

CHILDREN AND EDUCATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE	AGENDA ITEM No. 6
15 JULY 2021	PUBLIC REPORT

Report of:	Lou Williams, Service Director, Children's Services	
Cabinet Member(s) responsible:	Councillor Lynne Ayres, Cabinet Member for Children's Services & Lou Williams, Director of Children's Services	
Contact Officer(s):	Lou Williams, Service Director, Children's Services	Tel. 01733 864139

SERVICE DIRECTOR & PORTFOLIO HOLDER REPORT: CHILDREN & SAFEGUARDING

RECOMMENDATIONS	
FROM: Cllr Lynne Ayres, Cabinet Member for Children's Services & Lou Williams, Director of Children's Services	Deadline date: N/A
<p>It is recommended that the Children and Education Scrutiny Committee:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Note and comment on the performance indicators and other measures of the effectiveness of children's services within the report; 2. Note the brief summary of the work of youth offending services that now fall within the remit of this Committee; 3. Note and comment on the work of the Portfolio Holder in supporting the work of children's services locally and at regional and national levels. 	

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 Members with an overview of children's services performance in Peterborough, a brief summary of activities by the Youth Offending Service, which now falls under the remit of this committee, following the transfer of the service to children's services from the Communities service. The report concludes by including a summary of the recent relevant activities and functions carried out by the Cabinet Member for Children's Services.

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

Functions determined by Council

1. Children's Services including

a) Social Care of Children;

b) Safeguarding; and

c) Children's Health

d) Targeted Youth Support (including youth offending).

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

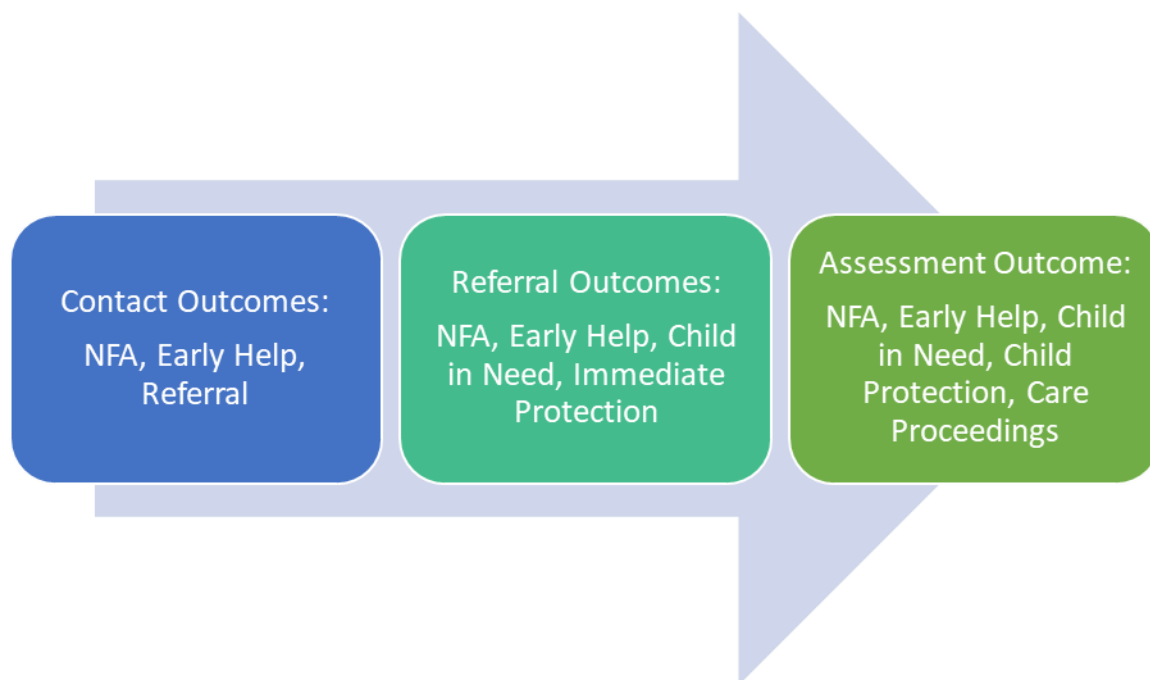
Background

- 4.1. This report provides an overview of the performance of children's services in Peterborough, starting with early help, the work of the Integrated Front Door, including the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub, services to children in need provided by the Family Safeguarding service, and finally considering corporate parenting services and services to care leavers. Our services for children in care were also the subject of a Focussed Visit by Ofsted that concluded on 23rd June 2021.
- 4.2. As noted above, Youth Offending Services now fall under the remit of this Committee, and a brief summary of the impact of the service is included in this report. A more detailed report about the work of the Youth Offending Service will follow at a later date.
- 4.3. The report concludes by providing a summary of the activities of the Portfolio Holder relevant to children's services.

