

<b>CHILDREN AND EDUCATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE</b>	AGENDA ITEM NO. 7
<b>5 JANUARY 2017</b>	PUBLIC REPORT

<b>Report of the Corporate Director for People and Communities</b>		
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## **SERVICE DIRECTOR REPORT: CHILDREN & SAFEGUARDING**

### **1. PURPOSE**

- 1.1. This report provides an overview of the key activities within the portfolio of the Service Director for Children and Safeguarding, as well as providing a summary of key performance information in respect of Children's Social Care as of the end of October, the most recent available performance data.

### **2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1. Members are asked to note the content of this report, and in particular those areas where good performance is being sustained, while noting continuing actions being taken to address areas where performance remains inconsistent;
- 2.2. Members are asked to note the delay in decision making by the Department for Education [DFE] in respect of the bid for innovation funding, caused by the very large number of bids made.
- 2.3. Members are asked to continue to support the bid for innovation funding to the DFE to establish the model of Family Safeguarding in Peterborough, which will help the Council to secure consistently good outcomes for vulnerable children and their families.

### **3. LINKS TO CORPORATE PRIORITIES AND RELEVANT CABINET PORTFOLIO**

- 3.1. This report relates to the corporate priority to support vulnerable people.
- 3.2. The report falls within the portfolio of the Cabinet Member for Children's Services.

#### **4. BACKGROUND**

- 4.1. The Service Director for Children and Safeguarding is accountable for a number of areas of service delivery as follows:
- Children's Social Care Services, with the exception of social work services to children and young people with disabilities, which is provided by the 0-25 Service within Adult Social Care services. Performance data in the sections below includes relevant performance in the 0-25 Service, however;
  - The Child Health and Healthy Child programme and associated commissioning arrangements, and;
  - Quality Assurance functions and a strategic lead role for safeguarding across children's and adult social care services.
- 4.2. This report provides a summary of key performance information in respect of children's social care services. Where performance is not yet consistently good, there is a brief description of actions being taken to improve performance.
- 4.3. The report concludes by providing information about other activities within the portfolio of the Service Director, including quality assurance and safeguarding functions across children's and adult services.

#### **Children's Social Care – summary of key performance data**

- 4.4. In general terms, most areas of children's social care performance has continued to show progress since the last report was presented to Scrutiny in September 2016, and staff turnover and vacancy rates have continued to remain stable.
- 4.5. Timeliness of much activity has continued to remain stable and while assessment timescales have slipped a little in the assessment team, there is a general view from case file audits, dip samples and similar that threshold decisions are applied well for the most part, and that the quality of assessments is improving.
- 4.6. Numbers of children subject to child protection plans have remained broadly stable, with no children or young people subject to plans for more than two years.
- 4.7. Numbers of children and young people in care have remained at around 370 since the last report in September 2016. This continues to be higher than it has been in the recent past, and while audits of decision making in relation to children coming into care have indicated that these decisions are being made appropriately, we have recently increased senior management oversight in relation to care planning, to ensure that plans for children in care are progressing quickly.
- 4.8. It is in the area of case file recording, the presence of consistently good quality chronologies and the consistency of planning for children where there remains work to be done.
- 4.9. While caseloads across the service have reduced to below an average of 20 for qualified social workers, authorities that have achieved 'good' in recent OFSTED inspections have tended to have average caseloads of 12-15 per qualified social worker.
- 4.10. If Peterborough is successful in our Family Safeguarding bid, we should be in a position to work towards caseloads of around those levels – certainly the top end of the range. The Family Safeguarding model will also bring with it a multi-disciplinary team approach to

working with families with complex needs based on a model of intervention called motivational interviewing.

- 4.11. Appendix 1 contains a number of charts that show performance against a number of areas over the last 24 months. Key messages from each area of performance is summarised in the following paragraphs.

