



## **CREATING OPPORTUNITIES AND TACKLING INEQUALITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

A Report from the Children's Services Improvement  
Programme Scrutiny Task and Finish Group

17 March 2014

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Children's Services Improvement Programme Scrutiny Task and Finish Group was established by the Creating Opportunities and Tackling Inequalities Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 14 November 2011. The purpose of the Group was to oversee the implementation of the Improvement Plan for Children's Services.

The cross party Task and Finish group comprised of the following members:



**Cllr Sue Day, Conservative,  
Paston Ward**



**Cllr Chris Harper, Conservative  
Stanground East Ward**



**Alistair Kingsley,  
Independent Co-opted Member**



**Cllr Bella Saltmarsh, Liberal  
Dogsthorpe Ward**

Officers supporting the Task and Finish Group were:

- Paulina Ford, Senior Governance Officer
- Elaine Alexander, Head of Projects and Change Management
- Darryl Freeman, Head of First Response and Assessment and Family Support
- Sue Westcott, Executive Director of Children's Services
- Debbie Haith, Assistant Director of Safeguarding Families and Communities
- Glen Denham, Head of Service, Quality Assurance and Safeguarding

## 2. SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

- Recommendation 1  
Continue Councillor visits to Children's Services departments across PCC on a regular basis to continue to get first hand validation on progress and issues remaining. This also has a positive impact on staff morale and hopefully provides reassurance that their opinions are genuinely important. The invitation should be extended to Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel.
- Recommendation 2  
To continue to receive a progress report on the Improvement Programme at each meeting of the Creating Opportunities and Tackling Inequalities Scrutiny Committee - this to include a detailed section on progress being made with the Liquidlogic system.
- Recommendation 3  
Circulate an electronic copy of the monthly monitoring report to members of the Creating Opportunities and Tackling Inequalities Scrutiny Committee each month so that individual questions can be raised on a 1:1 basis electronically with the relevant officer. This is to be extended to Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel.
- Recommendation 4  
To consider Children's Services as a possible candidate for a Scrutiny in a day event. What the department covers, all of the feeder agencies, the challenges (Adoption vs Fostering, Child Protection, Looked after Children etc, social worker recruitment).
- Recommendation 5  
The Scrutiny Committee to hold a review meeting in 6 months where the committee can have a single agenda topic to review progress on the Children's Services Improvement Programme.

### **3. OBJECTIVE AND SCOPE OF THE TASK AND FINISH GROUP**

#### **Objective**

The Task and Finish Group was established to oversee the implementation of the Improvement Plan for Children's Services.

#### **This will be achieved through the following activities:**

- Attending facilitated meetings with social care teams
- Observation through office visits and panel activities
- Presentation of anonymised recent case examples by social workers
- Direct contact with Foster Carer Support Groups
- Assessing and validating relevant performance data
- Participation in Children's Social Care training courses
- Gaining an overview of Children's Social Care Quality Assurance work

The Task and Finish Group members to be given training opportunities on the Council's arrangements for Children's Social Care in relation to its services and structures, the statutory framework for services and the member's role and;

Advice on whistle blowing and also potential conflict of interests to be provided

#### **Reporting**

- A standard format will be adopted for recording member visits to teams (suggested format attached)
- Reports of Task and Finish Group to accompany progress reports to the Committee on the Improvement Plan at each meeting of the parent Scrutiny Committee.
- A final report will be presented to the parent Scrutiny Committee with recommendations.

The Task and Finish Group to be in existence for a period of 18 months until the completion of the implementation of the improvement plan.

## 4. PROCESS AND METHODOLOGY USED FOR THE INVESTIGATION

### 4.1 Methodology

- Member observation through organised visits to offices and social work teams
- Monthly meetings of the task and finish group with the Executive Director of Children's Services and relevant key officers.
- Assessing and validating relevant performance data
- Scrutinising Quality Assurance Progress Reports and Audit Activity

The work of the Group has been undertaken through the following activities:

- Attending facilitated meetings with social care teams
- Observation through office visits and panel activities
- Presentation of anonymised recent case examples by social workers
- Direct contact with Foster Carer Support Groups
- Assessing and validating relevant performance data
- Participation in Children's Social Care training courses
- Gaining an overview of Children's Social Care Quality Assurance work

Initial baseline information used:

- **Safeguarding and Ofsted Action Plan**

### 4.2 Process

The timetable of the events leading to the production of this report are set out below:

The Group has met on 12 occasions. Meetings have covered a wide area of issues, including:

- Analysis of Re-referral Rates
- Child and Adolescent Mental Health Update
- Children Missing from Home and Care
- Commissioning Intentions
- Director's Report
- External Improvement Board Risk Register
- Implementation of Access to Resource Panels
- Liquid logic Implementation
- Multi-Agency Support Groups

- Peer Safeguarding Health check
- Performance Reports
- Quality Assurance
- Senior Managers Case File Audit
- Supervision Audit
- Workforce Strategy

<b>Meeting Date</b>	<b>Items discussed</b>
19 December 2011	Purpose of the Group Children's Service Improvement Plan Methodology of the Group
8 February 2012	Children's Service Improvement Plan Liquid Logic
14 March 2012	Directors Report Performance Report Workforce Strategy
12 June 2012	Directors Report Performance Report Update on recruitment strategy Visits to Children's Social Care
6 September 2012	Directors Report Performance Report Update on Quality Assurance Action Plan Visit to Children's Social Care
15 October 2012	Analysis of Senior Managers Case File Audit Update on the progress of the implementation of Access to Resource Panels Liquid logic Implementation update
8 November 2012	Directors Report Progress report on Workforce Strategy Peer Safeguarding Health check Performance Report
18 December 2012	Directors Report Review of Member Visits Analysis of Senior Managers Case File Audit and Peer Review QA Progress Report Performance Report

Meeting Date	Items discussed
14 January 2013	Performance Report Children missing from home and care EIB Risk Register
13 February 2013	Directors Report Performance Report Supervision Audit Child and Adolescent Mental Health Update
29 April 2013	Directors Report Ofsted Inspection Outcome Report Ofsted Report Multi-Agency Support Groups Commissioning Intentions Analysis of re-referral rates
8 July 2013	Directors report Performance Report Member Visits Proposal for Future Meetings
27 November 2013	Directors report Performance Report Safeguarding and Ofsted Action Plan / Children's Quality Assurance Progress Report and Audit Activity July – September 2013 Children missing from Education, Home and Care
18 February 2013	Directors Report Performance Report Safeguarding and Ofsted Action Plan Source of our Referrals Updated Audit Report Update on Recruitment and Retention Member Visits Final Report – Discussion regarding conclusions and recommendations



### **Key Witnesses / Expert Advisers interviewed:**

A key part of the Group's work has been to undertake visits to a number of the social care teams. These have included:

- Adoption
- Cherry Lodge
- Children's Integrated Disability Service
- Clare Lodge
- Direct Intervention Service
- Education for Children in Care
- Family Support
- Fostering
- Integrated Safeguarding
- Looked After Children
- Referral and Assessment
- The Manor
- Youth Offending Service

The Task and Finish Group would like to thank everybody who assisted them during the course of the investigation for their support and openness. This assistance was greatly appreciated.

## 5. BACKGROUND

Peterborough City Council's Safeguarding and Looked after Children's Services were inspected in March 2010. Ofsted judged the overall effectiveness of Peterborough's Safeguarding Services to be 'inadequate'.

An Improvement Notice was issued in June 2010 against key indicators in the areas concerned. A number of key issues for immediate action and improvement were also identified in the subsequent unannounced inspection of Contact, Referral and Assessment arrangements in March 2011. These included variations in the quality and timeliness of assessments, poor management oversight and direction, irregular staff supervision and inadequate assessment of risk.

A subsequent Safeguarding Inspection in August 2011 identified a number of unresolved issues identified in previous inspections. Ofsted deemed the capacity for improvement to be inadequate. A further Improvement Notice, due to poor performance was issued on 5<sup>th</sup> February 2012.

Having considered the evidence from the Ofsted Inspection of 2013, the progress report from the Improvement Board and its Chair together with advice from officials, the Improvement Notice was lifted by Edward Timpson, Parliamentary under Secretary of State for Children and Families in June 2013. A further progress report was requested in December 2013.

This report is an update of the progress made in social care since the Improvement Notice was lifted on the 6<sup>th</sup> June 2013. The council was asked to demonstrate continued sustainability. This report covers the 6 month period from May 2013 - October 2013, given our data reporting timelines. To understand the trajectory of recovery and sustainability, it has been necessary, in places, to report the data from October 2012 – October 2013.

### 5.1 Ofsted Action Plan and Delivery Plan

We refreshed our Children's Services vision and priorities in June 2013 under our delivery plan (*Appendix 1*) encompassing:

- *Providing children with early support*
- *Helping families with problems and keeping children safe*
- *Giving the best opportunities to children and young people in care*
- *Working in partnership with schools and others to make sure children succeed*
- *Supporting our staff to be outstanding*

The Ofsted Action Plan, based on the recommendations from the 2011 inspection, was completed in March 2013 and signed off by the Improvement Board as being finalised. The Ofsted Action Plan was then refreshed to include new priorities for action especially around raising the quality of practice and findings from national Serious Case Reviews.

We completed our regional self-assessment in May 2013, which was moderated in July 2013. The moderating DCS commented "In the self-assessment, there are no significant safeguarding concerns that are not addressed via action planning. Some elements of the peer review may be helpful after the impact of the Ofsted Action Plan has been embedded." This report demonstrated our strengthened performance in a number of critical areas within children's social care including the timeliness and management of our assessments.