How we respond to concerns or questions about children and young people

- 4.4. This section provides a brief summary of the way in which we respond to requests for support for individual children and young people, and their families.
- 4.5. All enquiries [which are called 'contacts'] about children and young people from the public or from other professionals come through a customer service centre, which is shared with Cambridgeshire County Council. Many enquiries/contacts are dealt with at this point, and may result in signposting to voluntary or community sector organisations or the provision of advice.
- 4.6. Customer services pass some enquiries/contacts about children and young people that they cannot resolve to the Integrated Front Door, which includes the Early Help Hub and Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub. The integrated front door is also shared with Cambridgeshire.
- 4.7. The Early Help Hub will respond to requests for support to children, young people and families who do not meet the thresholds for statutory services. The Hub will work with partner agencies to identify a lead professional, who can provide coordinating support to the family. This will usually be a person who knows the family or child well; a health professional or teacher, for example.
- 4.8. Where it is clear from the information provided about a child or young person that they are likely to reach statutory thresholds for children's social care, the enquiry or contact is passed to the assessment service as a referral.
- 4.9. Where the information about a child or young person indicates that there may be risks and/or a need for support by children's social care, but this is not quite clear, the contact is passed as a referral to the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub, or MASH. The MASH includes colleagues from health, education and police services, as well as from children's social care. Information gathered from these other agencies might confirm the concerns and that there is a need for an assessment or other form of support from children's social care. Equally, it may be that information from partner agencies means that there are fewer concerns, and that the needs of the child or young person can be supported through early help services.

- 4.10. Children receiving a service from children’s social care will either be a child in need, defined under s.17 of the Children Act 1989, or a child in need of protection, defined under s.47 of the Children Act 1989. Children with disabilities receive support services under s.17 unless they are also at risk of harm. The possible outcomes at each stage are summarised in the diagram below:



- 4.11. We must have parental consent to offer early help or child in need services to children and young people. The fact that a parent declines to provide consent to support is not sufficient for a child to become subject to a child protection plan or court proceedings.

Early Help

- 4.12. The vast majority of children and young people thrive through the support of their families and by accessing universal services provided by community health and schools, as well as through community groups and so on. Occasionally, a child, young person or their family may need some additional support; very often, this can also be met through their existing relationships with trusted professionals they know well – health visitors, school teachers, teaching assistants and so on.
- 4.13. The statutory duty of the local authority is to coordinate early help services, as opposed to being responsible for direct provision. In Peterborough, we have been very effective in using the available funding through government programmes such as ‘Troubled Families’ to develop sustainable family support services, including training large numbers of practitioners in schools and other services in the delivery of evidence-based parenting programmes.
- 4.14. Where children, young people or their families are in need of a higher level of support, a trusted professional will complete an Early Help Assessment in partnership with the family. This will help understand key needs and how these may be addressed. Schools and other partner agencies can access additional support through Multi-Agency Support Groups, or MASGs. These are locality based, with three covering the City as a whole. They are attended by a wide range of partner agencies, including Registered Social Landlords. Their role is to discuss in some detail the particular issues facing a child or young person and their family. They can agree the commissioning of additional support services as needed.
- 4.15. Overall, our approach to early help in Peterborough has been very effective; we have regularly exceeded our targets under the Government’s Troubled Families programme, for example, and are often among the top 10 performing local authorities in the country in relation to achieving the payment by results payable on submission of evidence of sustained impact.
- 4.16. That said, many of our key partners have been particularly stretched by the Covid-19 pandemic, and this has had an impact on their capacity to meet early help needs. We also need to make

