

CREATING OPPORTUNITIES AND TACKLING INEQUALITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE	Agenda Item No. 5
20 JULY 2015	Public Report

Report of the Corporate Director for People and Communities

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SERVICE DIRECTOR REPORT: CHILDREN & SAFEGUARDING

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1. This report provides summarises key performance data for Children’s Social care services as at the end of May 2015 – the latest data available at time of deadline for submission of this report to Scrutiny.
- 1.2. Where possible I have provided information about most recent performance among our statistical neighbours so that our performance can be benchmarked with other similar areas. There are, however, a number of areas of performance where differences in systems and practice between local authorities means that making comparisons is not possible.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1. Committee is asked to note the contents of this report, and to consider whether there are other areas of performance on which regular reports would assist the work of the Committee.
- 2.2. In particular, Committee is asked to consider what information may be beneficial to collate that may help to provide an accurate picture of the quality of practice within Children’s Social Care.

3. LINKS TO THE SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY

- 3.1. Creating Opportunities - Tackling Opportunities
 - Supporting vulnerable people

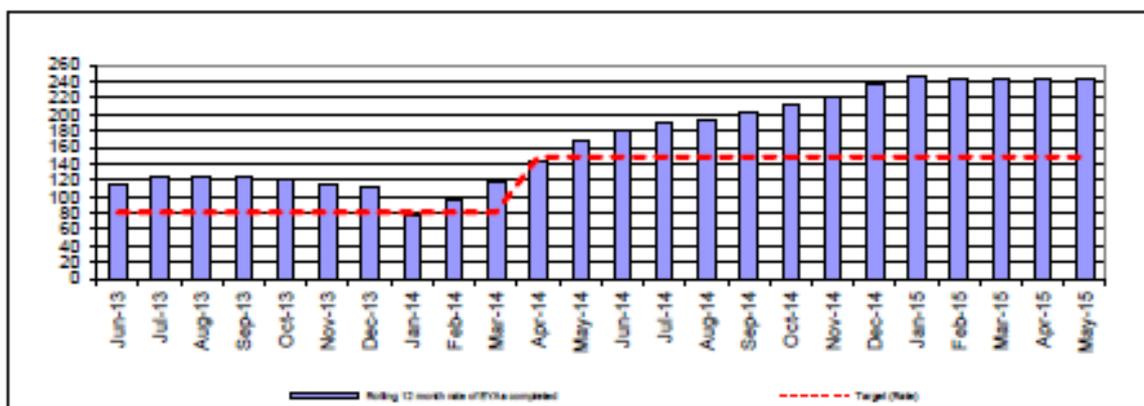
4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1. Key performance information is set out in the sections below, with some contextual information to assist in interpreting what the data is saying. This information is presented in accordance with the journey of a child through the system – beginning with the rate of early help assessments, and numbers of contacts and referrals into Children’s Social Care and ending with numbers of children who are looked after and who are leaving care through adoption and special guardianship orders.

Early Help Assessments, Contacts and Referrals

- 4.2. The chart below illustrates the continuing increase in the use of Early Help Assessments [formerly known as the ‘CAF’] by partner agencies in the City. The chart shows the

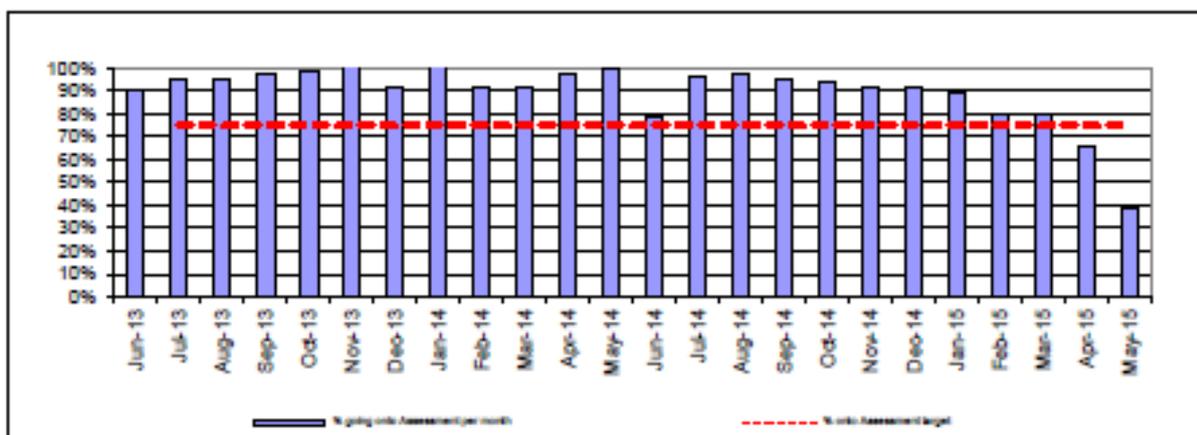
annualised rolling rate of new Early Help Assessments per 10,000 children and young people population and has shown a significant increase over the last 12 months although most recently, the rate of new assessments appears to have stabilised at around 240 per 10,000.



