

CHILDREN AND EDUCATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE	AGENDA ITEM No. 6
9 NOVEMBER 2017	PUBLIC REPORT

Report of:	Lou Williams: Service Director for Children and Safeguarding	
Cabinet Member(s) responsible:	Sam Smith: Cabinet Member for Children's Services	
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SERVICE DIRECTOR AND PORTFOLIO OVERVIEW REPORT: CHILDREN & SAFEGUARDING

R E C O M M E N D A T I O N S

FROM: Service Director for Children and Safeguarding **Deadline date:** N/A

It is recommended that the Children and Education Scrutiny Committee:

1. Note the contents of this report including those areas where progress across Children's Services in Peterborough has been maintained and the few remaining areas where further work is required.

1. ORIGIN OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report was requested by the Children and Education Scrutiny Committee.

2. PURPOSE AND REASON FOR REPORT

- 2.1 This report provides a summary of key performance information in respect of Children's Social Care Services. These performance measures provide an indication of the effectiveness of services to safeguard the children and young people in Peterborough who are most vulnerable. The report also provides information about continuing developments in the service in place to continue to enable improved outcomes for children and young people.

- 2.2 This report is for the Children and Education Scrutiny Committee to consider under its Terms of Reference Part 3, Section 4 - Overview and Scrutiny Functions, paragraph No. 2.1 Functions determined by Council :

- Children's Services including
- a) Social Care of Children;
 - b) Safeguarding; and
 - c) Children's Health.

- 2.3 This report relates to the Corporate Priority to support vulnerable people.

- 2.4 This report links into the Children in care Pledge: to keep children and young people safe.

3. TIMESCALES

Is this a Major Policy Item/Statutory Plan?	NO	If yes, date for Cabinet meeting	N/A
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4. BACKGROUND AND KEY ISSUES

- 4.1. 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.
- 4.2. The report includes updates on a number of other activities relevant to the performance of children’s safeguarding services, including the development of the Family Safeguarding Service.

Children’s Social Care – summary of key performance data

- 4.3. The last of these reports was presented to the Children and Education Scrutiny Committee in January 2017. There have, however, been a number of other reports related to performance considered by the committee in the intervening months including, for example, the report on the self-assessment and outcome of the Joint Targeted Area Inspection presented to Scrutiny on 21st September 2017.
- 4.4. Most performance indicators have remained stable since the last report; overall children’s services as measured by our key performance indicators are now performing consistently. This does not mean that we can be complacent and there are areas where we continue to need to improve. Most of these areas are now in respect of the quality of intervention such as the consistency and quality of assessments of needs and care planning. Most – although not all - areas of performance related to compliance are now at a level that represents consistently solid performance.
- 4.5. A number of areas of quality of practice are also showing sustained improvement, however, the consistency of management oversight remains an issue in some areas of the service, but the recent JTAI found that the quality of assessments is improving. For example, caseloads have reduced in many parts of the service and as at the beginning of October, there was an average of 17 in Family Safeguarding as we have added some resource as a result of the innovation funding received. This compares with over 25 at the time of the last OfSTED inspection in 2015 and an average of around 20 for much of the last 12 months. This is very good progress and sets us in a good position to take full advantage of the additional funding we have to develop the multi-disciplinary family safeguarding model of practice over the next 18 months.
- 4.6. 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

- 4.7. There has been a slight reduction in the number of contacts to Children’s Social Care in the current calendar year compared with the last, as shown in Chart 1. We have changed the target for the percentage of contacts that we accept as referrals from 40% to 25%. This change is a reflection of the relatively high proportion of referrals and assessments that result in being either closed with no further action or being stepped down to early help. We are seeking to avoid where possible spending time and resources on contacts that do not meet our criteria, and to closing these down more efficiently than was previously the case.
- 4.8. Chart 2 details the rate of referrals of children and young people to children’s social care per 10,000 of the child population. The number has been reducing steadily and is now generally at or around our target rate, which represents good progress.
- 4.9. As Chart 3 shows, the proportion of referrals that lead to assessments remains high, however, especially given, as noted above, that a good proportion of these – typically around 60% - result in a step down to early help or to being closed with no further action. This is an area where we are

now really focusing attention as it is not a good use of resources to assess children when this is not necessary and it also exposes children and families to unnecessary intrusion.