### 5.2 Leadership and Governance

The new Director of Children's Services was appointed in December 2012.

The new Assistant Director of Safeguarding was appointed in June 2013.

There is now a permanent, new third tier management structure.

We have experienced, like all local authorities, some difficulty in recruiting Team Managers and after an unsuccessful targeted recruitment, have made interim internal appointments with a 'grow our own' approach. We have provided these new Team Managers, promoted internally, with increased support and learning and training opportunities. They are however not experienced front line managers and need a lot of support in their decision making and capacity to provide quality supervision.

The council continues to support social care through significant investment including an additional £1.5 million investment in our Child Sexual Exploitation Team and the current financing of additional support to bolster management capacity and experience amounting to an additional £1 million.

The Lead Portfolio Holder, the Cabinet and the Chief Executive continue to provide clear direction and leadership. There is high visibility of the Lead Portfolio Holder and elected councillors in the service through attendance at our Safeguarding Assurance Days and fortnightly meetings with the Assistant Director of Safeguarding and the DCS.

In addition our Members of the Scrutiny Task and Finish Safeguarding Group visit the teams on a monthly basis and report back to the Senior Leadership Team. There is then a follow up report to this.

A new and experienced independent chair was appointed to the Peterborough Safeguarding Children Board (PSCB) in December 2012. We have also appointed a new Business Relationship Manager which combines the training function to give the Board added impetus. The new chair has brought a renewed challenge to agencies to fulfil their safeguarding responsibilities.

A PSCB development day was held on 16 April 2013 where clear priorities and objectives for the work of the Board were compiled.

### **5.3 Reconfiguration of the front door**

Following a reconfiguration of the teams into a small discrete duty team and six assessment and family support teams pressure increased in the latter due to social workers having to undertake initial assessments whilst managing complex children in need cases, child protection cases and looked after children cases. This created a situation whereby cases were not being closed off and/or looked after children cases not transferred to the Looked after children team. Caseloads began to increase expedientially. Once this was identified changes were made. The change had been made to decrease the number of transition points between the services and provide greater consistency for children and families.

We have now reverted back to the former model which works for Peterborough; a two team front door with two team managers and two Heads of Service. The council has given us additional resource to enable this to happen. This creates more capacity at the front end, ensures rigorous screening of cases and separates the complex children in need work from the First Response Team. The scrutiny committee has recognised that the service was brave enough to attempt the change which is consistent with Munro values and expectations, but to recognise it could not work and revert to the former model.

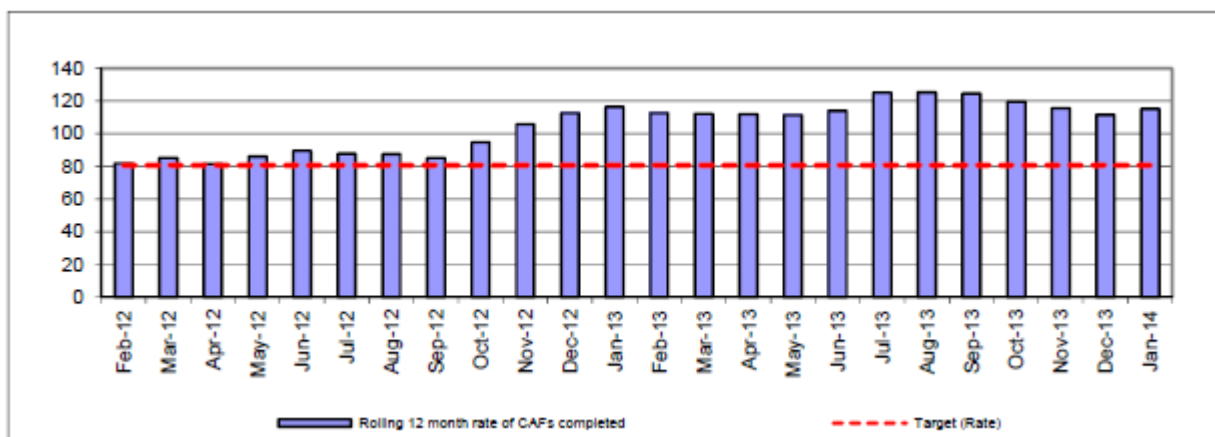
Already the change has meant some significant change to the way in which the service is operating. Over 900 cases have been scrutinised and there has been over 200 cases closed bringing caseloads down significantly.

### **5.4 Social Care Performance Data**

This data set has been taken from the commencement of the improvement plan and the start of the Scrutiny committee reporting in January 2012. It therefore shows a two year trajectory of improvement from February 2012- January 2014.

## 5.5 Early Help Assessments (CAFs)

The Peterborough Children and Families Commissioning Board has developed a simplified, but comprehensive early help assessment with partner agencies. This change has contributed to the significant increase in the rate of new Early Help assessments registered each month per 10,000 population, as illustrated by the chart below:



The main presenting issues for these early intervention assessments between 1 April and to date, were behaviour and relationship problems within the family. The top five services offered for support were nursery/pre-school provision, housing advice and support, children centre provision, our 0-19 service and a Team Around the Child Meeting to assess need.

Our e-Caf is now live from 9 December 2013 which will give us greater information and ability to review CAF plans, with training for practitioners.

Alongside the multi-agency training programmes, the team also completes a safeguarding and quality compliance audit for all Early Help Assessments which is completed by our partners. This consists of the following elements:

- Every Early Help Assessment submitted to the local authority for registering is read by a co-ordinator within the CAF Team in order to ensure that no safeguarding concerns are raised in the documentation. All co-ordinators have received up-to-date child protection training and assess any safeguarding concerns against the Peterborough Threshold Document. Any concerns raised are dealt with immediately by follow-up contact with the practitioner who initiated the Early Help Assessment. Where concerns remain, these are escalated as appropriate – a process that includes a discussion between the team manager responsible for Early Help Assessments and appropriate colleagues within Children’s Social Care.
- All comments made by children or young people and their parents or carers recorded on an Early Help Assessment or within any notes of Team Around the Child meetings submitted to the local authority are recorded by the CAF team. All of these comments are screened and any issues that are raised about either the experience of the Early Help Assessment or TAC process are addressed by the team as appropriate. These comments are also used to help to inform training and support sessions offered by the team to practitioners who complete these assessments.
- 10% of all Early Help Assessments completed are selected on a monthly basis at random. Each is assessed using the National Quality Framework for the Early Help Assessment process

- Six months following the registration of the Early Help Assessment, all lead professionals are contacted for an update on the impact of the Early Help Assessment. Returned document scores are recorded and comments discussed by the team. Follow-up action taken is then taken where required.

Although the rolling number of CAFs fluctuates on a monthly basis the rolling rate remains high and above target. There is no national or regional indicator for this to compare our performance.

## **5.6 Multi-Agency Support Groups (MASGs)**

Our multi-agency groups within the localities have, since their inception, offered support to more than 380 families. Whenever a family is presented to MASG, a simple Distance Measured tool is used to track progress made after support services have been in place for a period of time – typically 12 weeks. Analysis of the outcomes identified in relation to the first 300 families presented to the MASG indicated that of the 221 families where interventions monitored by MASGs had come to an end, there was evidence of improved outcomes that could be attributed to actions by MASGs in 91 cases. Services put in place by the MASGs have included Family Group conferences, family mediation, spot purchased family support services during family crises and parenting support programmes through the voluntary sector. Participants at each MASG include community health services, children's services, housing, neighbourhood services, early years, educational psychology, connecting families and social care.

We are currently leading training across the partnership on Outcomes Stars and as practitioners become familiar with this approach, the stars will be used both to help focus the work with the child or young person and their family as well as provide an effective measure of distance travelled.

An independent audit is planned to take place in the near future. This will focus on the work of the CAF team and the operation of the MASGs with a focus on their effectiveness in relation to safeguarding and their impact on the child's journey. Recommendations from this audit will be published and an action plan drawn up to ensure that the quality of practice and intervention is improved where necessary.

## **5.7 Child Sexual Exploitation Team**

In January 2013, a joint Police and Children's Social Care investigation was launched in response to intelligence gathered from a variety of sources and following two complex strategy meetings.

Both the police and the council have made available considerable resources to this operation which has allowed the time and flexibility that is a prerequisite for success in an operation of this complexity. The council made available £1.5m which enabled the establishment of a dedicated team consisting of an operational manager, 6 social workers and administrative assistant.

In addition a dedicated resource panel was set up which includes statutory and community partners. The panel enables rapid access to a range of resource for young people where there are concerns regarding sexual exploitation.

Joint police and social work protocols, operational policies and practice standards were quickly established. These included witness and victim strategy, operational guidelines, memorandum of understanding and staff welfare policy. It was agreed that weekly joint briefings would be held alongside weekly single agencies briefings due to the fluid and dynamic nature of the work and emerging investigative streams. The CSE team keep a weekly activity log in order to manage the number of victims, emerging needs and changes to risk and priorities.

The current investigation resulted in a trial with a very successful outcome for the victims resulting in a number of long sentences for the defendants. This involved five victims and initially nine, now eight, defendants between the ages of 14 and 32.

There will be future trials arising from the ongoing investigations.