### **Contacts, referrals and timeliness of assessments**

- 4.12. In previous Service Director's reports, I have discussed in detail the links between contacts, referrals and assessments. One of the challenges that we have faced is the very high number of contacts we receive, the great majority of which do not meet the threshold for intervention by Children's Social Care, but all of which have to be considered.
- 4.13. In September, new thresholds for accessing social care services were launched through the Peterborough Safeguarding Children Board. These provide much clearer advice on the circumstances where consent to make a referral to children's social care is and is not required, and aims to help practitioners to recognise that in many circumstances, the best response to the needs of a family is not to refer to children's social care, but is to discuss the issues and identify what other sources of support are available first.
- 4.14. Considerable effort was taken to ensure that partners were involved in the development of the revised thresholds, and understood the rationale behind them. There has been a tendency in the past for attempts to amend key policies such as these to be perceived as being imposed on other agencies by the Council, and we wanted to ensure we avoided this.
- 4.15. The changes have been broadly accepted and the reasons behind them understood. There are also some signs that this clearer guidance is beginning to have an effect on the number of contacts. As Chart 1 shows, in October 2015, there were 998 contacts, compared with 778 in October 2016 – this is an encouraging change.
- 4.16. The proportion of contacts that become referrals has decreased considerably over the last few months, again as shown by Chart 1. Contacts that remain open for more than 24 hours must be considered as a referral, and this reduction in the proportion moving into referrals indicates that we are continuing to make decisions about contacts more quickly.
- 4.17. Where too many contacts are opened as a referral, more work is needed to close them down again. This means that in essence, we spend more time than we need deciding that a child or young person does not meet the threshold for children's social care, as opposed to working with those who do meet the threshold for a service.
- 4.18. Chart 2 shows the rate of referrals per 10,000 population. The trend has been downwards for some time now, and has finally turned amber this month, after a number of months when the rate was significantly above target.
- 4.19. Chart 3 shows the proportion of referrals that move on to a full assessment of need, which has been around 70% of the overall number of referrals but in October appears to have increased to 99%. The October performance may be an outlier, however, although in terms of actual numbers of assessments completed, is not particularly out of line with recent months.
- 4.20. That said, we continue to undertake too many assessments overall, with a significant proportion resulting in either no further action or a step down to early help services. While

this will always be the case for a proportion of assessments, I would like to see the number of assessments we complete reduce.

- 4.21. There is a close connection between a successful children's social care service and an effective early help and prevention offer. Chart 4 in Appendix 1 shows the rate of early help assessments currently active per 10,000 children and young people in the City. Early help assessments are completed when it is identified that there is a need for more than one targeted service to work with the child and their family. These assessments are always completed with the consent of the family. Working alongside families in this way often leads to better outcomes than where an assessment is completed by Children's Social Care which then recommends that the family accesses Early Help services. Chart 4 shows continuing increases in numbers of children being supported in this way, which is positive.
- 4.22. Where a referral into Children's Social Care is seen to warrant a further assessment, a single assessment is completed. These assessments should be completed within 42 days, and timeliness in this area is an indicator of the pressures on the system. Performance in this area is shown in Chart 5 of Appendix 1. The year to date target of 95% is a stretch target and signifies high expectations in this area – it is usually better for children and their families for assessments to be completed quickly, but thoroughly.
- 4.23. The trend for the number of assessments being completed in timescale has been downwards for a number of months now. There has been a period during and at the end of the summer where there was staff sickness in the First Response team, which has had an impact on performance in this area. I expect performance to begin to improve and, as noted above, I also want to see a reduction in the number of assessments we undertake, as this would also support performance in terms of timeliness.
- 4.24. Chart 6 shows the position regarding the percentage of referrals where a previous referral has been made in the last 12 months. Despite an apparent spike in the October 2016 data, the re-referral rate is slowly declining from a peak in June 2016, although clearly remains above target.
- 4.25. I remain of the view that part of the reason for this is the earlier very high referral rate, but the introduction of new performance reporting systems, which are now beginning to become available, will also help us to identify re-referrals where children have been diverted to support from early help services, but have then been referred back into children's social care – sometimes before early help services have had the chance to engage with the family.