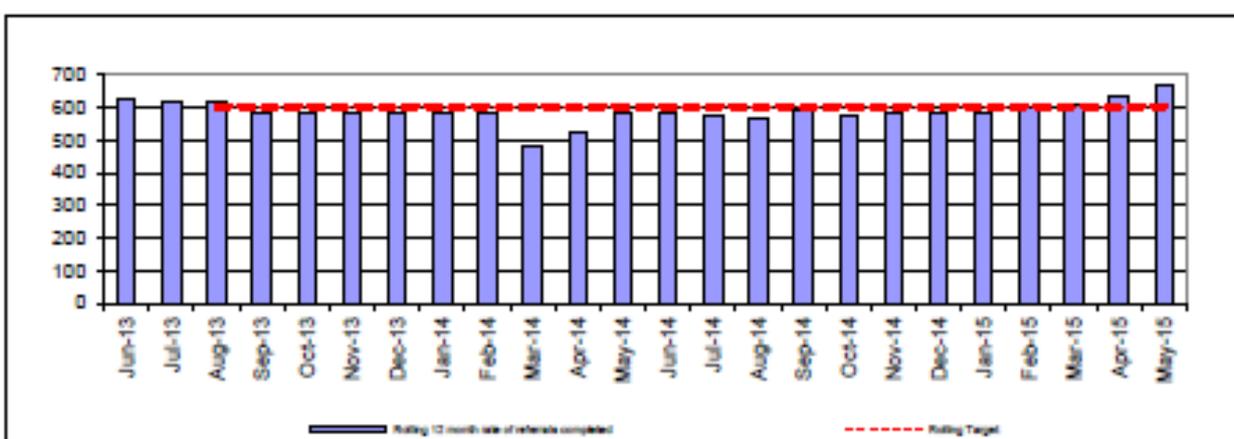
- 4.3. This indicates that more children and young people are benefiting from a holistic assessment of their needs. Effective early help services should help to address issues before they become entrenched and hence avoid subsequent referrals to Children’s Social Care and other specialist services.
- 4.4. It is difficult to provide comparative data in relation to this indicator since there is no consistency as to when early help assessments are used between local authorities. In Cambridgeshire, for example, such an assessment is completed prior to referring a child to any single support service. In Peterborough, we ask for one to be completed when it appears likely that the child needs the support of more than one support service. Essex, meanwhile, has stopped using these assessments altogether.
- 4.5. The next charts and tables show the numbers of contacts received into Children’s Social Care, and the proportion of these that are then opened as a referral – which means that we have decided that we need to understand more about the situation of a child or young person – and the proportion of referrals that then progress to an assessment. Not all children and young people we accept as referrals will progress to assessments; this decision will depend on the subsequent information that is gathered after the case has been opened as a referral.

Month	Refs	Contact	% Mnth	% YTD
Jun-13	213	762	28.0%	32.2%
Jul-13	223	894	24.9%	29.5%
Aug-13	184	796	23.1%	27.9%
Sep-13	134	817	16.4%	25.5%
Oct-13	284	900	31.6%	26.6%
Nov-13	210	783	26.8%	26.7%
Dec-13	226	750	30.1%	27.1%
Jan-14	213	825	25.8%	26.9%
Feb-14	217	750	28.9%	27.1%
Mar-14	249	947	26.3%	27.0%
Apr-14	221	831	26.6%	26.6%
May-14	280	767	33.9%	30.1%
Jun-14	210	928	22.6%	27.4%
Jul-14	194	913	21.2%	25.8%
Aug-14	140	728	19.2%	24.6%
Sep-14	254	927	27.4%	25.1%
Oct-14	201	872	23.1%	24.8%
Nov-14	236	847	27.9%	25.2%
Dec-14	237	805	29.4%	25.6%
Jan-15	213	820	26.0%	25.7%
Feb-15	269	868	31.0%	26.2%
Mar-15	302	972	31.1%	26.6%
Apr-15	319	817	39.0%	39.2%
May-15	416	857	48.5%	43.9%