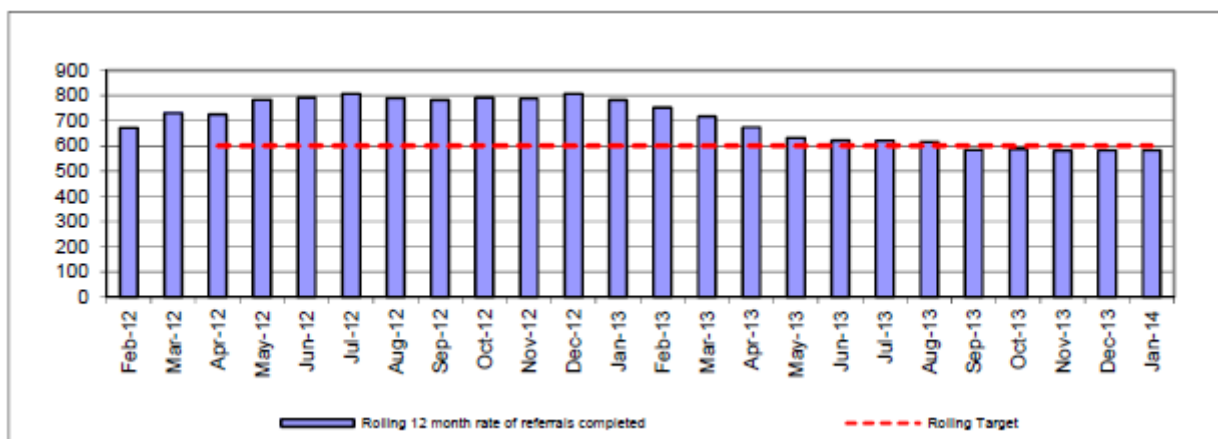
A Police Peer Review of the conduct of the investigation was recently undertaken by Greater Manchester Police which was fulsome in its praise of the manner in which the investigations have been managed and was particularly complimentary about the nature of the joint working arrangements between the police and children’s social care.

We have mainstreamed the work across the service. It is now our intention to set up a dedicated CSE team to ensure that these cases are fully assessed and worked by May 2014 together with the police.

The Peterborough Safeguarding Children Board has agreed (and a job description written) for the post of a dedicated CSE worker.

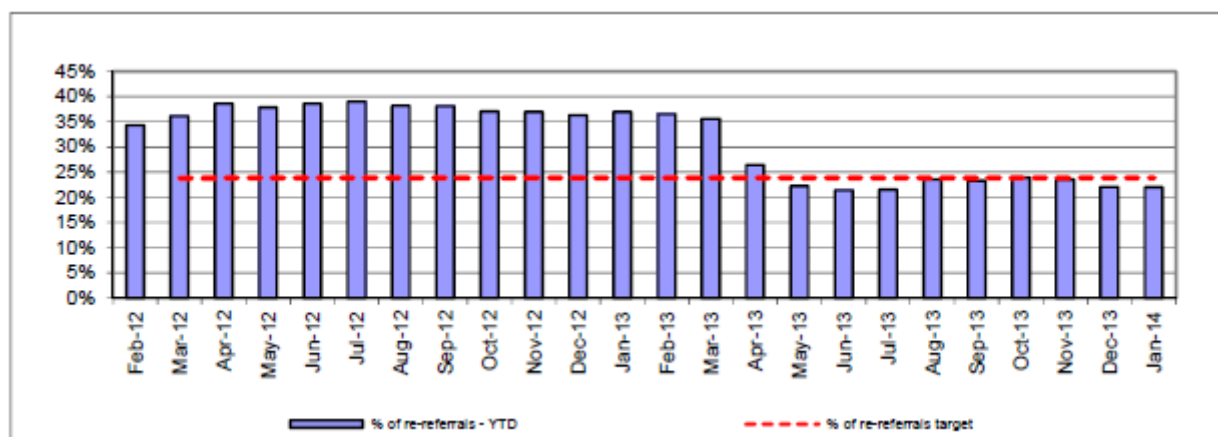
## 5.8 Referrals

Number of Referrals



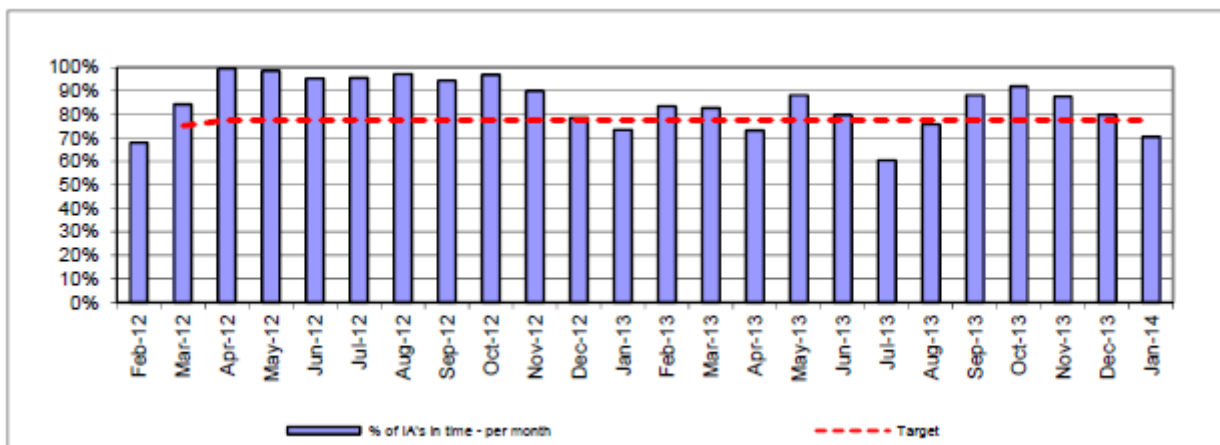
The number of referrals per 10,000 of the population has consistently dropped and is currently 3.1% below target .This is holding steady and has been for some months.

Re-referrals

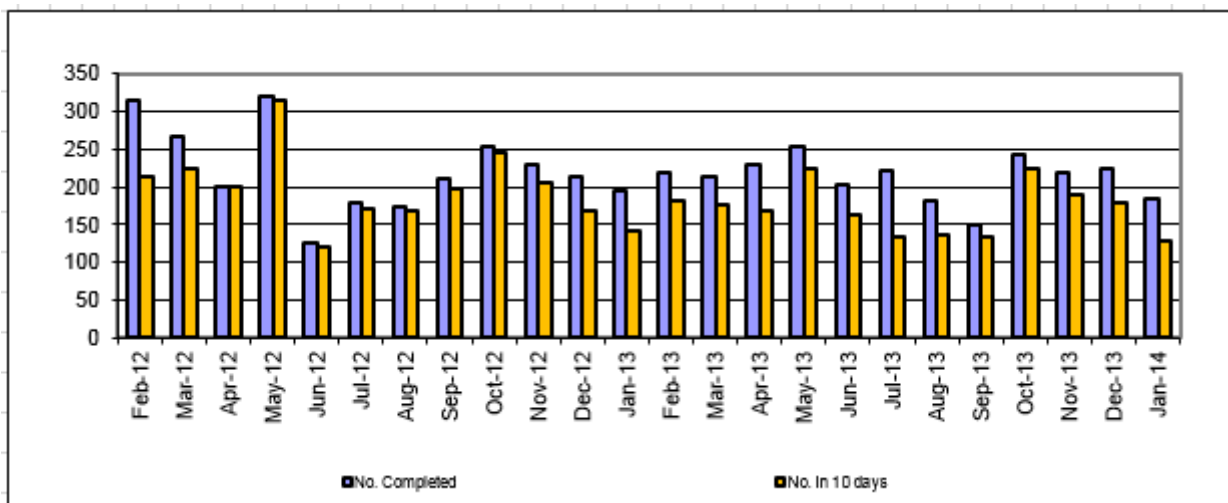


The percentage of referrals where a previous referral has occurred within the last 12 months has dropped and has been on target Since May 13.