### **Safeguarding and Child Protection**

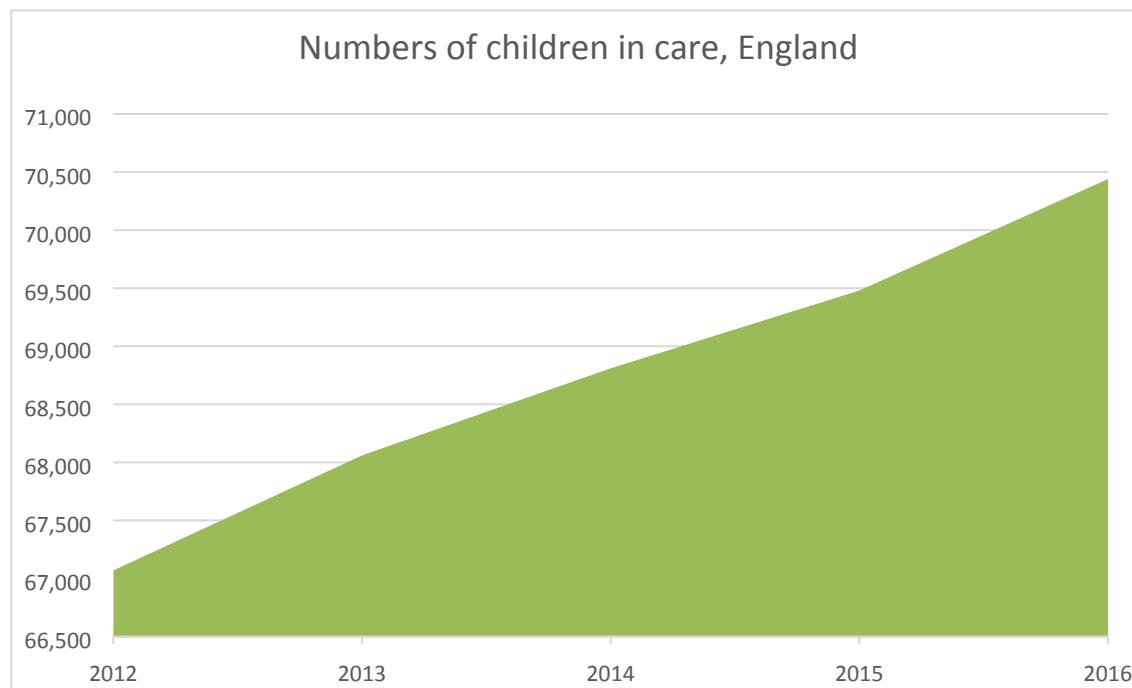
- 4.26. Numbers of children subject to child protection plans have remained reasonably constant over the last few months at between 250 and 260, reducing from around 285 in February 2016 [Chart 7]. This is quite a volatile indicator and can be affected by changes relating to a small number of families with large numbers of children either becoming subject to child protection plans, or for whom plans have come to an end.
- 4.27. Chart 8 details the number of child protection review meetings that take place within timescales. The stretch target for this is 100%, and although there has been a slight reduction in the year to date figure to 96%, this remains very good performance. Performance against this indicator provides a good overall indication as to how well the child protection system is operating overall. The most recent month's performance is often

adjusted upwards slightly where conferences have taken place within the timeframe but are not logged by the reporting system as being completed until minutes are uploaded.

- 4.28. Chart 9 shows the timeliness of visits to children subject to child protection plans. Performance in this area is still short of the stretch target of 100%, but is now consistently above 95%. There are a number of reasons why performance can drop; families do sometimes refuse visits or avoid pre-planned visits – and where this happens consistently, it is likely to result in us considering whether we need to move into legal proceedings. Families do also sometimes move out of the area or the country, but will remain on plans while we try to identify where they have moved to, so that we can alert the relevant authorities. Children will remain subject to a plan while we make these enquiries.
- 4.29. Now that visits are taking place more regularly, the focus now needs to be on the extent to which these visits are ‘purposeful’ and progress the child protection plan. Audits of the quality of plans indicates that the majority remain ‘requiring improvement’ despite a number of practice workshops and other activities taking place to help practitioners improve practice in this area.
- 4.30. As noted above, success in the bid for funding from the DFE to support the implementation of Family Safeguarding in the City would be expected to have a particular impact in this area.

### **Children Looked After**

- 4.31. Chart 10 of Appendix 1 shows the rate of children and young people looked after per 10,000. Numbers have increased from the start of the year although are currently fairly stable at a new higher rate of around 360-370, equivalent to a rate of 78 per 10,000.
- 4.32. Latest national data shows an increase in numbers of looked after children in England year on year, as illustrated by the chart below:



- 4.33. The current rate of children and young people looked after in Peterborough is 78 per 10,000, just below the statistical neighbour average as of March 2016, which was 79 per