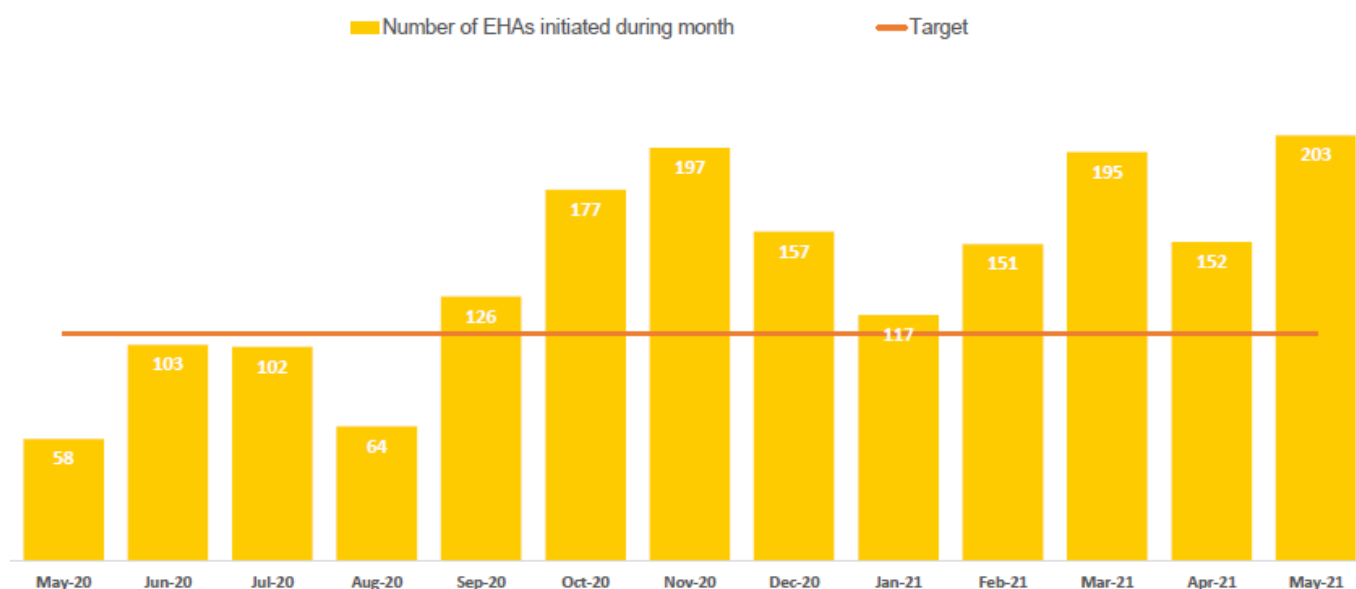
sure that the services that we offer as a partnership respond to changing needs. One area where we need to change our practice relates to young people who may be at risk of criminal exploitation, for example. These young people are often at significant risk of harm, but the child protection system is often not well matched to their needs, since this focuses on risks within the home, rather than from risks posed by criminal networks and adults outside the family.

- 4.17. Strong Families, Strong Communities is the result of a jointly commissioned piece of work by partners including the Clinical Commissioning Group and the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner. It describes how we intend to improve our response to vulnerable children, young people and their families in partnership with key services, the community and voluntary sector and families and communities themselves, including how we can better support young people at risk of criminal exploitation.

Key Performance Information: Contacts, Referrals, Early Help and Assessments

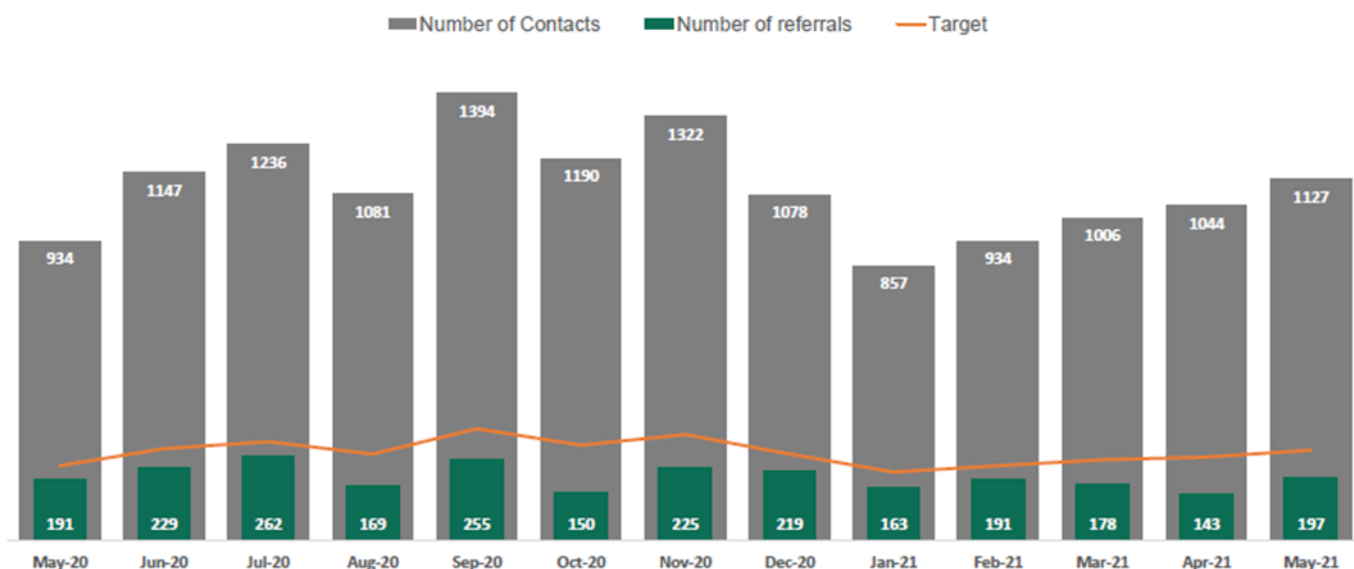
- 4.18. This section provides information about the number of contacts and referrals into children’s services, how many of these progressed to referrals and assessments, and information about the number of children and young people who have an active early help assessment.