### Percentage of Initial Assessments in timescale

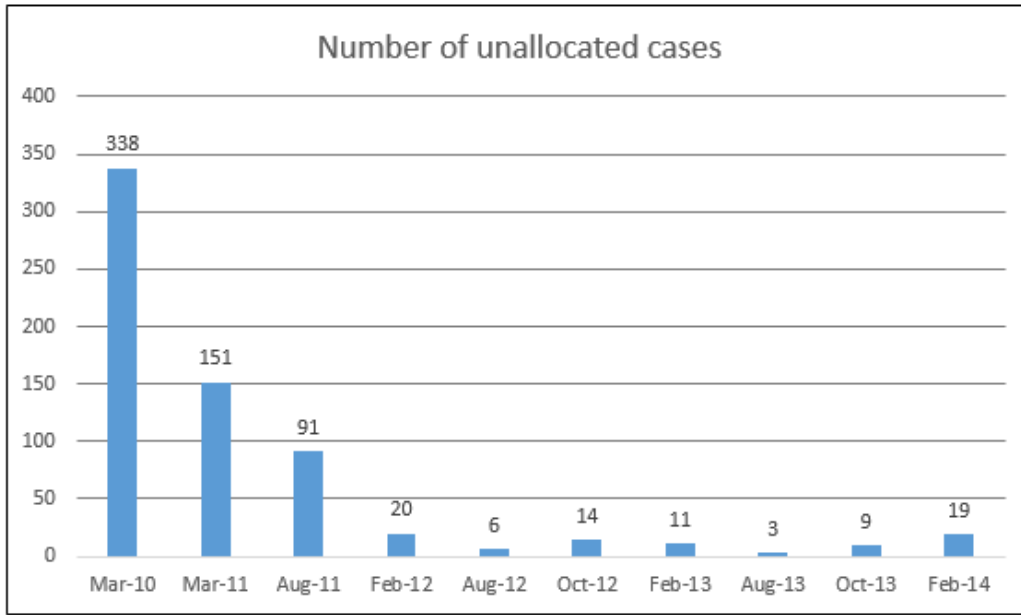


### Number of Initial Assessments Completed



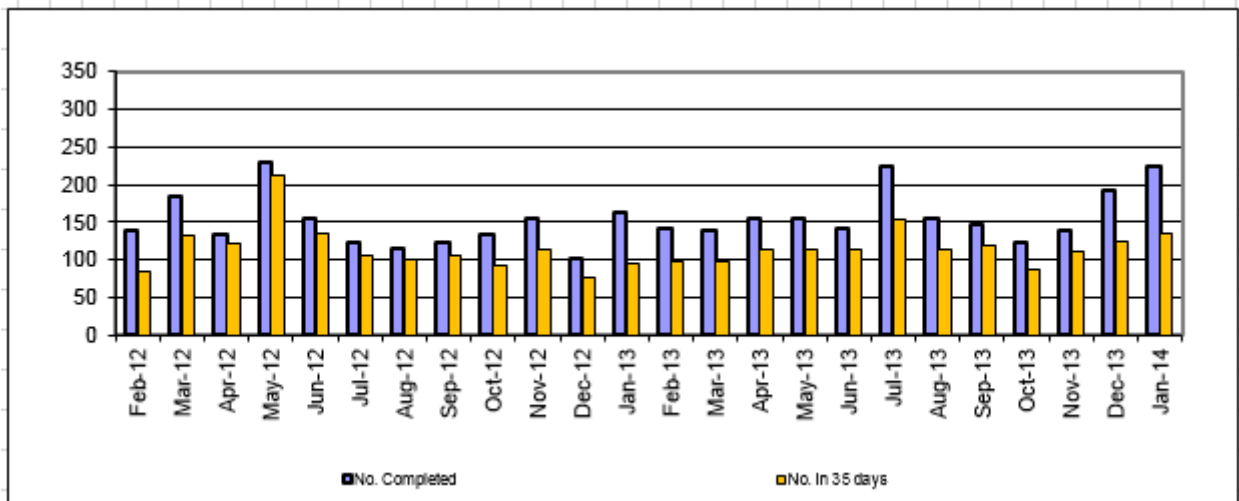
The number of Initial Assessments completed within target has fluctuated and in January it is the lowest it has ever been with 185 Initial Assessments completed. It is however demand led and hard to predict. We have a very clear threshold document which is understood and used to take decisions about appropriateness of referrals into Social Care.

## Unallocated Cases

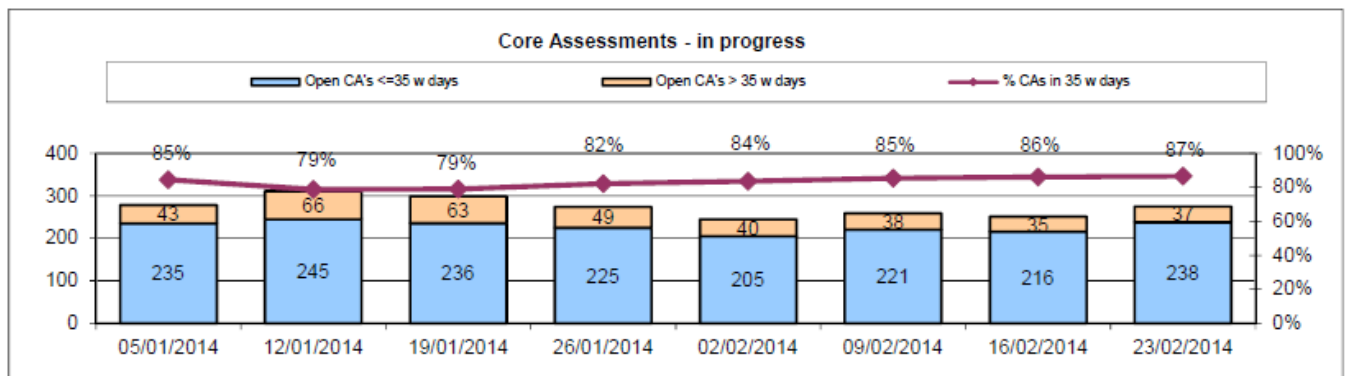


The target each month is a maximum of 20. As you can see, we have been consistently under that since February 2012. There will always be cases that need to be allocated as they come through the front door. At any one point, there may be up to 20 at the point the data is captured as the referral will have just come in and not yet loaded on the server.

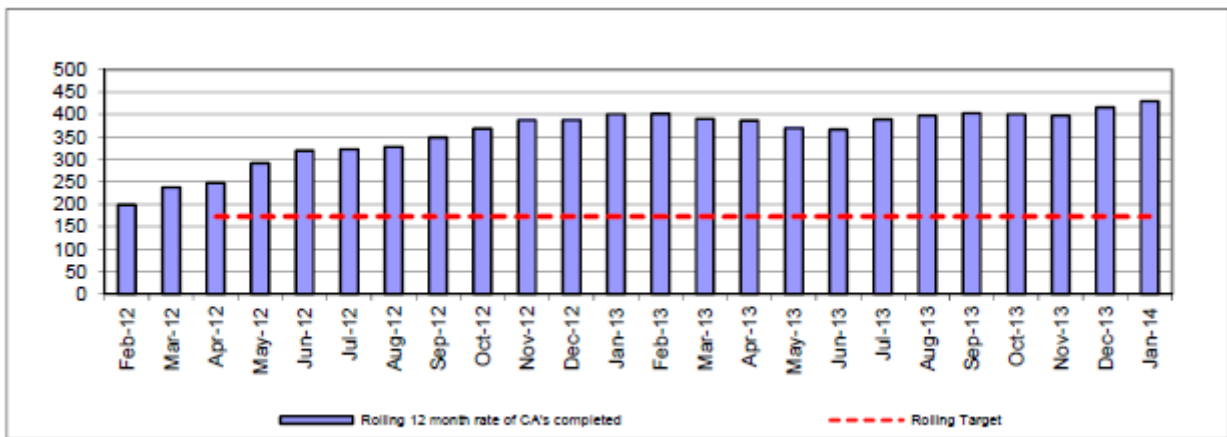
## Core Assessments Completed



## Number of Core Assessments



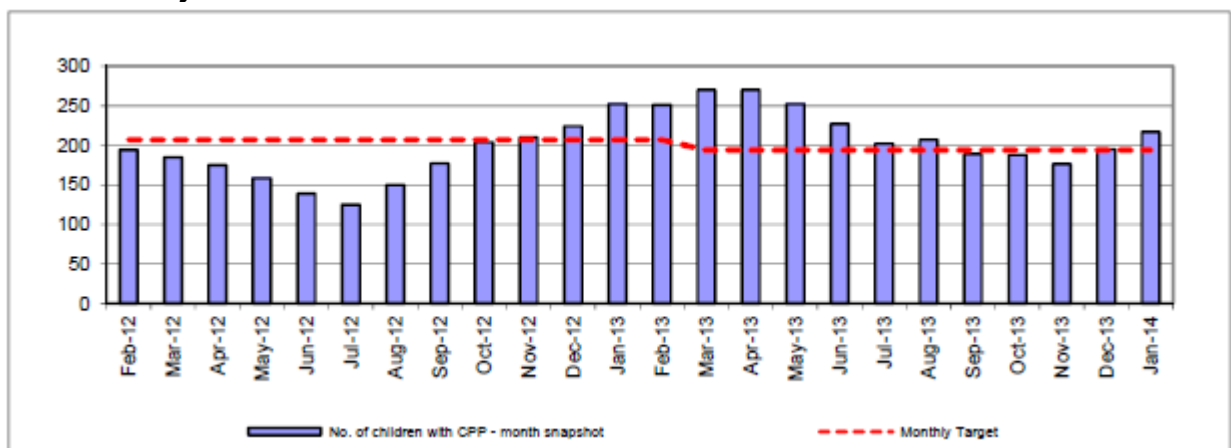




The number of Core Assessments completed continues to be high and significantly above target. The rolling 12 month rate has increased to 429.8 per 10,000 of the population, which is significantly higher than our target of 173 per 10,000 of the population. This is because we complete a Core Assessment for all children with complex needs rather than move to a Children in Need plan under an Initial Assessment. This is good practice and demonstrates a rigour of assessment. Many other local authorities undertake the majority of their referrals under an Initial Assessment. Notwithstanding this, the number is overly high and we are asking managers to review the social workers' caseloads to close and/or de-escalate to a Common Assessment Framework. This builds on an audit of some 900 Children in Need cases.

The number of Core Assessments in timescale has dropped significantly and remains one of our most significant challenges. It dropped to 60,3 % in the month . The second chart illustrates the rise in the number of open core assessments from 104 to 260 which will be explained later when reporting on the number of Child in Need cases.

