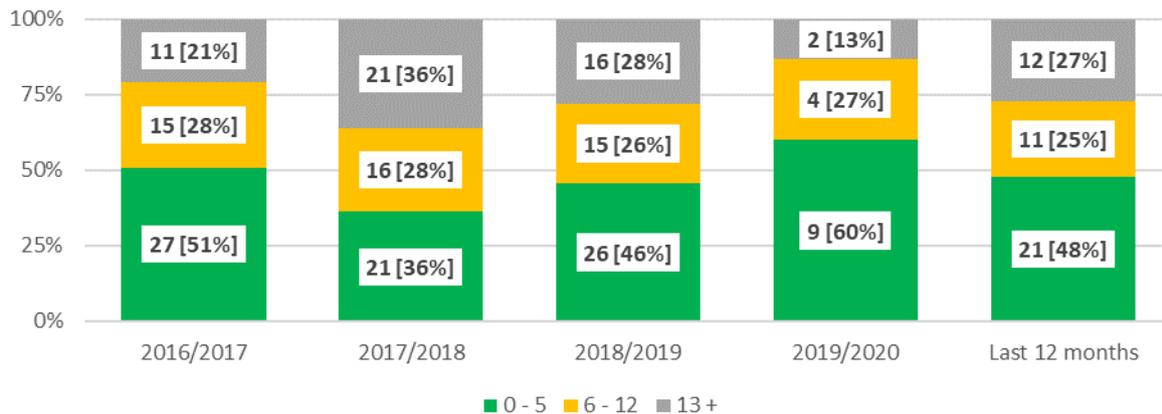
### **Returning home from care**



23. Over the last three financial years, on average, 56 children have returned home after being looked after. This has shown a slight decline in the last 12 months and we plan to undertake a deep-dive audit into the reasons why children come into care and subsequently return home. This should help us to fully understand the reasons for the reduction.

## **Demographics:**

### Returned home – Age came into care



24. Of the looked after children returning home, those who were aged 0-5 years when being taken into care account for the largest proportion ranging from 36% in 2017 to 60% so far in 2019/2020 (although this only accounts for April to August and is for a lower number of children).

## **Previous involvement with Children services**

25. We monitor the children who have had previous involvement with services to see if there are any patterns in relation to looked after episodes and children returning home. Approximately half of the children who returned home had been on a child protection plan prior to becoming looked after, which demonstrates that we are working with families to try and prevent children becoming looked after.
26. Children coming into care who subsequently return home have tended to initially come into care under s20. Intensive work is undertaken to return children home safely and if this cannot be achieved a decision making meeting is held to look at making plans of permanence for children.

## **Returned home – Subsequently returned to care**

27. Of our children who returned home, a small proportion will return to care. In the last 12 months, 11% of those who returned home have since come back into care (5 children)
28. Care episode for children who returned home from care have varied from year to year with no discernible pattern, although in the last 12 months, around 63% of children who returned home had been in care for less than 3 months. The return to care is something we need to understand better as we know that multiple moves can cause additional trauma to children. A deep dive audit on this is planned to ensure we are getting the decision-making right for children.

Returned home - Placement Duration	2016/2017		2017/2018		2018/2019		2019/2020		Last 12 months	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Less than 1 month	14	26.4%	20	34.5%	10	17.5%	9	60.0%	16	36.4%
1 - 3 months	14	26.4%	13	22.4%	12	21.1%	2	13.3%	12	27.3%
3 - 6 months	8	15.1%	5	8.6%	9	15.8%	1	6.7%	4	9.1%
6 - 12 months	12	22.6%	10	17.2%	14	24.6%	1	6.7%	5	11.4%
More than 12 months	5	9.4%	10	17.2%	12	21.1%	2	13.3%	7	15.9%
<b>Total</b>	53		58		57		15		44	

## What the service is doing

29. Over the last 12 months the service has introduced a number of measures to try and ensure any children that can be returned home safely are. These include:

- Monthly meetings to look at new into care
- Monthly meetings to look at section 20s
- Themed audits on the performance data
- Review of children and family situations and plans via care teams and Looked After Reviews
- Bespoke packages of support to families to ensure children can return home
- Practice innovation group has been established to ensure we provide the best interventions and support to children and families

## Issues the OSC might want to consider

30. In light of the information provided the OSC might wish to consider whether it is satisfied with the level of support being offered to children and families in order to reduce the number of children subject to CP plans and reduce the number of Looked After Children. When addressing this question, the OSC might wish to take into account the following:

- Are we working proactively with families?
- Have we got the right involvement from our partners?
- Are we promoting positive outcomes for children?

## Recommendations

The views of the OSC are sought on:

1. Whether it is satisfied with the level of support children and families receive in Gateshead Council

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