- 4.19. The chart below shows the number of new Early Help Assessments started each month:



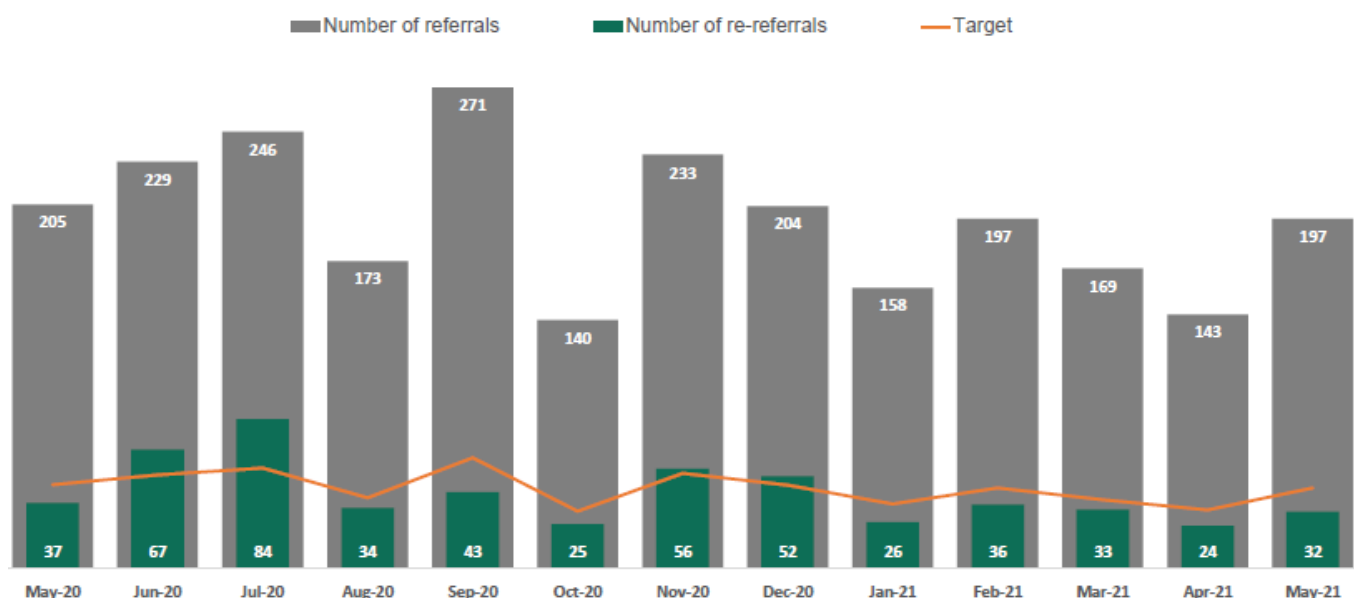
- 4.20. The chart shows that an increasing number of early help assessments are being completed as schools have fully re-opened, and school staff have had an opportunity to see how children have been settling back in to their routines. As explained above, this is not the whole number of children being supported through early help approaches; it is a smaller number for whom it is apparent that the involvement by more than one early help service is required.