### Children subject to a Child Protection Plan



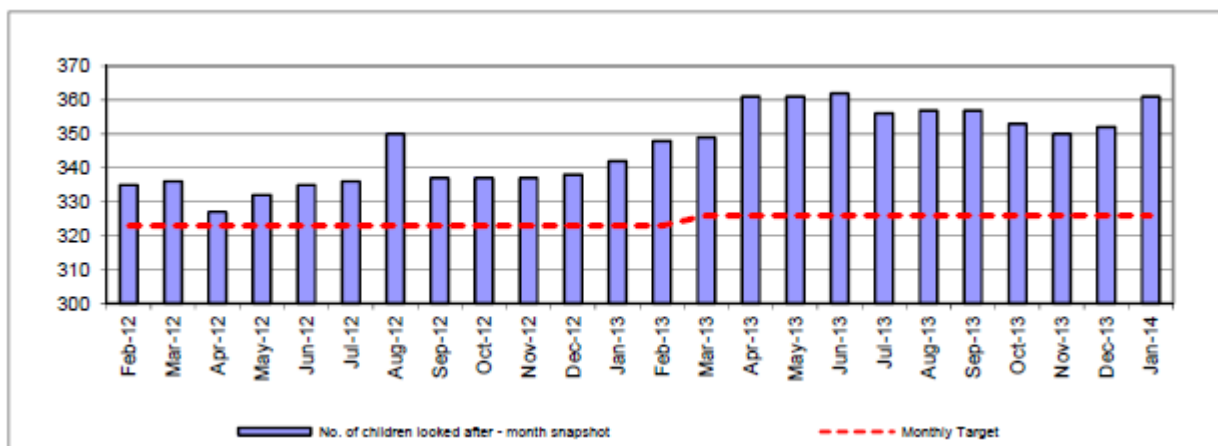
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### Children subject to a plan per 10,000

The number of children subject to a Child Protection Plan has fluctuated over the last year but stabilised since July 2013. The number increased to an all-time high in March 2013 to 270, declining to 188 in October 2013. This indicates that the threshold for conferences was not well defined. The number of children subject to plans is now where it should be, given that the rough indicator is half the LAC population (351/187). The target of 44.2 per 10,000 of the child population is now met. This has been achieved by reinforcing compliance around thresholds, greater interrogation of potential risks prior to conference, greater scrutiny by the chairs and decisions to go to conference made by the team manager only. The team manager now attends

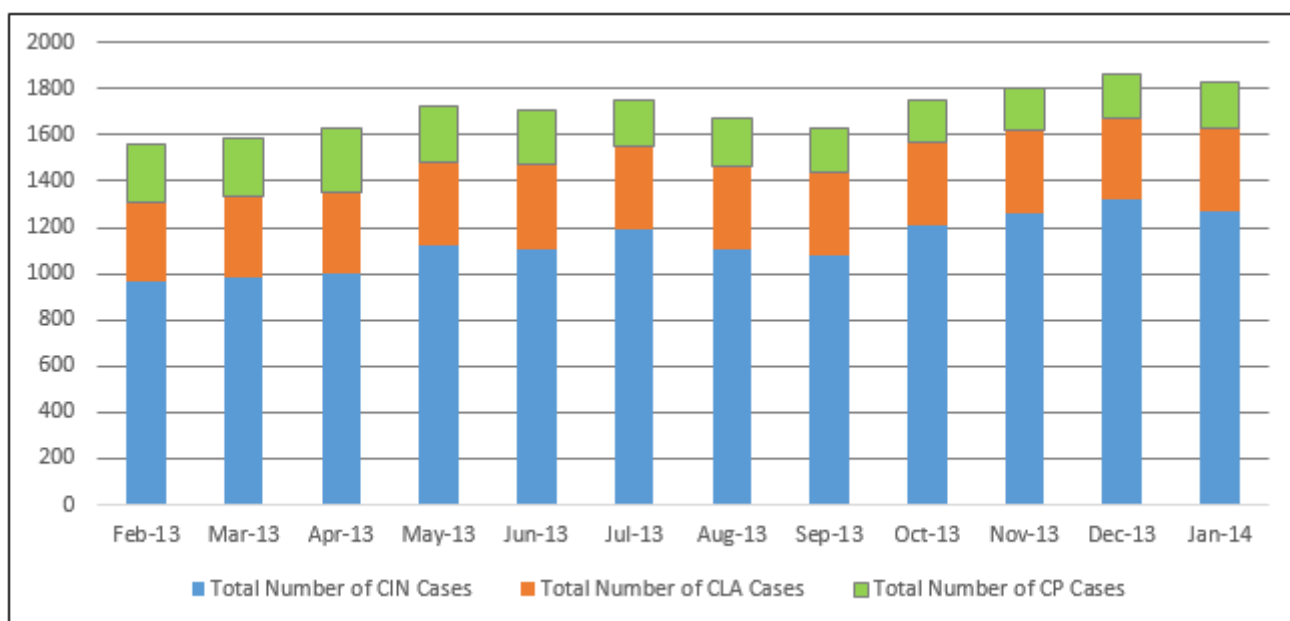
every initial conference. There has been a slight rise in January and it is this which we will need to be vigilant about.

### Children Looked After



The number of looked after children has remained relatively stable since April 2013, but there has been a significant rise in the number in January owing to the identification and accommodation of children subject to Child Sexual Exploitation and the fall in the number of young people exiting our care, which has dropped significantly given the age of the cohort in care.

### Child in Need Cases

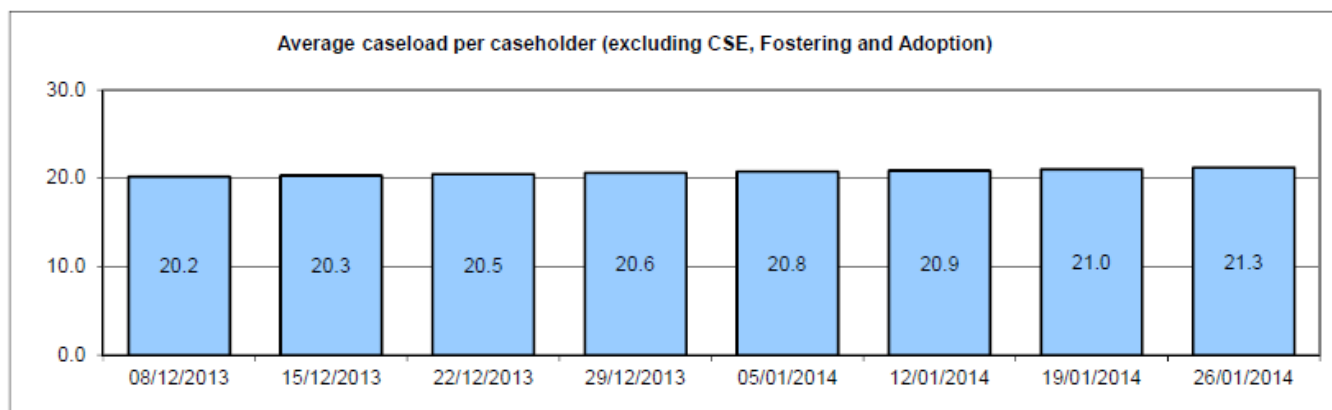


Recent audit findings (analysis of decision making at child protection conferences - May 2013) have suggested that child in need cases “may not receive the same rigour of approach and monitoring expected of those cases worked under child protection plans”.

In February 2013, there were 977 open child in need cases. This had risen to 1,130 by May and there are now 1233 open child in need cases open to children’s social care (January 2014).

Child in need cases are worked within several of the social work teams: Referral and Assessment; Family Support Services and the Children with Disabilities team. The role of the social worker is to support families through robust child in need plans that minimise risk to children and young people. It is imperative that workers are pro-active in working with families in need to ensure that the risk of these children coming into the care system or the case progressing to child protection is reduced.

## Social Workers Caseloads



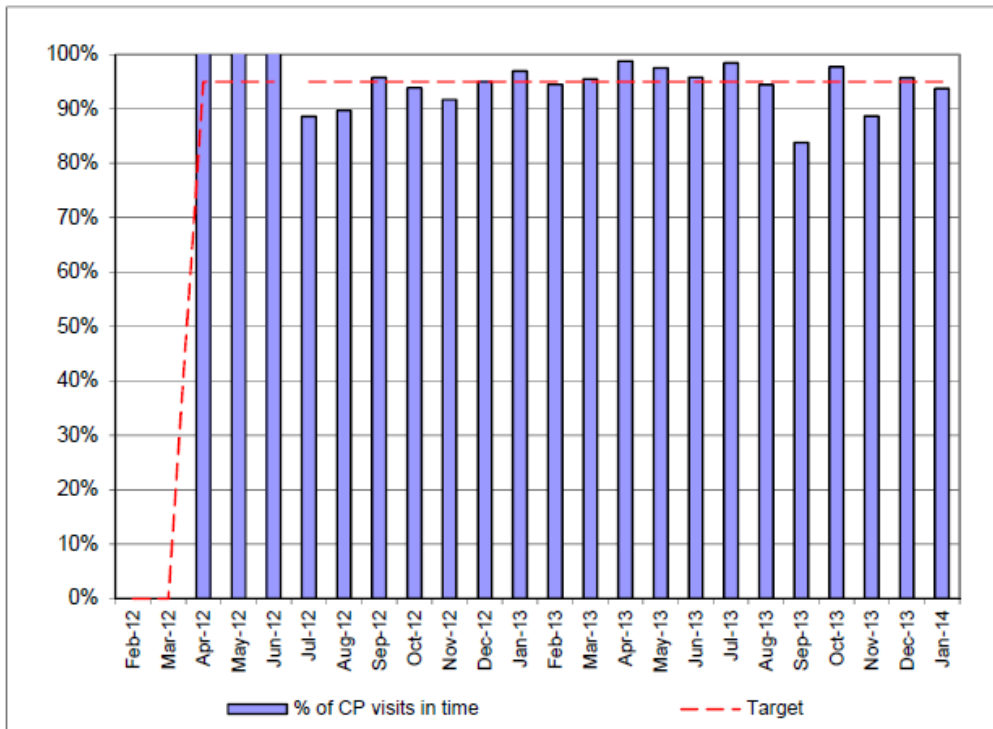
There has been an increase in the overall size of social workers' caseloads. Whilst the average caseload remains slightly higher at 20, our Daily Dashboard shows significant increase in the more experienced social workers' caseloads. This increase is a result of an additional 169 open cases in the system, predominantly children in need and our open assessments.