- 10,000. This would indicate that increases in Peterborough are not out of line with changes within similar local authorities, or indeed nationally.
- 4.34. Nevertheless, a greater degree of oversight of the progression of children's care plans has now been established, with the head of service for children in care reviewing children's care plans to ensure that they are progressing appropriately. We need to ensure that children do not remain in care for longer than is necessary, not only because looking after children is very high cost, but because children should progress to suitable permanent homes outside the care system where these are available as quickly as it is safe to do so.
  - 4.35. Chart 11 shows the number of children and young people in care who have had three or more placement moves. Performance in this area remains good, with low numbers of children experiencing multiple placement moves. It is clearly important that children and young people do not experience unnecessary moves once they have come into care.
  - 4.36. Chart 12 shows the percentage of children looked after reviews that are completed within timescale. There is a stretch target of 100% against this indicator. Unfortunately there was a small dip in performance in July [when two reviews were held outside of timescale] that means that we will not now achieve 100% over the current reporting period. Nevertheless, performance remains very good at over 99% for the 12 month rolling year. This is a 'bell weather' indicator as anything other than good performance indicates that there are likely to be other issues in the care planning and looked after systems.
  - 4.37. Chart 13 of Appendix 1 shows the timeliness of visits to children who are looked after. There was a dip over the summer period, which coincides with carers and children being more likely to be away, and the period when there is higher than normal levels of leave among social workers. This means that there is less flexibility to rearrange visits in the event that one is cancelled for any reason. Performance in October is back in line with the 95% target, and I expect this to continue.
  - 4.38. The reported percentage of Initial Health Assessments completed within 20 working days can be found at Chart 14 of Appendix 1. Members will be aware from previous reports that this is a very complex indicator for the current performance management system to calculate accurately, and the figures in Chart 14 are not correct.
  - 4.39. Local performance information in relation to the timelines of Initial Health Assessments shows a completion rate in timescale of 80% in September 2016 and 72% in October 2016. These fluctuations are partly explained by small numbers, meaning that percentage variations appear more significant. So, taking the October figures as an example, there were 14 children and young people who should have had an initial health assessment during this month. In twelve of these cases, appointments were offered within the required timescale but two were cancelled because they did not fit in with the other commitments of the foster carers. In the case of two more children, there were some complex legal issues that arose, which resulted in the arrangements for the medicals being delayed and falling out of timeframe. Achieving 100% in this performance measure is very challenging, but arrangements for ensuring that medicals are arranged within the timescale are constantly reviewed and performance is very much better than it was at the time of the most recent OfSTED inspection, for example.
  - 4.40. Having said that, charts 15 and 16 of Appendix 1 are both disappointing, however. The percentage of children and young people in care who have had an annual medical or dental check have both continued to decline. There will always be a group of [usually older] teenagers who refuse to access annual health checks or attend dental

appointments, but the decline in performance year to date needs further investigation and action.

- 4.41. The assistant director for children's social care and the head of service for children in care and care leavers are in the process of holding performance clinics to support improved performance in both these areas and I expect to see an improvement by the time of the next service director's report.
- 4.42. Chart 17 of Appendix 1 shows the proportion of children and young people looked after who have Personal Education Plans. Performance in this area remains strong, with 98% of eligible children having Personal Education Plans, above the target of 95%.
- 4.43. Chart 18 of Appendix 1 shows the performance in relation to adoption in Peterborough. This continues to show adoptions running below target. Adoption performance in Peterborough compared with national performance remains good overall; and what we are seeing here is a reflection of the national decline in the use of adoption orders by courts.
- 4.44. As noted in previous scrutiny reports, adoption has been affected by the increase in the use of Special Guardianship Orders for very young children. Special Guardianship Orders were originally intended to provide legal permanence for older children and young people who, while not being able to live with their parents, would in all likelihood continue to have some contact with them, and for whom adoption, which severs all legal links with parents, would not therefore be appropriate.
- 4.45. Over the last few years, courts have increasingly used Special Guardianship Orders to provide permanent homes for much younger children with relatives of birth parents. This has the benefit of ensuring that more children are able to remain in contact with their birth families, which for some at least will be very positive, but it has also meant that use of adoption has fallen.
- 4.46. Recent revised statutory guidance has resulted in Special Guardianship Order assessments being required to be more thorough, which may lead to a move back towards adoption, but it is as yet too soon for any impact to be known.

#### **Concluding Remarks: CSC Performance**

- 4.47. Although there remain a number of areas where performance remains inconsistent, the overall direction of travel remains positive, and most areas are showing a steady improvement – certainly compared with the position 18 months ago.
- 4.48. Numbers, timeliness and other performance information only provides part of the story, however. The quality of the assessments, of plans, and the quality of engagement with families and children is also of importance. This is an area where we know we have a continued need to improve before we are delivering consistently good services. There are many examples of good quality work across the service, but much of the work in Peterborough is highly complex and although caseloads are lower than they have been, they remain higher than in authorities where OFSTED inspections identify consistently good performance.
- 4.49. The pilot to employ a number of alternatively qualified workers has continued to be very successful; this group of workers are now working directly with over 200 children in need cases, as well as supporting qualified social workers in their work with children subject to child protection plans. They have contributed to reducing average caseloads for qualified

social workers, and their involvement means that children in need are receiving a better service than was the case when they were part of a caseload of a qualified social worker that included child protection and court cases.