4.21. The next chart below provides information about contacts and referrals over the last 12 months:



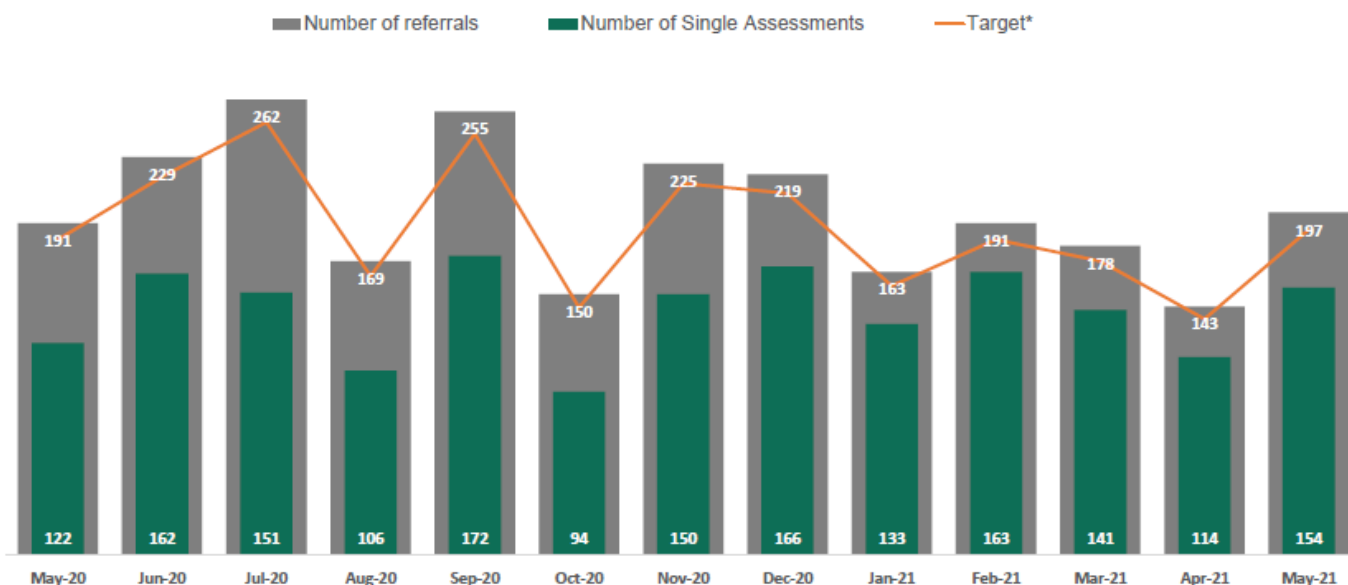
4.22. Our target is that 25% of contacts should progress to a referral; most recent performance is that around 16% of contacts progress to a referral. We undertake regular dip samples of decision making to ensure that thresholds are being applied correctly. These consistently find that this is the case. We have recently introduced a web-based referral process, and intend to develop this so that it provides signposting information about available services that do not require a referral to the local authority. This should mean that the number of contacts reduces over time, as we provide better quality information about available services to those who are seeking help and support for a child or young person. If the number of contacts reduces, the proportion of referrals will increase towards the long term target.

4.23. The chart below shows the proportion of re-referrals within 12 months of a previous referral over the year to date. This is a measure of the extent to which our response to the original referral has been successful in addressing the concerns raised.



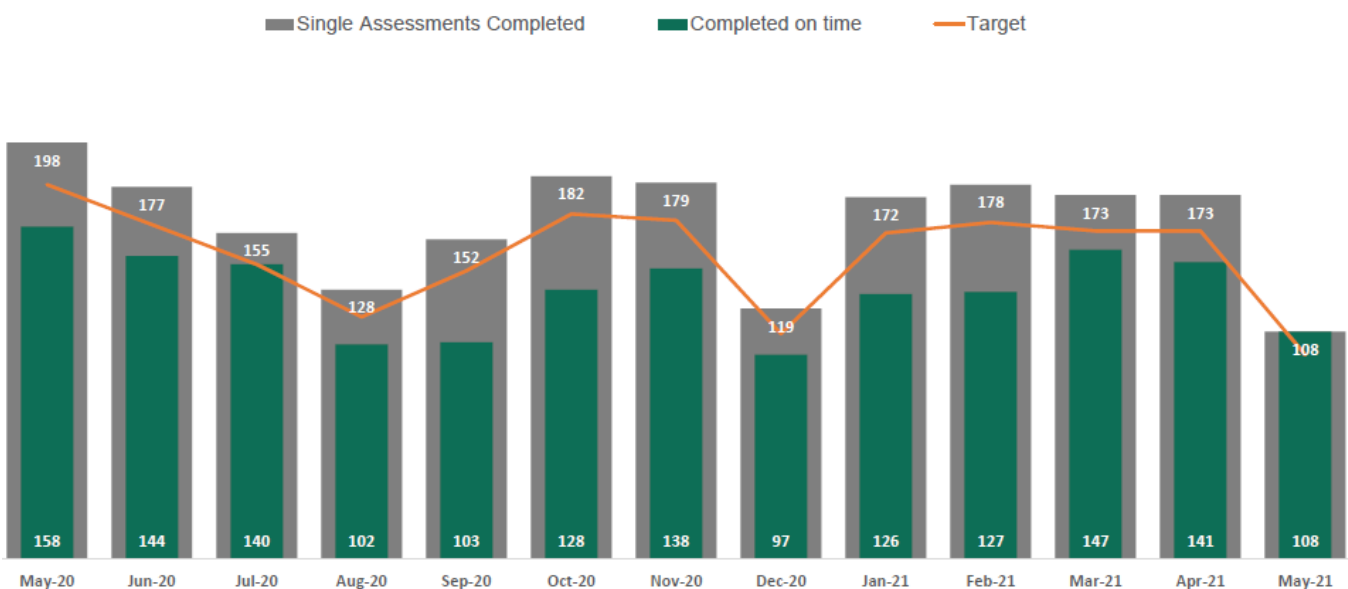
4.24. Our year to date performance is that 16.5% of referrals are re-referrals; this compares well with both national and statistical neighbour performance, which is 23%.