- 4.6. The first thing to note in the table above is the number of contacts made to the service each month. These are often running at the rate of 800-900 per month, and all have to be screened and a decision made as to whether they should be opened as referrals. Typically only 25-30% of these contacts reach the threshold for a referral. This illustrates the importance of continuing our work with our partners to ensure that thresholds are widely understood and that effective use is made of the range of early help services before a contact is made with Children's Social Care.
- 4.7. The next thing to note is that the percentage of contacts proceeding to referrals appears to have increased significantly in April and May of this year. This is connected to the continuing development of the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub in Peterborough, which is linked to the main MASH in Cambridgeshire. Contacts come in to the MASH Hub where they can be worked on for a further 3 days, while further information is gathered from partners to help the decision about whether the case needs to progress to an assessment. This process is now working effectively in Peterborough, however our recording system has to record any contact that remains open for more than 24 hours as a referral, which explains the apparently much higher proportion of cases progressing to referral in the table above.
- 4.8. This is confirmed by the chart below, which shows the percentages of referrals that go on for a further assessment:



- 4.9. The percentage of referrals progressing to an assessment has dipped significantly in April and May, as the percentage of contacts progressing to a referral has increased.
- 4.10. Differences in the way that contacts and referrals are treated across the country makes comparative data difficult to interpret. There is comparative data available for the rate of referrals per 10,000 child population, however, with 2013/14 being the most recent year that such comparative data is available. The chart below shows the Peterborough rolling annualised rate of referrals per 10,000 population:



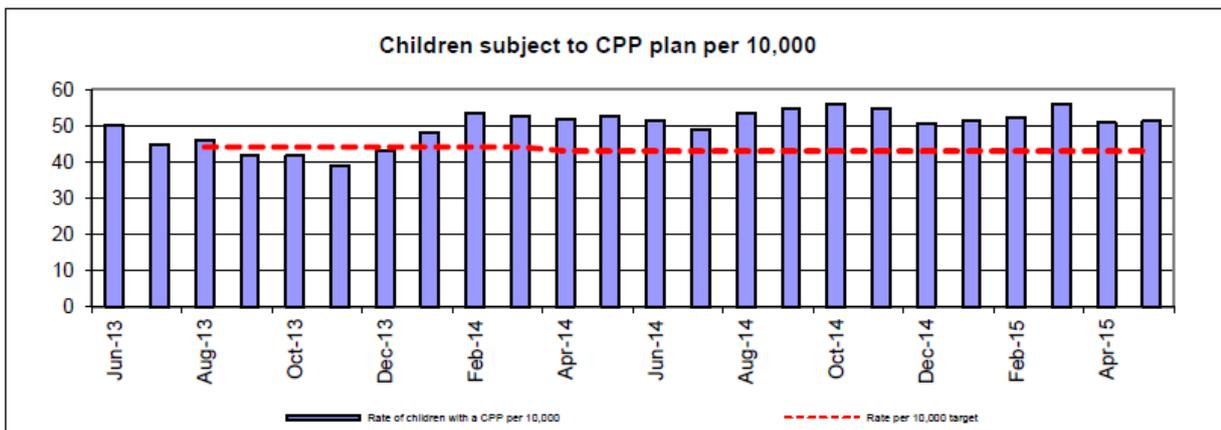
- 4.11. The impact of the higher referral rates in May can be seen in the chart above, indicating that the establishment of the MASH will see our referral rate increase. For comparison, in 2013/14 the statistical neighbour average was 730 referrals per 10,000, while the Peterborough rate was 580 per 10,000. However, in that year, 95% of referrals progressed to assessment in Peterborough, compared with only 77% among our statistical neighbours. The direction of travel in relation to the data indicates that performance in Peterborough is likely to move closer to the average of our statistical neighbours.
- 4.12. A further complication is that the model of assessment used in Peterborough changed in June 2014. Other local authorities have also made this change, but at different points over that last 18-24 months. Prior to this change, there were two forms of assessment in use. The first was an Initial Assessment, which was to be completed within 10 days and was intended to establish whether there was a need for a more in-depth assessment, or whether the needs identified did not warrant further support from Children’s Social Care. The more in-depth assessment was the Core Assessment, which should have been completed within 35 days. These assessments have been replaced by the Single

Assessment, which can take up to 45 days to complete, although the expectation is that more straightforward assessments should continue to be completed within a ten day period.

- 4.13. This change, and the fact that different authorities implemented it at different times over the last 18-24 months, means that again, there is a lack of meaningful comparative data available. The rate of such assessments per 10,000 population as of the end of May 2015 was 623, a number that has increased over the year as more of these assessments are completed. We will now begin to have some year on year comparative data locally, and some nationally comparative data may become available towards the end of 2015.