- 4.10. As has been the case consistently for a number of years in Peterborough, Early Help services remain an area of strength. As Chart 4 shows, there is a continuing steady increase in the rate of children per 10,000 who are being supported through Early Help Assessments. This rate of increase is slower than in previous years, which indicates that the approach to early help in Peterborough is now well embedded and is at a fairly steady state in terms of meeting demand.
- 4.11. Chart 5 shows the timeliness of assessments, where performance remains below target. Most assessments that are being completed outside of the timescales are in respect of children open to the long term teams. Performance in respect of new assessments is generally much better. While we need to improve performance overall, it is more important that new assessments are completed in a timely way.
- 4.12. Chart 6 shows the position with regard to the percentage of referrals where a previous referral has been made in the last 12 months. Where re-referral rates are high, it is an indication that some children may be being closed to children's social care too soon, and so are more likely to be accepted back into the system at a later date.
- 4.13. Members will recall that I have been of the view that historical high re-referral rates were more related to changes to the way that data was recorded than a true reflection of practice and decision making. Although this is a volatile indicator because of the relatively small numbers of children involved, chart 6 would seem to bear out this hypothesis. Re-referral rates have fallen steadily from their peak in June 2016 and have been better than our target [which is based on regional and national performance] since April 2017.
- 4.14. Members will be aware that we have recently moved our Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub and the front door to our early help services to be co-located with Cambridgeshire at Chord Park in Godmanchester. This change is relevant to performance in relation to decision making between contact to referral and referral to assessment. This is because our staff are now co-located with a broader range of partners, including the police, health, school navigators, probation colleagues and a broader range of early help services. These arrangements are still bedding down and the joint service with Cambridgeshire is now under the leadership of Nicola Curley, who is Assistant Director for Children's Services in Peterborough.
- 4.15. The success measures for the new joint service include better quality of decision making, as would be evidenced by a smaller number of single assessments being completed with a smaller proportion of those assessments concluding with a step down to early help or no further action, and improved resilience across both local authorities by virtue of bringing two relatively small teams of workers together into a larger unit.