This is against a decrease in the number of re-referrals which evidences a greater working of cases to conclusion and not a premature closing off.

We are addressing this through a clear Management Action Plan outlining:

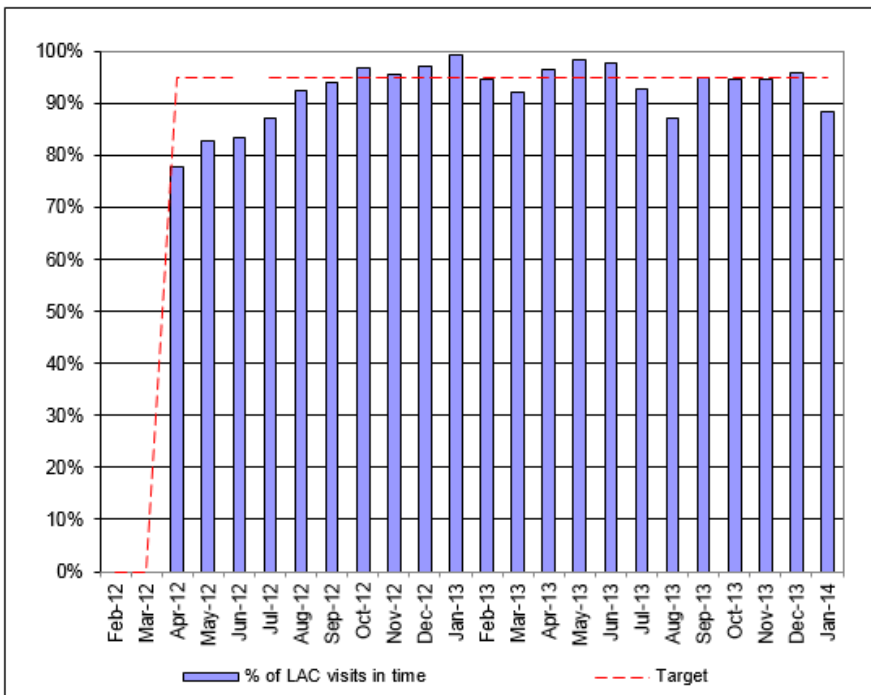
- Individual Action Plan for each Team manager to close off at least 20 cases per team until the work is completed.
- The council has committed additional resource to assist with the management of these cases.
- An experienced Manager has been appointed to commence week beginning 2 December. These managers will also review whole caseloads to ensure that there are not cases that need to be closed off as there has, with the reconfiguration, been a rise in the number of cases on a social worker's caseload.
- An update ICS list of all cases open and not active has already been produced.
- An additional Head of Service has been appointed to manage our Assessment & Family Support Teams.
- A Principal Social Worker to assist with raising the quality of assessments through direct and group supervision of staff is being appointed. (March 2014)

### Child Protection visits in timescale



The data for the end of January shows that 93.8 % of the visits were in timescale. There is a family who has left this country to go back to Eastern Europe .This is a priority for us and we must maintain this level of performance.

### Looked after Children visits in timescale



This remains an area that fluctuates in performance and it currently stands at 88.3 %

To address this, there is a weekly monitoring report for managers identifying the due date and those that have not been completed in timescale. Some staffing pressure and sickness, particularly in the Leaving Care Team, have impacted upon this, especially to those care leavers that are deemed looked after but settled in placement, but where there is still a statutory responsibility. The Adolescent Intervention team and YOS has been assisting the leaving care team with the conduct of visits.

### **Progress in Fostering**

A number of key initiatives have been set in place since April 2013:

- New Publicity Materials: a complete rebranding of the Fostering Service
- New Website: a totally new rebranded website
- Appointment of a Recruitment and Marketing Officer, with a strong marketing background
- Marketing Strategy: a detailed marketing strategy has been developed
- Change in the senior management arrangements of the service

The service has received over 170 enquiries into the service. This represents a 37% growth compared with the same point in 2012 and means that the service is on track to recruit a cadre of approved foster carers that is around 25% larger than at the beginning of the year, equating to a net gain of 24 new fostering households.

The service continues to develop an improved relationship with our existing and any new carers, minimising the number leaving for reasons other than retirement or through offering permanence to children they are currently looking after.

### **Progress in Adoption**

The increased number of Adoption Orders made this year to-date (2 December 2013) demonstrates strong performance.

	Adopters approved	Children matched	Adoption Orders
2011 - 2012	6	6	7
2012 - 2013	17	16	19
			At 2 December 2013

## **5.9 Raising the Quality of Practice**

### **Quality Assurance update**

We have an ambitious annual quality assurance audit framework in place.

There has been a significant amount of audit activity, management scrutiny and cascading of learning and actions required during this reporting period as outlined below.

### **Cases Requiring Improvement**

Governance and scrutiny arrangements are well embedded across the Department. All cases that are graded as “requiring improvement” (new OFSTED grading) as part of quality assurance activity are monitored on a regular basis by the Quality Assurance Manager and progress against remedial actions is reported to the Assistant Director of Children’s Social Care and the Head of Quality Assurance and Safeguarding.

The Head of Quality Assurance and Safeguarding ensures that all cases requiring improvement are monitored and scrutinised at the weekly Departmental improvement meetings. In addition, from February 2014 the inadequate audit tracker will be presented to the Departmental Management Team on a monthly basis. Currently there are five cases that remain requiring

improvement. Two of the cases arise from the senior manager's monthly case file audits, 2 from the contacts and referrals audit and 1 from the child in need audit. The actions on these cases will be completed by the 20 February 2014

### **Audit Activity**

In the period from April – December 2013 the Quality Assurance Team have undertaken a total of 21 themed audits; this audit activity has amounted to in excess of **500** cases being reviewed as part of the audit programme. In addition an independent management consultant undertook a Child in Need caseload management exercise and reviewed in excess of **800** files.

Therefore the most recent audit that has been completed include those for children who are Children In Need, Looked After, Leaving Care, or have been adopted. The Looked After Children, Leaving Care and Children in Need Audits findings and recommendations have all been presented by the Head of Quality Assurance and Safeguarding to the Team Managers and two of the audits are due to be signed off by the Assistant Director on the 13 February 2014. The front door was also scrutinised during this period through an audit of Contact and Referrals and the findings were positive as outlined below.

### **Audit of Contact and Referral Thresholds**

An audit of contact and referrals was undertaken in December 2013. The audit considered the appropriateness of thresholds that were applied at the point of a contact and decision for a case to progress to referral. This screening process is a crucial safeguarding activity to ensure that children receive the right service at the right time based on presenting need and the assessed risk of significant harm.

In total 62 cases were considered and all contacts were received between 1 October 2013 and 11 December 2013. Of the 62 cases, 34 cases had not progressed past a contact and 28 had progressed to a referral.

The audit found that in a significant majority of cases that the threshold applied at the point of contact was appropriate and consistently applied. In addition all of those contacts that progressed to referral (28/28) were judged to be appropriate decisions.

Two cases which resulted in No Further Action (NFA) but should have progressed to referral were brought to the Head of Service attention. Both of those cases were urgently reviewed and remedial action was identified and agreed. Once a case had progressed to a referral, auditors found that in a small number of cases the threshold applied regarding case progression (eg strategy discussion, core assessment) was not systematically applied. This is now being progressed by the relevant Head of Service.

Where auditors found issues on cases these were escalated to the Head of Service and Assistant Director for action. The Head of Service reviewed all cases and identified alternative action where necessary. The cases are being monitored by the Quality Assurance Team to ensure that action is taken and the progress will be reported back to DMT on a monthly basis.

### **Audits in Progress/Summary**

There are currently two audits being scoped, one that is focussing on supervision, the other is a multi-agency audit of domestic abuse cases. The Head of Service for Quality Assurance and Safeguarding Chairs the Team Mangers monthly management meeting and has led on three action learning sets on supervision. A report detailing the recommendations from the action learning sets will be presented to the Departmental Management Team in early March 2014. The domestic abuse audit will be undertaken by a group of multi-agency auditors and will track the quality and timeliness of multi-agency working across 20 cases which involve children. The 20 cases provide a sample across the varying domestic abuse risk levels and crime/incident severity.

The Head of Service for Quality Assurance and Safeguarding also chairs the Local Safeguarding Board multi-agency Quality Assurance Effectiveness Group and at the meeting on the 4 February 2014 the timeline for the above was agreed, along with partner representatives.

### **Children in Need Case Load Management Review**

The Caseload Review took place between 10 and 29 January on all open referrals as at the 3 January 2014. The objective was to consider all Children in Need (CIN) cases within the Assessment and Family Support Teams (AFS) to ascertain whether they were active and to identify those that could appropriately be closed. Over 1,000 cases have been scrutinised.

All of the CIN cases open to the AFS Service other than those relating to LAC or those subject of a Child Protection Plan were looked at and a view taken as to the objectives behind the local authority being involved and a view taken as to whether those objectives had been met or were likely to be met by the time of the next CIN meeting. Conversations were held with the relevant social worker to seek their views and the lists were amended as appropriate. The final stage was for the reviewer to sit with the Head of Service and the relevant Team Manager to consider arrangements for case closure. These cases have been tracked and shared with Team Managers for them to follow up within their teams. In such a significant cohort of children, fewer than 5 were escalated for senior manager consideration as needing remedial action. The Head of Service will also follow these tracked cases up with Team Managers in supervision and progress on a weekly basis until such a time as the Assistant Director is satisfied to the point that she is able to sign the task off. This activity will significantly reduce caseloads and release further capacity across the service to focus on children and families who are in greatest need of continuing support and interventions. The spreadsheet of closures will be monitored in the performance meetings which the Director of Children's Services will chair.