4.25. The following chart shows the proportion of referrals that proceed to a single assessment by Children’s Social Care:



4.26. This chart shows that fewer than the target of 95% of referrals progress to an assessment; this means that we could potentially do more to tighten up decision making about the number of contacts that progress to a referral.

4.27. The chart below shows the proportion of single assessments completed within 45 working days. Most recent performance, in May 2021, was that 89% of assessments were completed within this timeframe – just below our 90% target. National performance is 84% and statistical neighbour performance is 86%, so our current performance is good:



4.28. Audits of the quality of assessments show a generally good picture; they generally include a good analysis of risks and protective factors and include use of appropriate specialist assessment tools that help understand the impact on the child of things like parental neglect. They make good use of information held by partner agencies. The lived experience of the child is mostly considered well, and the extent to which cultural competence is considered and included within plans for children is improving.

4.29. Overall, the picture that emerges from the early help service and the assessment area of the children’s social care service is a positive one. Services are managing well, despite the impact of Covid-19.

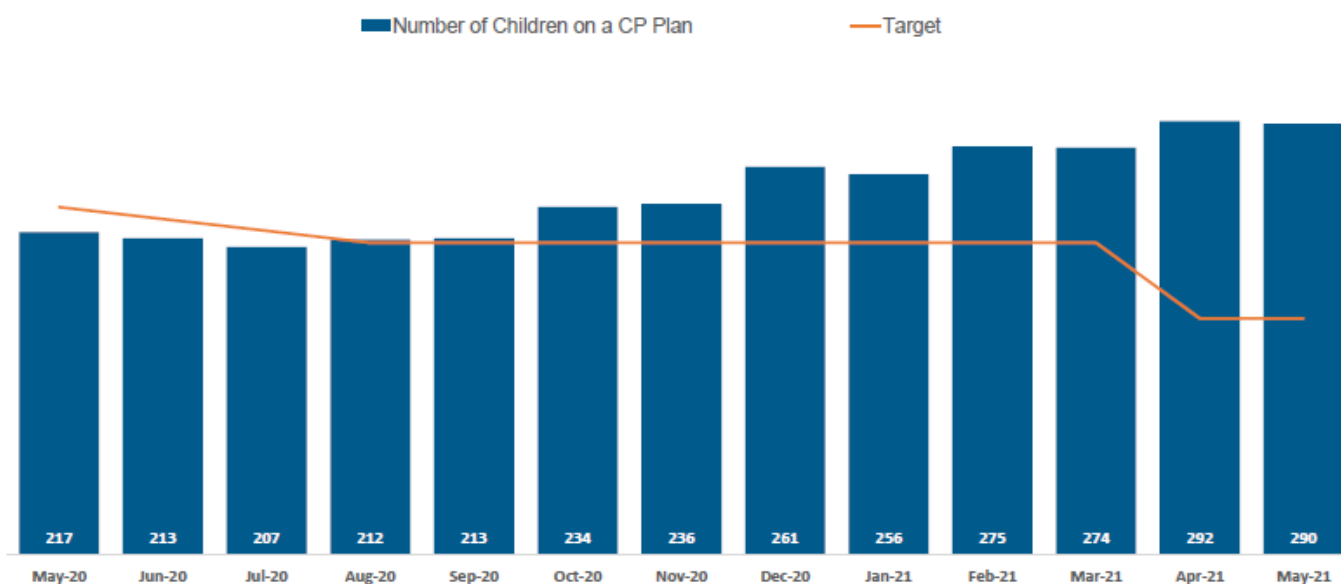
Family Safeguarding

4.30. Our family safeguarding teams work with children and young people in need and in need of protection, as identified by their child and family assessment. Where issues cannot be safely resolved for the child, this part of the service is also responsible for issuing care proceedings or seeking other legally permanent parenting options for the child.