Safeguarding and Child Protection

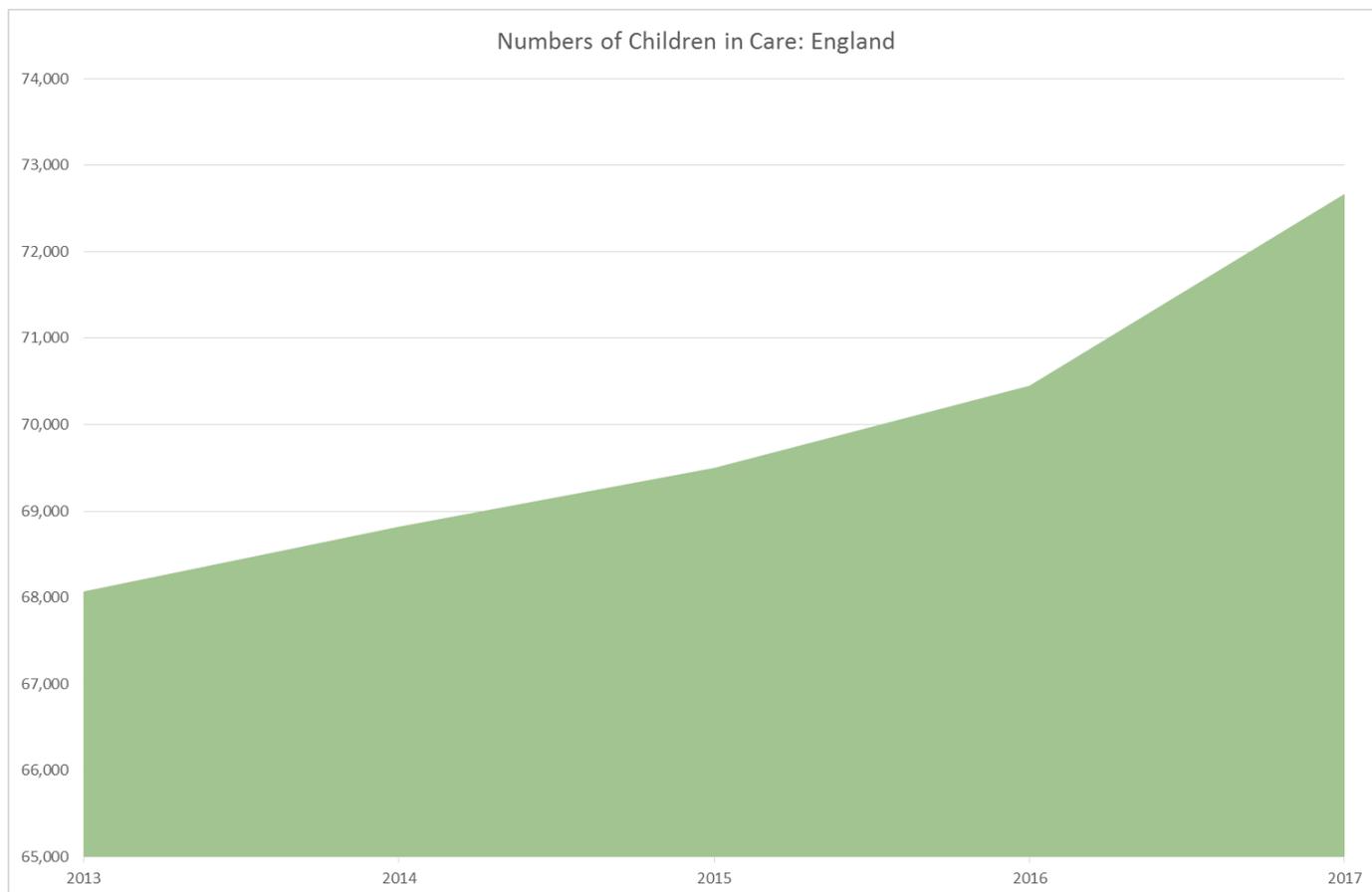
- 4.16. Numbers of children subject to child protection plans are another volatile indicator because of the relatively small numbers of children involved. Chart 7 illustrates some of this volatility, with a spike in numbers in August of this year. The service has worked with the conference and reviewing service to review numbers subject to plans and improved oversight of the management of thresholds in response, and numbers have fallen back again and continue to do so. Overall rates of children subject to child protection plans in Peterborough has remained broadly steady, in contrast with the position among our statistical neighbours and the England average, where numbers have increased quite rapidly over the last two years.
- 4.17. Only those children at the very highest levels of risk should be made subject to child protection plans, and they should not remain on child protection plans for long. Child protection plans should either achieve their goal of reducing risks to children quickly or effectively, or quickly identify where such changes are not going to be made, with the result that robust action to safeguard children is taken. Chart 8 shows the number of children subject to child protection plans for two years or more. Peterborough's performance has been consistently good in this area. Of the 262 children subject

to child protection plans as of the end of September 2017, 232 had been on a plan for 12 months or less; 28 had been subject to plans for 13-18 months.