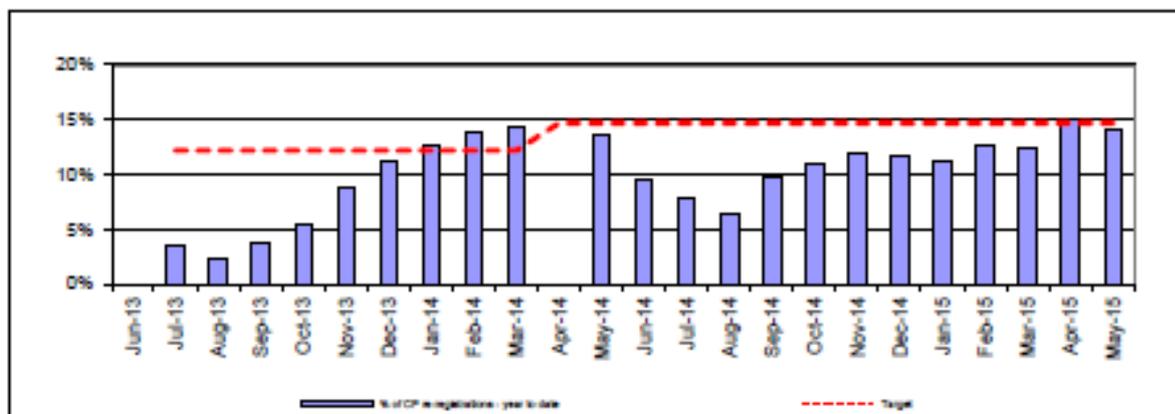
Child Protection Enquiries

- 4.14. In the year to May 2014, there were 891 child protection enquiries made under s.47 of the Children Act 1989, of which 45% resulted in an Initial Child Protection Conference being convened. This conversion rate is in line with England average [in 2013/14, this was 45.8%] but is slightly lower than the statistical neighbour rate of 50% for 2013/14.
- 4.15. Child protection enquiries are highly intrusive in terms of the experience of the family concerned, and often place families under considerable stress and anxiety. It is clearly therefore desirable to avoid such enquiries whenever possible. Equally, however, it is often difficult to gain a complete picture of whether a child is likely to be at risk of significant harm without such enquiries being made.
- 4.16. There were 215 children and young people subject to child protection plans as of the end of May 2015, equivalent to a rate of 51.3 children per 10,000. The chart below shows the rolling year rate per 10,000 children subject to child protection plans:

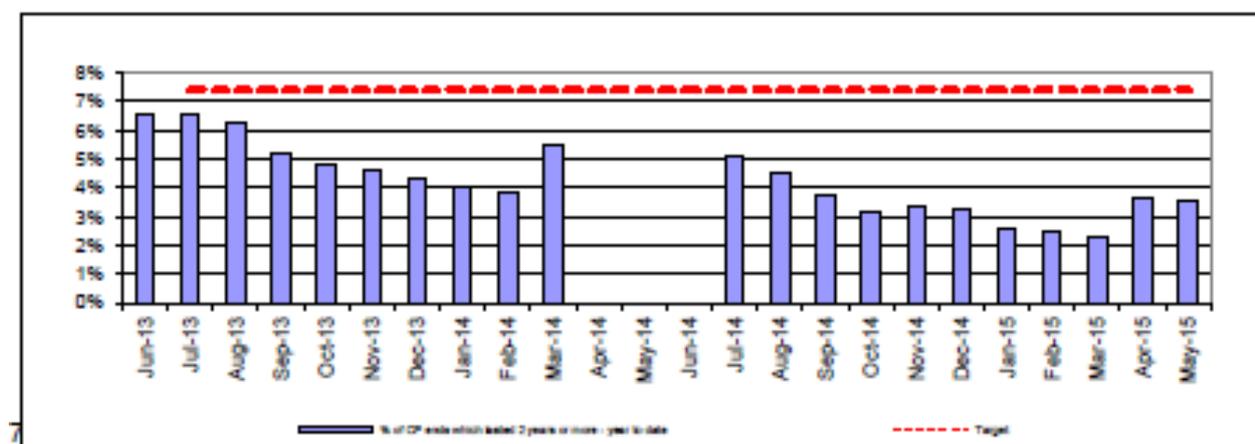


- 4.17. In 2013/14, the rate for children subject to child protection plans in Peterborough was 52.4 compared with a statistic neighbour average of 54.0 and an England average of 42.6. The target, which was set some time ago, is one that needs to be reviewed as it is set at the England average. Peterborough has higher levels of deprivation than the average for England and so it would be expected that rates of child protection plans would be higher than the England average.
- 4.18. There are two broadly accepted indicators of the effectiveness of child protection plans: the number of plans that have been in place for 2 years or more and the number of children who becomes subject a child protection plan for a second or subsequent time. The chart

below shows the position within Peterborough in respect of children who are subject to a plan for a second or subsequent time:



- 4.19. Current year to date performance is 14.2%; this compares to a statistical neighbour average of 15.6% in 2013/14 – the most recent date when comparable data is available. Because of the nature of child protection in Peterborough, this can be a slightly volatile indicator. Overall, the number of children subject to plans is quite small, however among this population are a few families with significant numbers of children. Re-registration of a family with a relatively large number of children can therefore have a significant impact on a monthly figure.
- 4.20. The chart below shows the percentage of children subject to child protection plans for two years or more:

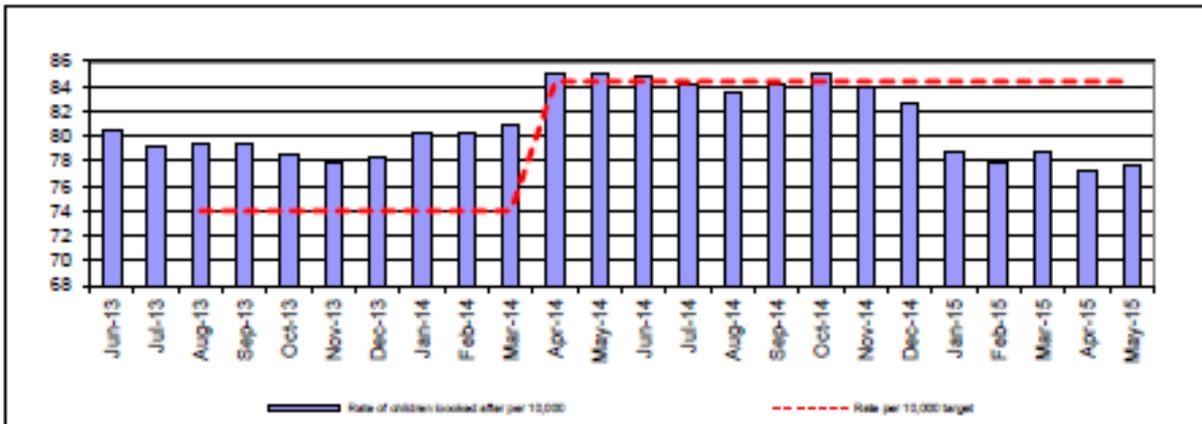


- 4.21. Current performance of 3.5% is in line with most recently available statistical neighbour performance of 3.7%.

Children Looked After

- 4.22. As of the end of May, some 350 children and young people were being looked after by Peterborough. Of these, most are placed with foster carers [around 80% of the total] and the majority of these are placed with our own foster carers.

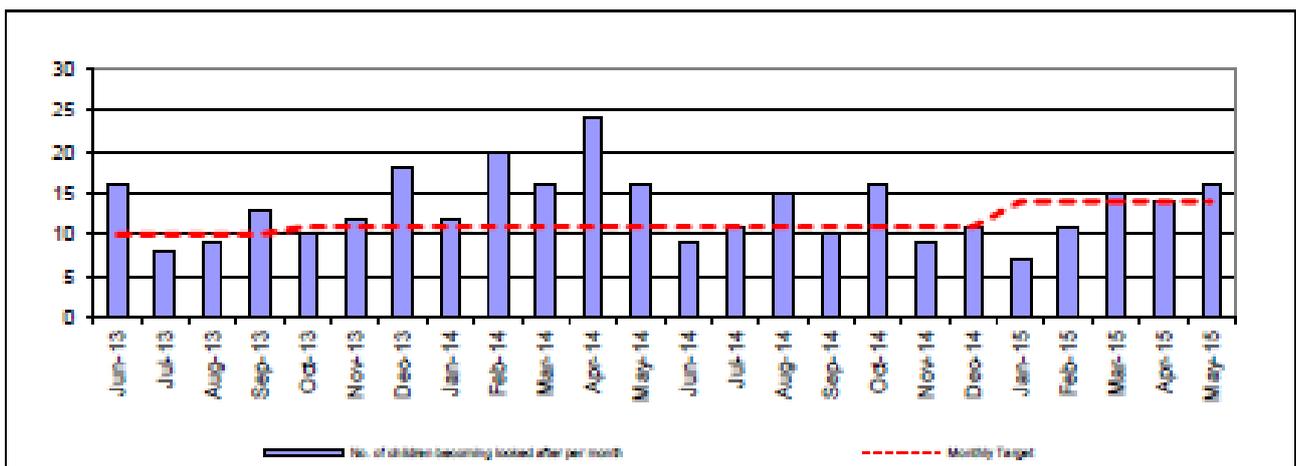
4.23. The easiest way to compare local performance with other similar areas is to look at the rate of children looked after per 10,000 population of children and young people aged 0-17 in the City. The chart below shows how this has varied over time in Peterborough:



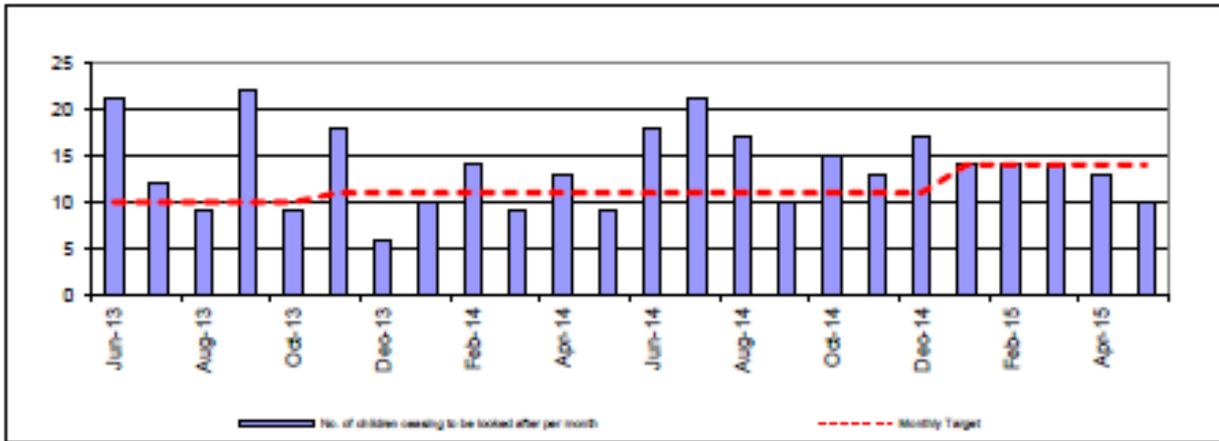
4.24. As can be seen from the chart above, for most of the financial year 2014-15, there were higher numbers of children and young people being looked after in Peterborough than there was in either the previous or current financial year to date.

4.25. The current rate of 77.6 children and young people looked after per 10,000 is almost exactly in line with the most recently available statistical neighbour average of 77.2. Every increase by 1 in the rate per 10,000 looked after is equivalent to an additional 4.5 children in care.

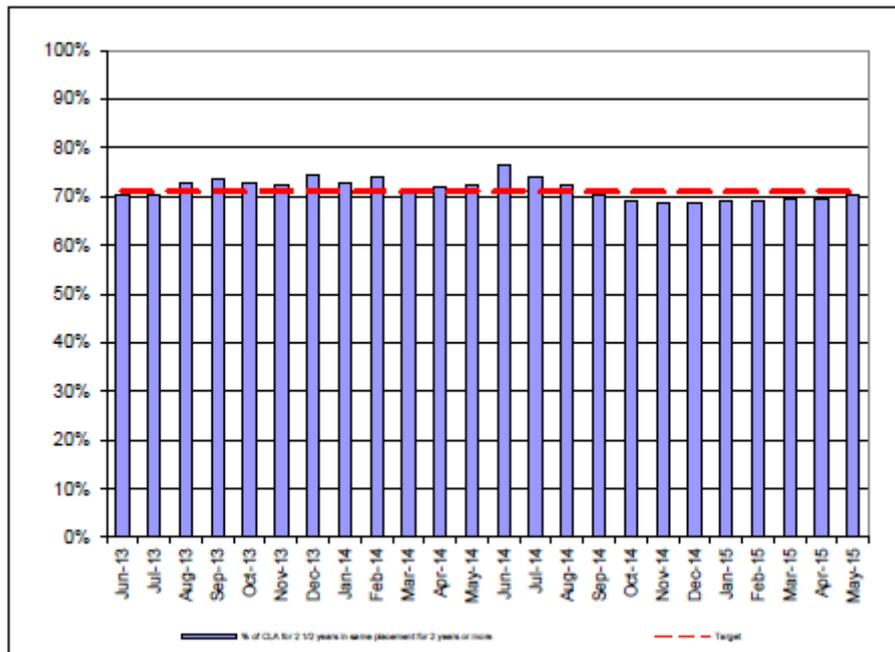
4.26. The child in care population is not a static one; some children will come into the care system in any one month, while others will leave, either because they have returned home, or have been adopted, made the subject of a Special Guardianship Order, or have simply reached the age of 18. The chart below shows the number of children becoming looked after per month:



4.27. The chart below shows the number of children and young people leaving the care system each month:

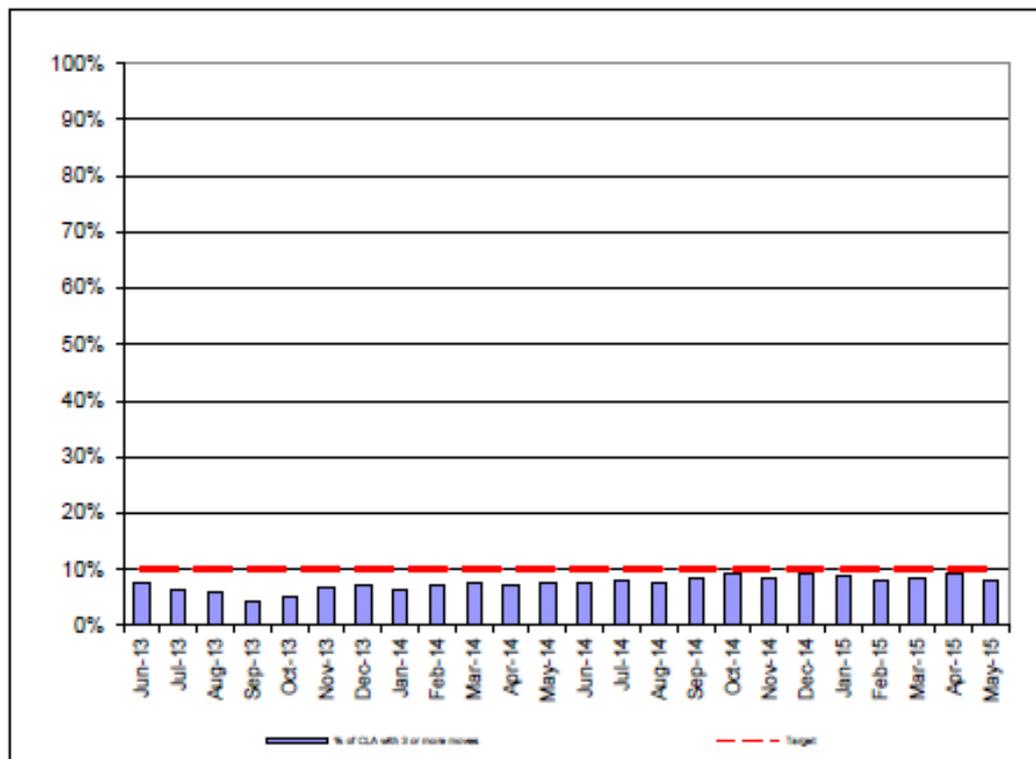


- 4.28. Clearly, in months where the numbers coming into the care system is higher than those leaving, the overall number of children looked after will rise. This has been the position for the last 3 months, suggesting that the overall trend may be increasing at present.
- 4.29. Two indicators that provide an indication of the quality of placements and practice for children and young people who are looked after measure the number of children who have had three or more placements, and the number of children who have been in the same placement for two years or more. The chart below shows the percentage of placements that have been for two years or more:



- 4.30. Current performance is that 71% of placements are of two years or longer, compared with a statistical neighbour average of 69% in 2013/14. This percentage should never be too high as children do need to move on from placements when appropriate – to return home or move to adoptive placements, for example.

4.31. The table below shows the percentage of children who have experienced three or more placements in the preceding 12 months:



4.32. Current performance is that 8% of children have experienced 3 or more placement changes in the last 12 months, compared with 11.3% of children and young people among our statistical neighbours in 2013/14.

4.33. Adoption performance in Peterborough for the last financial year has been good, with more children being adopted than in the previous year – bucking the national trend. In 2014/15, 32 children were adopted in Peterborough, compared with 27 the previous year. Peterborough has also launched a successful fostering for adoption scheme, and 6 babies have now been placed through this approach. This means that they experience no change of carer from leaving hospital to being adopted, which is a great result for them. The scheme will continue to be actively promoted over the coming 12 months and beyond.

Staffing, Recruitment and caseloads

4.34. Attracting sufficient numbers of qualified social workers and team managers to work permanently in the service remains a challenge, and use of agency social workers in particular remains high in the City. This reflects a national position, with many Councils reporting difficulties in recruiting key members of staff.

4.35. As of the end of June in the City, 26 social worker posts were covered by agency social workers. This is 25% of the full social worker establishment. Many agency social workers remain in post for considerable periods and make a significant contribution to the work of the service. However, a smaller number tend to move around the country more quickly, which can lead to children and families experiencing disruptions in relationships with their key professional support. Agency staff are also considerably more expensive than directly employed staff.