4.31. The Family Safeguarding service consists of multi-disciplinary teams that include adult practitioners who work with parents who are struggling with domestic abuse in their relationship, substance or problematic alcohol misuse or mental and emotional health difficulties. This model of practice was first developed in Hertfordshire; Peterborough was awarded funding from the Department for Education to implement the model here.

4.32. As noted in previous reports, Family Safeguarding is associated with better outcomes for our most vulnerable children and young people and the need to issue fewer care proceedings and so have lower numbers of children coming into care than would otherwise be the case.

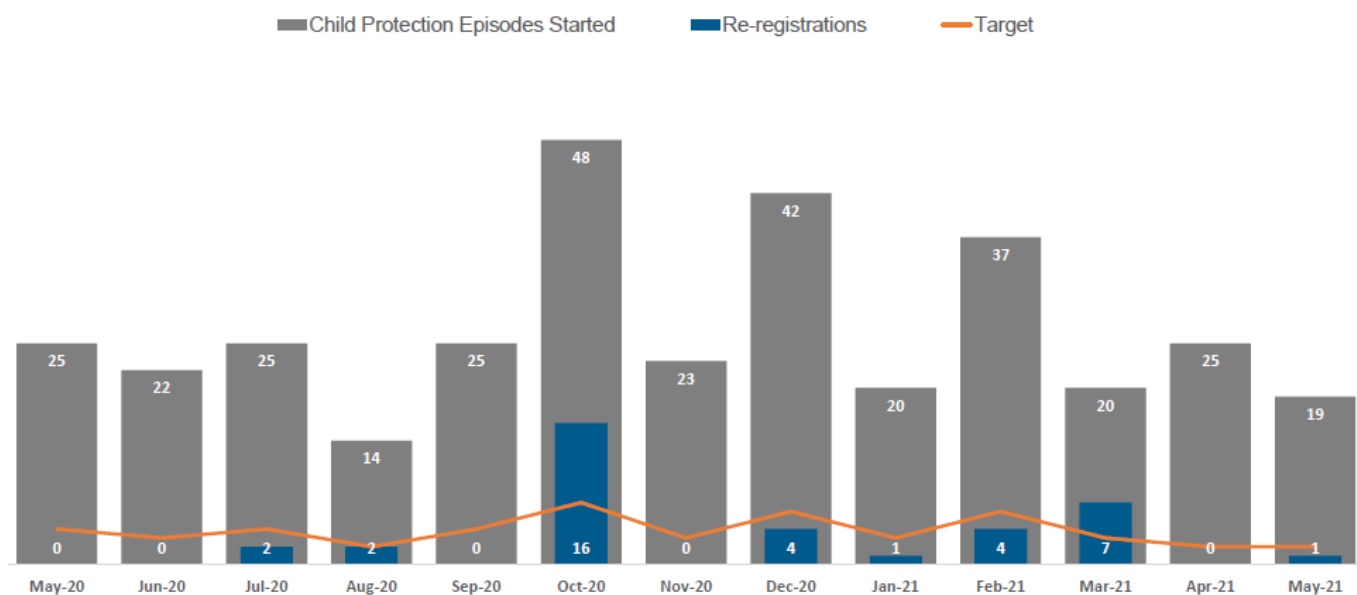
4.33. As noted in the last service director report to Committee, one area where we have seen an impact of Covid is in respect of the number of children and young people who are subject to child protection plans. These are the children living in the community about whom we have the greatest concerns. The chart below shows the change over the last 12 months:



4.34. The red line in the chart above is supposed to be indicating our target, but the reduction from 31st March appears to be a glitch as we have not changed the target. Before the pandemic, we had been seeing a sustained reduction in numbers of children subject to child protection plans. Lower numbers of children subject to child protection plans is another feature of the Family Safeguarding approach. The rate of children subject to a child protection plan is currently 57.3 per 10,000 children and young people aged 0-17, which while being higher than our target, remains below the average of our statistical neighbours, which is 60 per 10,000.