- 4.18. Any child subject to a plan for 9 months is automatically reviewed by a senior manager. Legal planning meetings are automatically considered where child protection plans have been in place for 12 months or more. It is this robust approach to oversight of children subject to child protection plans that makes a significant contribution to keeping the overall numbers of children subject to plans low compared with similar authorities and authorities nationally.
- 4.19. Chart 9 shows the timeliness of visits to children who are subject to child protection plans. Performance remains consistently around 95% - short of our stretch target of 98% - but this reflects good performance overall. Some visits will not take place because families choose to avoid them, in which case the service considers what actions need to be taken to ensure that the child is safeguarded. Other families may not be visited because they are away for genuine reasons, and the occasional visit will be missed because the social worker is off sick or has had to re-organise their diary at short notice because of other urgent matters arising. This combination means that actual performance will always be slightly below 100%.
- 4.20. Senior managers in children's social care, the Cabinet Member for Children's Services and the Cabinet Adviser receive a weekly report that identifies the reasons behind any visits that have not taken place within expected timescales.
- 4.21. Members will be familiar with Peterborough's successful bid for funding to develop Family Safeguarding here in Peterborough. This approach to multi-disciplinary working in children's services is to include practitioners with experience in adult mental health, substance and alcohol misuse and domestic abuse. This programme is directly relevant to supporting improved outcomes for vulnerable children and young people subject to child protection plans.
- 4.22. The project to establish this approach is progressing well; all key staff have accessed training in motivational interviewing. Agreements have been reached with key partner agencies and we are now in the process of recruiting adult practitioners to join the children's teams.

Children Looked After

- 4.23. Nationally, numbers of children and young people in care have risen over the last few years. The most recent national data, released at the end of September 2017, shows that the rate of increase increased in the 2016-17 financial year, as illustrated in the chart below:



- 4.24. Numbers of children in care in Peterborough have increased since the start of the current financial year and are currently around 375. This is illustrated in chart 10, which shows that numbers had remained at between 350 and 360 for most of the last financial year. A figure of 375 equates to a rate of 78 per 10,000; the most recently released figures for children looked after indicate that the average among our statistical neighbours has increased over the last 12 months to 82 per 10,000. This means that while our numbers are higher than we would want them to be, they remain below the average of other similar authorities. That said, the lowest rate is in Sheffield at 50 per 10,000, with Medway at 61 per 10,000.
- 4.25. This increase is significant for a number of reasons. We need to ensure that we only look after the right children for the right length of time. This is first and foremost because children should only come out of their homes when there is no alternative. Once this has happened, they should be moved into permanent placements as quickly as possible, at which point many will cease being looked after. Permanent outcomes for children include adoption, Special Guardianship Orders, and return home to parents or to broader family members.
- 4.26. The other issue is of course that looking after children is very expensive. While we have delegated the responsibility for placements through our partnership with TACT, the contract identifies that where numbers are higher than 365, it would be unreasonable to expect TACT to cover all additional associated costs.
- 4.27. Pressures are currently being mitigated within the service, and a joint approach to reducing numbers in care is being actioned across children's services and with TACT. Numbers need to reduce back down to around 360 before the end of the year and if possible, sooner, or the risk of funding pressures become more significant.
- 4.28. The partnership with TACT is already delivering improvements in the quality of the fostering service; TACT has invested in additional staffing, for example, in Family Group Conferencing. TACT has also commenced training foster carers in an evidence-based approach for helping to support plans for children to return home to their parents or carers. This is the most common reason for children and young people to leave care, but sadly, of those children who return home, around half will come back into the care system. The TACT programme equips foster carers to help support

parents and carers with parenting skills and strategies, helping to make any return home more likely to be permanent.