- 4.36. We have recently recruited a permanent social worker and are in the process of completing checks. We are interviewing for 12 newly qualified social workers and have already appointed 7 candidates and we are waiting for these to start during the summer.
- 4.37. Indications are that turnover rates among our permanent staff are lower than they were a year ago and if this pattern remains, then we should have a positive impact from the recruitment of the newly qualified workers.
- 4.38. Nevertheless, we are taking active steps to help to address the recruitment issue. These include:
- Reviewing and then relaunching the recruitment website to emphasise the benefits of working in the City and in a single People and Communities Directorate;
 - Seeking creative routes into recruitment including, for example, working with an agency to recruit permanent social workers from Ireland;
 - Reviewing our retention packages so that we hold on to more staff more effectively. This includes reviewing our training and investment programmes as well as exploring whether annual retention bonuses may be a cost effective way of retaining key staff;
 - Continued investment in the Newly Qualified social worker programme, so that we can recruit the brightest and best of newly qualified personnel and support them in their development;
 - Explore ways in which we can reduce our need for qualified staff and instead find other ways of meeting needs using differently qualified staff who can both support the work of qualified social workers and work directly with children, young people and families.
- 4.39. Overall workloads across the service remain high, although the total number of cases open to the Department has reduced slightly from a peak of over 2,000 at the beginning of May to being just over 1,900 at the end of the month. Long term averages have been at or around the 1,700 – 1,800 level however, and we need to reduce overall numbers in the system in order to ensure that social work caseloads are more manageable. The current average caseload is 21.8, but this number includes newly qualified workers who carry reduced caseloads, which means that our more experienced workers are holding caseloads of up to around 30 children. This is higher than we would like and emphasises the need for us to step cases down and out of children’s social care and into early help more effectively, assuming that this is in the best interests of the child concerned.

Quality of Practice

- 4.40. Much of the report above has focused on quantitative data. While some of this data provides indications of the quality of practice – data on the length of time in placement or the number of children becoming subject to a child protection plan for the second or subsequent time, for example – quantitative data can only ever provide an indication of the quality of practice.
- 4.41. Senior managers in Children’s Social Care undertake quality audits of cases on a monthly basis. These cases are selected at random and the quality of work evidenced within the case file is assessed against the OfSTED quality assurance template. These senior manager audits are then analysed on a quarterly basis to identify areas where practice needs to improve, and action plans developed accordingly.
- 4.42. For future Service Director reports, it would be possible to include some analysis of the messages from senior management case files audits, and in particular where these relate

to key areas of priority for the service, including for example, the voice of the child and evidence of regular reflective supervision and management oversight.

- 4.43. The most recent of these summary reports for February to May 2015 established that the proportion of case files to be judged overall as inadequate had dropped significantly [from almost 40% to fewer than 10%], and the number graded 'requiring improvement' had increased to just over 50% [from 40% the previous quarter] with around 35% graded as good, compared with around 17% the previous quarter.
- 4.44. While this is a positive direction of travel, numbers of files audited in this way are small and data is therefore susceptible to significant swings. The audit identified that there remains work to do on ensuring that needs of siblings within families are appropriately differentiated and that children's participation in meetings, visits and similar are effectively recorded. As themes such as these are identified, actions are agreed by the Children's Services Management Team to improve practice.

5. KEY ISSUES

- 5.1. Key issues arising from the above include:
- Continuing high levels of demand across the system is resulting in sustained workload pressures and caseloads that remain higher than we would wish;
 - On-going high levels of contacts into the service underline the importance of ensuring that all partners are aware of thresholds and of the early help offer available. A review of thresholds and models of practice forms part of the Peterborough Safeguarding Children Board work programme for this year;
 - Recruitment and retention remains a significant priority area and progress will be reported in the next service director's report to Scrutiny;
 - Numbers of children and young people looked after have declined since their peak levels in summer 2014 although there are some signs that numbers may be increasing again;
 - Indicators of quality of practice such as duration of time children spend on child protection plans and the stability of placements for children looked after place Peterborough in line with or slightly better than our statistical neighbours. However, other indications of quality of practice, including evidence of reflective management supervision on case files and of the participation of children and young people in planning and decision making, give a less consistent picture;
 - Adoption performance remains good in the City and is bucking national trends. The new fostering for adoption programme has been launched particularly successfully in the City.

6. IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1. Delivering high quality and consistent services are essential if we are to promote the best interests of children and young people in the City.
- 6.2. However, delivering positive outcomes for children and young people is not something that can be done by Children's Social care in isolation. There is a need to develop a shared understanding across the partnership of which children and young people are more likely to be supported effectively by targeted service at an early help level, and which require the intensive support available through Children's Social Care. The Safeguarding Children Board will be leading on this work in the coming year.

7. CONSULTATION

- 7.1. Consultation has taken place with relevant managers within Children's Social Care including the Assistant Director and Principal Social Worker.

8. NEXT STEPS

- 8.1. Depending on feedback from Members, work will begin on the continued development of this regular report to enable Scrutiny to develop a better picture of quality of practice along with a summary of the volume of work.

9. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Used to prepare this report, in accordance with the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985:

- 9.1 None

10. APPENDICES

- 10.1. None.