Moving forward greater oversight and planning will be required along with further development work, which will be formulated into a prioritised action plan in agreement with the Assistant Director.

### **Children and Young People/Parents and Carers Feedback**

In order to begin to fully understand how the work we do impacts on children and families lives, it is important to gather our own local evidence that will better inform our work and provide a reference source from which to develop relationship based practice. This will be undertaken via two processes:

- Questionnaires
- Focus Groups

**Questionnaires** - The Quality Assurance service has developed two brief questionnaires which are to be used with children/young people and their parent's/carers at various points in the child's journey such as closure of an Initial Assessment, Core assessment, or following the 12 week review of a Child in Need Plan. Since December 2013 The Performance Management Team identifies who the questionnaire needs to be sent to and business support colleagues send out directly and collate the responses, which will then be analysed by the Quality Assurance Service on a quarterly basis. Learning will then be cascaded across the organisation as a whole along with evidenced good practice examples. To date there have only been 3 returns (stamped addressed envelopes are provided) from the same family. The parent and both children's return was extremely positive about the social work service received. The positive feedback was shared with the newly qualified social worker and the Team Manager.

**Focus Groups** - A series of parental focus groups will commence at the end of January 2014. The sessions will commence with a group of parents whose child/children have recently come off a Child Protection Plan. The sessions will be facilitated by the Head of Service for Quality Assurance and Safeguarding. The purpose of the sessions is to gather constructive feedback on Children's Social Care practice that can be used to develop and improve future practice. Two

focus groups were planned but unfortunately only one parent turned up. Nevertheless the detailed and focused session was enlightening and clear learning points came out of the session, which are applicable to practice across the service. The parent also reported that she found the session a positive experience and would encourage others to partake. A further group or individual sessions will be offered in March 2014.

### **Independent Chairs /Grade Descriptors**

A series of qualitative practice standards (grade descriptors) have been introduced from January 2014. The standards are being used on all cases where the child/young person is the subject of a Child Protection Plan or Looked After. The Independent Chairs are using the standards in Child Protection Conferences and LAC Reviews to assess social worker and multi-agency interventions. Feedback is provided to Social Workers, Team Managers and Heads of Service. The grade descriptors are monitored by the Performance Management Team and a quarterly analytical report will be compiled. Whilst the standards have only been introduced for a short time they have been assessed as useful and are having a positive impact on the social work teams concerned.

### **Independent Chairs and Case Alerts**

From February 2014, Independent Chairs have been allocated as a single point of contact to every team across the children's services directorate. They will meet with Team Managers and make themselves available to develop strong professional relationships and embed further their role within quality assurance processes and practice improvements.

There are five active case alerts all of which are within timescale for a response and resolution. Case alerts are now firmly embedded in practice and once raised are resolved in a timely manner. This is a significant improvement.

### **Good Practice Exemplars**

The Quality Assurance service is currently developing a suite of good practice exemplars that will be used by social workers to improve practice. The exemplars are short guides and will cover a range of pertinent practice areas including:

- Cultural awareness
- The importance of recording
- Good assessments
- Robust and outcome focussed plans
- The purpose of statutory visits

These exemplars are in a draft format and are due to be presented to the Departmental management Team on 13 March 2014.

All findings from the audits are cascaded across the organisation with clear actions plans and there is strong evidence of greater accountability and ownership amongst team managers. Practice briefings are now well embedded and action learning sets have been developed to address areas for development.

There is still a need however to ensure children's views are always included in an assessment of need and the impact of the quality of parenting received well understood and incorporated into any assessment of need. This will further be enhanced by the introduction of children/young people and their parents' questionnaires/evaluation forms, which will be used at various points in the child's journey. This will enable greater understanding on how the work we undertake impacts on children and their family's lives and act as a reference point from which to further develop relationship based practice.

### **Service Developments Conference & Review Service**



Following a service evaluation, the service was restructured in November 2013. Previously there were distinct roles of Child Protection Chairs and Independent Reviewing Officers. However it was agreed to appoint more chairs who could undertake a dual role in chairing Child Protection Conferences and Statutory Reviews. This enables the chair to understand the trajectory of a child's journey from being subject to a Child Protection Plan through to possible accommodation into care.

Grade descriptors and practice standards have also been introduced to assist in evaluating the quality of child protection plans and also the plans for children who are looked after. The grade descriptors were well received amongst children's services staff and their introduction was also supported by Peterborough's social work forum.

The conference and review service is now more closely aligned to the quality assurance team and PSCB, providing monitoring evidence of attendance at Conference and the provision of reports.

There is now in place a robust monitoring process detailing information on all agencies invited to child protection conferences, the quality of the reports submitted and whether the conference is actually attended. Where there is non-attendance this is followed up and explanation sought. Where there are concerns about agency attendance these are followed up by meetings with partner agencies, senior management from Children's Services and the board's Independent Chair.

The details of attendance now form part of the PSCB multi-agency data set and are reported quarterly to the board allowing for appropriate scrutiny and challenge.

Early monitoring has already demonstrated improvements in attendance from agencies where there were identified concerns and the timeliness of reports being shared prior to the meeting.

### **The Social Work Forum**

The Social Work Forum, established in May 2012, continues as a consultative and feedback body to the DCS and departmental management team. This ensures direct communication between senior managers and a representative group of practitioners. The leader of the council attends this forum and the group can, and does, call senior managers to the table.

### **Performance Management and Supervision**

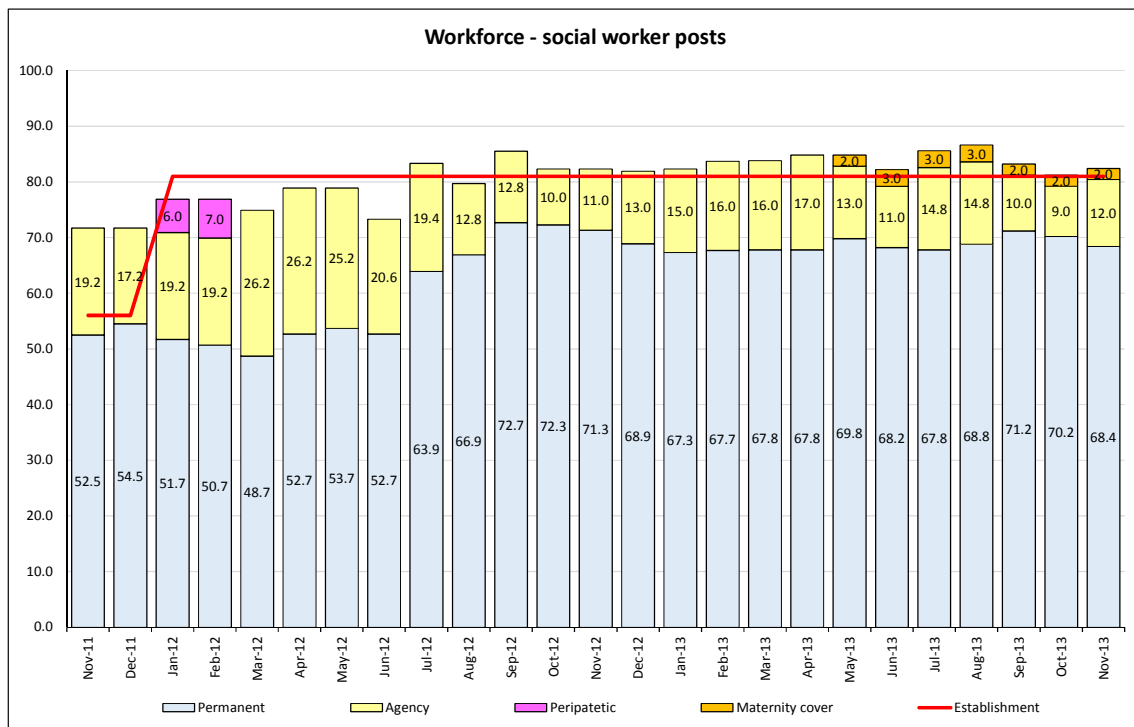
Our performance management arrangements for children's social care are well established. High level performance management information is used to measure compliance and quality of practice. A suite of daily, weekly, and monthly reports continue to be produced including:

- Monthly Performance Management Information Monitoring Report
- Weekly report on Social Care Performance
- Daily Dashboard
- Weekly report on Unallocated Cases
- Weekly report on Statutory Visits to children in care and those subject to a Child Protection Plan
- Fortnightly staffing levels
- Legal Tracking sheet

These reports are used actively in weekly performance meetings, extended management team meetings, the team managers meeting and team meetings to inform and ensure performance remains on track.

Raising the quality of assessments has also been achieved through reduced caseloads and increasing evidence of reflective supervision on file, enhanced through training and learning sets.

## Staffing



We currently have 63.8 permanent staff in post out of an establishment of 81. This gives us a vacancy rate of 17.02.

We have 17 agency social workers in post covering vacancies, long term sickness and acting up arrangements, plus an additional 2 covering permanent staff who are on maternity leave.

We have 3 new starters (one permanent and two agency) in the pipeline, who are all due to start during February and are appointing 2 more additional agency social workers to cover roles in First Response.

We are also currently undertaking reference approvals on a permanent NQSW to start with us in April.

Against a national background to the shortage of qualified and experienced social workers throughout the country, Peterborough is experiencing some difficulties in attracting social workers. A few neighbouring authorities are offering cash incentives and some of our staff have been attracted to these inducements. To address this we refreshed our targeted advertising campaign in November when we went out to recruit, specifically in Lincolnshire and Cambridgeshire and also in the specialist press.