- 4.29. Numbers of children and young people in care in Peterborough will remain an area of focus over the next two years. For the Family Safeguarding approach to be sustainable, further reductions in numbers in care will be required in line with those achieved in Hertfordshire, where this approach was originally developed.
- 4.30. The number of children looked after is often described as being demand-led. As the chart above shows, the trend in England has been for numbers to increase, making affordability in Peterborough of looking after our children in care an area of continued risk, particularly given that we are planning for our numbers of children in care to reduce.
- 4.31. Chart 11 shows performance in relation to the number of children in care who have experienced three or more placement moves. Our performance in this area remains consistently good, meaning that relatively few children experience disruptions in their care placements.
- 4.32. Chart 12 shows performance in relation to reviews of children in care being held within statutory timescales. Performance has remained above 99% and although this shows as amber because our stretch target is 100%, this represents good performance. This indicator is regarded as something of a bell-weather indicator by regulators, since anything other than consistently good performance can indicate other more significant issues within the child in care system of a local authority.
- 4.33. Chart 13 of Appendix 1 shows the timeliness of visits to children in care. Performance in this area has remained consistently at above 95% since the start of 2017. This remains amber as we have a stretch target of 98%, but similar to issues that can affect visits to children subject to child protection plans, it is very difficult to achieve 100% - particularly over holiday seasons. Fostering families go on holidays, as do social workers, which can make scheduling of visits challenging, for example.
- 4.34. Local performance in relation to initial health assessments within timescale indicates that in most months, more than 60% are carried out within the required 20 working days. This is a very volatile indicator that the performance system continues to struggle to capture accurately. Local data is however monitored on a monthly basis. The most recent data available is for August, where of the 8 health assessments that should have been undertaken, 5 were completed within timescale, 1 was not completed because of a lack of parental consent, 1 was not completed because they were placed out of area and the local service did not offer a timely appointment, and 1 was not completed because we did not give sufficient notice to health colleagues.
- 4.35. Performance in relation to annual health assessments has remained fairly steady at around 90% as illustrated in chart 14 of Appendix 1. While we would want to see this indicator reach 95% which is our target, this is again a stretch target given that there will always be a number of young people who decline medical assessments.
- 4.36. Performance in relation to dental checks remains an area that is proving stubbornly difficult to improve and is currently at around a reported 61%, as illustrated in chart 15. Performance is likely to be higher than this since this data depends on data being collected from foster carers and other placement providers. There is a proportion of young people in care who refuse dental checks, despite the best efforts of those working with them. This notwithstanding, I would want to see this performance improve and it is a continuing area of focus from the relevant head of service.
- 4.37. Chart 16 shows the proportion of children and young people in care who have a current Personal Education Plan. This is an area where performance is generally good and indeed is currently standing at 100% and has been for the last four months.
- 4.38. Chart 17 shows the percentage of children who leave care who are adopted. Small numbers make this a relatively volatile indicator, but it is encouraging that performance is hovering around the target, given the context of a national reduction in use of adoption over recent years and a

corresponding increase in the numbers of children leaving care to permanent arrangements within the extended family under Special Guardianship Orders.

Concluding Remarks: Children's Services Performance

- 4.39. Performance in most areas has remained consistent and is indicating good progress overall since the last service director's report in January 2017.
- 4.40. The provision of timely management information is another area where real progress has recently been made. This was an area of focus at the time of the last OfSTED inspection and was an issue that was also picked up in the recent Joint Targeted Area Inspection. There has been a great deal of work taking place to update our ICT systems to enable managers to have up to date information about the performance of teams and individual workers. This information is important for managers in helping to ensure overall good performance.
- 4.41. A suite of near live dashboards is now available for most areas of the service, which represents real concrete progress. The dashboards are interactive and simple to use, and managers report finding them very useful. This addresses one of the outstanding issues from our recent inspections and so places us in a good position in this area for when we are next inspected.

5. CONSULTATION

- 5.1. Senior managers within children's services were consulted in preparing this report.

6. ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES OR IMPACT

- 6.1. Performance in children's services is directly related to the extent to which we are able to promote positive outcomes for some of our most vulnerable children and young people.

7. REASON FOR THE RECOMMENDATION

- 7.1. It is important that Members have a clear view of performance in children's services as these are form part of the statutory responsibilities of the council.

8. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 8.1. As noted above, children's services form part of the statutory duties of the local authority and it is essential that Members have a good oversight of key performance areas.

9. IMPLICATIONS

Financial Implications

- 9.1. There are no specific financial implications arising from this report. Children's services are an area of spend where there are risks arising from increases in demand. As noted above, increased demand in relation to care placements represent an area of significant financial risk. There are others, however – most notably in relation to staffing. Current use of agency staff is low, but there is little slack in the system and so increased demand as represented by increasing numbers of children requiring the support of social care services would quickly result in pressures on staffing budgets.

Legal Implications

- 9.2. There are no specific legal implications arising from this report.

Equalities Implications

- 9.3. There are no specific equalities implications arising from this report.

Rural Implications

9.4. There are no specific rural implications arising from this report.

10. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

10.1. None

11. APPENDICES

11.1. Appendix 1: Summary of key performance information for Children's Social Care.