- 4.50. As noted in the September 2016 Service Director report, we have taken the decision to extend this pilot to the end of the current financial year, while we await the outcome of the bid to bring Family Safeguarding to the City and continue to develop proposals for a more targeted response to young people on the edge of care through a Targeted Youth Support Service.
- 4.51. The DFE had originally indicated that the result of the Family Safeguarding bid would be known by November 2016, but have now pushed this back to January or February 2017.

#### **Quality assurance across children's and adult services**

- 4.52. The new single Quality Assurance and Safeguarding Service for Children's and Adult services is now fully established. The head of service reports directly to me as the Service Director with overall responsibility for assuring that services delivered by the People and Communities Directorate promote the wellbeing of the vulnerable children and adults who rely on them.
- 4.53. This new approach has brought with it learning from both adult and children's services. Because of the nature of children's services in terms of regulation and the approach to inspection by OFSTED, quality assurance measures have tended to be more robust in children's than in adult services. In contrast, the emphasis on recording service users' views and placing these at the centre of decision making within adult services is an area from which children's services can learn.
- 4.54. A detailed audit programme for both services has been established. The findings from audits are collated and the quality assurance service tracks progress against those findings against a progress tracker, which is in turn analysed at senior management meetings for the two services.
- 4.55. The reporting arrangement for the head of service is to the Service Director for Children and Safeguarding. This means that there is separation between line management responsibility and operational responsibility for the two service areas.
- 4.56. The head of service is also the Principal Social Worker for both adults and children's services. The Principal Social Worker role is designed to provide a direct link between the experiences of social workers at the front line and senior managers. This helps to ensure that senior managers have a better awareness of issues such as morale among the workforce and can take action more quickly to address issues that are hindering the ability of the workforce to work effectively.
- 4.57. The Principal Social Worker also has a range of responsibilities for helping to support improvements in practice among front line social workers.
- 4.58. To this end, the Principal Social Worker organises a range of practice workshops and chairs the social work forum. She has begun to organise joint events between children's and adult social workers as a way of building links and supporting the sharing of skills across the two service areas.
- 4.59. The Principal Social Worker also hosts regular events for practitioners within children's and adult services and partner agencies. The aim of these events is to improve

communication and build a better understanding of respective roles and responsibilities. The events are relatively informal, while being focused on a particular theme so as to provide some structure. They have proved to be very popular, and offer a good way for us to support the development of improved relationships across the agencies responsible for working with our most vulnerable citizens.

## **5. KEY ISSUES**

### 5.1. Key issues arising from the above include:

- While there remain some areas of continuing inconsistency, performance indicators have mostly maintained a relatively steady level of performance;
- The focus continues to be on the quality of practice as reflected in the quality of assessments, plans and direct work;
- The opportunity to develop a new approach in the event that we are successful in our bid for innovation funding offers real potential to significantly improve outcomes;
- Alternatively qualified workers continue to make a significant positive contribution to the work of the service, and to improve outcomes for children in need in particular;
- Work continues on developing proposals for a targeted youth support service, as described in previous reports, which will improve the service offered to vulnerable young people.

## **6. IMPLICATIONS**

### 6.1. The Family Safeguarding bid, if successful, would mean the Council receiving in excess of £2.5M to implement the approach over a 12-18 month period. This funding would cover the initial cost of additional children's and adult workers, along with the project and training costs necessary to ensure that the approach is successfully established.

### 6.2. The approach is expected to be self-sustaining once established. In Peterborough, we have calculated that this will be achieved through a small reduction in numbers of children subject to child protection plans, and a reduction in numbers in care.

## **7. CONSULTATION**

### 7.1. Consultation has taken place with colleagues from Finance, Legal and HR services in the Council.

## **8. NEXT STEPS**

### 8.1. Next steps depend largely on whether or not the bid for Family Safeguarding is or is not successful.

### 8.2. If the bid is successful, there will be a significant amount of activity to ensure that the multi-disciplinary teams are established with input from adult mental health, substance misuse and domestic abuse workers, and the required training and development programmes are in place ready for a go live date early in the new financial year.

### 8.3. The successful implementation of the proposed Targeted Youth Support Service will also support the successful development of the Family Safeguarding approach in

Peterborough, since this will help the latter to focus on effective interventions with families with younger children, which is the focus of the model.

- 8.4. We are working on a parallel plan to identify the steps that we will need to take in order to ensure that practice standards continue to improve and become more consistent in the event that the bid for innovation funding is unsuccessful.

## **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. Appendix 1: Summary of key performance data in Children's Social Care