### Regional and Self-Assessment

Social Care are conducting a multi-agency self-assessment against the new Ofsted inspection judgements. This complements our adoption and school improvement self-assessment. The PSCB will also be evaluating their performance against the new Ofsted guidance.

We are having a LAC peer review inspection in the spring to pilot the new regional methodology which we have helped develop.

This will give us an independent assessment of our LAC services against the new OFSTED judgement areas and indicators.

## **Early Intervention**

The Children and Families Joint Commissioning Board oversees much of the work of agencies to support the needs of children and families through effective targeted early intervention services. An annual report covering progress made in improving outcomes for children, young people and their families against the areas of priority need identified in the Prevention and Early Intervention Strategy is available separately.

## **Improving the Quality of Early Years Provision**

We have been committed to improving the quality of childcare provision across the city as part of our determination to narrow the gap in Foundation Stage performance among our most vulnerable children and helping to ensure that they arrive at school ready to learn. Through the provision of targeted support and challenge to childcare providers, the quality of provision in the city, as assessed by Ofsted, has continued to improve over the last 12 months.

Through this pro-active approach to working with childcare settings in order to drive up standards in the city, 75% of childcare settings were assessed as good or better by Ofsted in July 2013, compared with only 69% in July 2012. This is a year on year increase of 6%, compared with a national average increase of 3%. This performance brings the overall quality of childcare settings in the city closer to the England average of 77% of all settings being judged good or better by Ofsted as of July 2013.

We are currently consulting on a re-modelling of Children's Centres in the city in response to continuing pressures on the council's finances and in recognition to the increased funding available to parents for childcare and continuing investment in health visiting in the city.

The model on which we are consulting would see provision protected in those communities that are facing the most significant challenges in terms of deprivation. Alongside these proposed changes to Children's Centres, we are proposing the development of multi-agency community support hubs from which multi-agency teams will provide support to vulnerable families, children and young people across the city. Taken together, we expect to be able to continue to offer an effective model of support to our most vulnerable children and their families, recognising that many more young children will have access to childcare which will

## **Supporting Vulnerable Young People and those who are NEET**

We commission and provide a range of services working with vulnerable young people in the city. Our main provided services include:

- The Adolescent Intervention Service which works intensively with individual young people with complex needs and their families
- The Youth in Localities Service, which undertakes a wide range of community based youth work as well running targeted groups to work with young people who have particular needs – for example young women who have been identified as being at risk of sexual exploitation.
- The NEET Service which works with schools and other partners to proactively target young people at risk of NEET and to work with those young people to identify constructive options for them as well as working with young people who are NEET and supporting them into employment, education or training

We also commission a range of services and work in partnership with a number of voluntary sector organisations to ensure that we are using every opportunity to provide young people with the support that they need in order to achieve improved outcomes.

Our most recent performance suggests that the percentage of young people NEET in October 2013 remains lower than at the same time last year, at 7.5%. It also remains the case that we know the status of a much higher proportion of our young people than either our statistical neighbours or the England average.

The most recent data available for the rate of first time entrants into the Youth Justice System in Peterborough shows that the rate has fallen to below that of our statistical neighbours for the first time. Our recent HMI Inspection in February 2014 has been very positive.

The outcome will be published in March 2014.

Local performance data indicates that this indicator continues to improve. Not only is this very encouraging, but we also believe that it is evidence of the success of the partners working with vulnerable young people and tackling issues that are often associated with offending such as being out of employment, education or training and problem alcohol and/or substance misuse. Softer information on the effectiveness of some of our intensive support work with individual vulnerable young people is provided through our regular sampling of case work files. For example, the most recent sampling of 30 randomly selected young people receiving a service through our Adolescent Intervention Service found that:

- 6 demonstrated improvements in relationships at home
- 9 secured improved school attendance or engagement with different model of education – e.g. college
- 1 young person was no longer homeless
- 6 were referred to specialist mental health services
- 2 young people already in care were supported with the result that their placements became more stable
- 1 young person moved
- While in only 3 cases was there limited or no engagement

### **Troubled Families**

Connecting Families is the local name for the Troubled Families programme. We have adopted a scheme whereby partner agencies have identified workers to become Connectors. These Connectors work intensively with families to address issues such as school attendance and anti-social behaviour. The Connectors form a virtual team who support each other by sharing their knowledge and skills. Access to Connecting Families is through the Multi-Agency Support Groups to ensure that services being provided are properly coordinated. Almost 100 families have now been worked with through the Connecting Families Programme. There are 10.5 FTE Connectors working within the programme from a wide range of organisations including the fire service, police, children's services and social housing, alongside Connectors from Peterborough and Fenland Mind and from Ormiston Trust and Drink and Drug Sense. The Connectors are a highly committed group of practitioners who have had considerable success in helping families to make significant changes to their circumstances.

In parallel to developing the Connecting Families approach, we have developed systems that enable us to bring together agency data. This has meant we can now evidence achievement of agencies across the city in relation to work with children, young people and families.

## **6. CONCLUSIONS**

- In light of previous concerns over reporting and data for key Children's Services activities, the Task and Finish group has provided an extremely valuable vehicle in ensuring that challenge and data validation has been possible. The success of the process has been dependent on officers being open with the task and finish group, receptive to enquiry and challenge and most

importantly, being willing to engage in the process. We believe this has been the case on the whole.

- Councillors on the Task and Finish Group have had the opportunity to drill down and witness for themselves how it really was in the field, listen to what was deemed good and not so good and discover what could be reported back from a grass roots level. Personal visits again encouraged free flowing conversation between staff and councillors/co-opted member and a sense that concerns would be listened to and hopefully acted upon.
- From the regular written and verbal reports received and scrutinised by the Task and Finish Group it is clear that there has been a steady and marked improvement in the social worker numbers particularly in the reduction of agency staff. The Task and Finish Group have come to appreciate that it is not just about recruitment but also retention of quality staff and the pressure by other authorities offering improved terms and conditions in their desperation to prise our social workers away.
- The improvement in social worker numbers and their skill levels has had the targeted effect of improving both initial and core assessments within the set target timescale. Additional Managerial control aspects implemented have disclosed some quality weaknesses and training requirements which have taken place to improve the quality standard of assessments.
- It is clear from the reports that the Task and Finish Group Members have submitted that Senior Officers have taken on board all of the questions and recommendations put forward and that they have worked to either put the issue right, or at least explain why things are the way they are and take on board the comments for future consideration.
- The direct contact model with social workers, foster carers and other departments has provided an additional layer of feedback and validation against the data and reports provided.
- As the Task and Finish Group has progressed, Children's Services improvement has understandably diminished the "buy in" to the value of the initial Task and Finish Group. I think this is linked to the level of attendance by Scrutiny members as the process has gone on. There is a need in future for a broader base of councillors to be appointed to a Task and Finish group to ensure adequate representation and challenge at each and every meeting.
- As the improvements have continued, the frequency and "freshness" of data has reduced, linked to the timing of the Task & Finish Groups.
- Better use of Member visits, data, feedback and correlation could be made. This is a valuable resource and has not been best utilised to date.
- Recruitment and retention are a key strand throughout this process and need to be considered more formally as an ongoing Scrutiny Committee topic. Not just specifically in terms of social workers, but in terms of Managers and key leadership. The topic of social worker training and becoming more self-sufficient in the long term is a key consideration.
- The success of this process has been by those on both sides of the table being open, willing to engage and where necessary ask, or respond to, difficult questions.
- There have been measurable and sustainable improvements seen over the duration of the Task and Finish group, covering the expansion and stabilising of our social worker base, the significant improvements on Initial and Core Assessment timeliness and subsequently quality, a reduction in re-referrals and significant improvement in and efficiency of reporting. The Task and Finish Members have confidence that the service is better equipped to both identify and also remedy challenges that might impact on service quickly, and there is a clear increase in visibility for elected members.

- The Task and Finish Group would like to thank those officers involved over the last 18 months for their willingness, openness and valuable input into the Task and Finish group monitoring process.
- The cooperation of all involved with the Task and Finish group has been vital and we would like our thanks to go to everyone at all levels for their openness and honesty.

## 7. RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Recommendation 1**

Continue Councillor visits to Children's Services departments across PCC on a regular basis to continue to get first hand validation on progress and issues remaining. This also has a positive impact on staff morale and hopefully provides reassurance that their opinions are genuinely important. The invitation should be extended to Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel.

- **Recommendation 2**

To continue to receive a progress report on the Improvement Programme at each meeting of the Creating Opportunities and Tackling Inequalities Scrutiny Committee – this to include a detailed section on progress being made with the Liquidlogic system.

- **Recommendation 3**

Circulate an electronic copy of the monthly monitoring report to members of the Creating Opportunities and Tackling Inequalities Scrutiny Committee each month so that individual questions can be raised on a 1:1 basis electronically with the relevant officer. This is to be extended to Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel.

- **Recommendation 4**

To consider Children's Services as a possible candidate for a Scrutiny in a day event. What the department covers, all of the feeder agencies, the challenges (Adoption vs Fostering, Child Protection, Looked after Children etc, social worker recruitment).

- **Recommendation 5**

The Scrutiny Committee to hold a review meeting in 6 months where the committee can have a single agenda topic to review progress on the Children's Services Improvement Programme.

## 8. LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS AND RESEARCH SOURCES USED DURING THE INVESTIGATION

- Directors Report to DfE (December 2013)
- Monthly Performance Monitoring Report (January 2014)
- Weekly Performance Management Report (Week ending Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> February)

Further information on this report is available from:

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 Chief Executive's Department, Town Hall  
 Bridge Street  
 Peterborough, PE1 1HG  
 Telephone – (01733) 747474

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