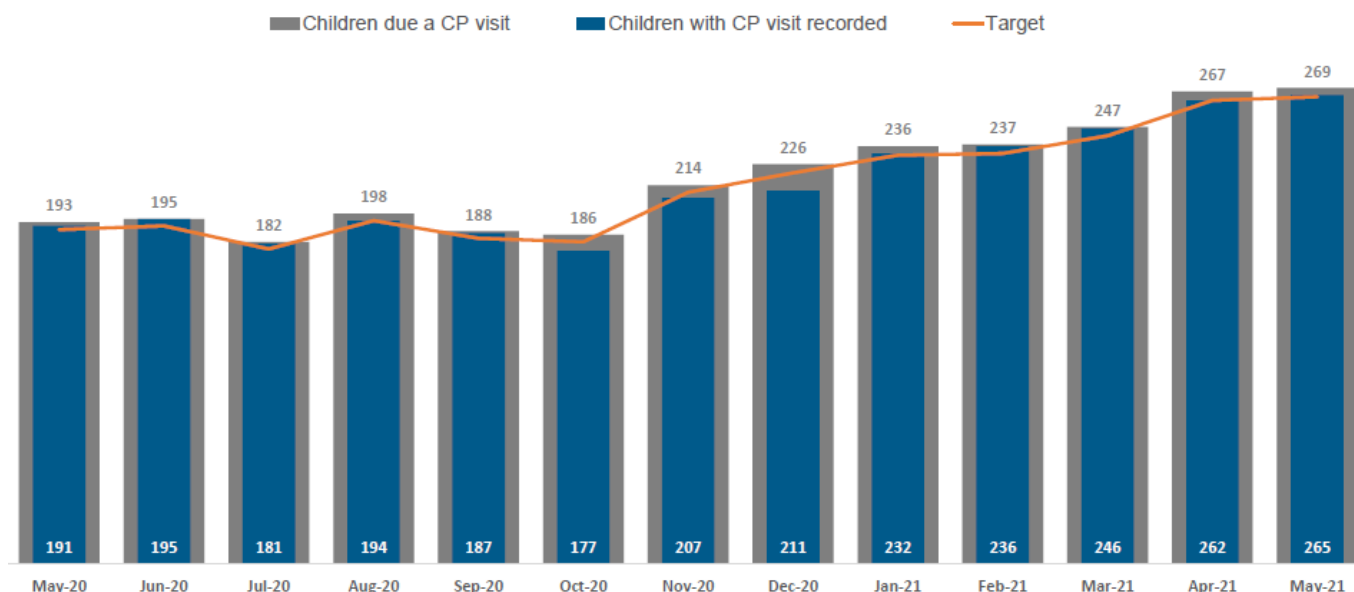
4.35. In numbers terms, we currently have 290 children and young people subject to child protection plans; this compares with 217 12 months ago, and a low of just below 200 immediately prior to the pandemic.

- 4.36. There are two main reasons behind this increase; the first is that it has taken longer to complete some work with families through the lockdown periods, when many partner agencies have not been undertaking direct face to face work. Virtual engagement has not proved as successful in moving complex issues forward than direct engagement. The second reason, however, is that we have also seen children referred into the service who are facing very complex situations and risks that have resulted in them needing to escalate to a child protection plan rather than being worked with under a child in need plan. These children have often been less visible as a result of the pandemic; we would have been likely to have been working with them and their families in any event, but we may have started that work at an earlier stage had we not been through the periods of lockdown.
- 4.37. Despite these challenges, other performance in respect of children subject to child protection plans remains positive. Managers continue to tightly monitor the progress of plans, and our performance in respect of length of plans remains very good, with only 7 children being subject to a child protection plan for longer than 18 months. There are 33 who have been subject to plans for 12-18 months, which is higher than would ordinarily be the case, and reflects the comment about virtual working taking longer than direct work to complete.
- 4.38. Very few children become subject to child protection plans for the second or subsequent time within 2 years of the last registration in Peterborough, as shown below:



- 4.39. This is a volatile indicator, which can be impacted by a large family of children becoming subject to a plan for the second time. Our current year to date figure is that 2.3% of children subject to a child protection plan have been subject to a plan two years previously.

4.40. The chart below shows the proportion of visits to children subject to child protection plans that have been carried out in accordance with the required timescales:



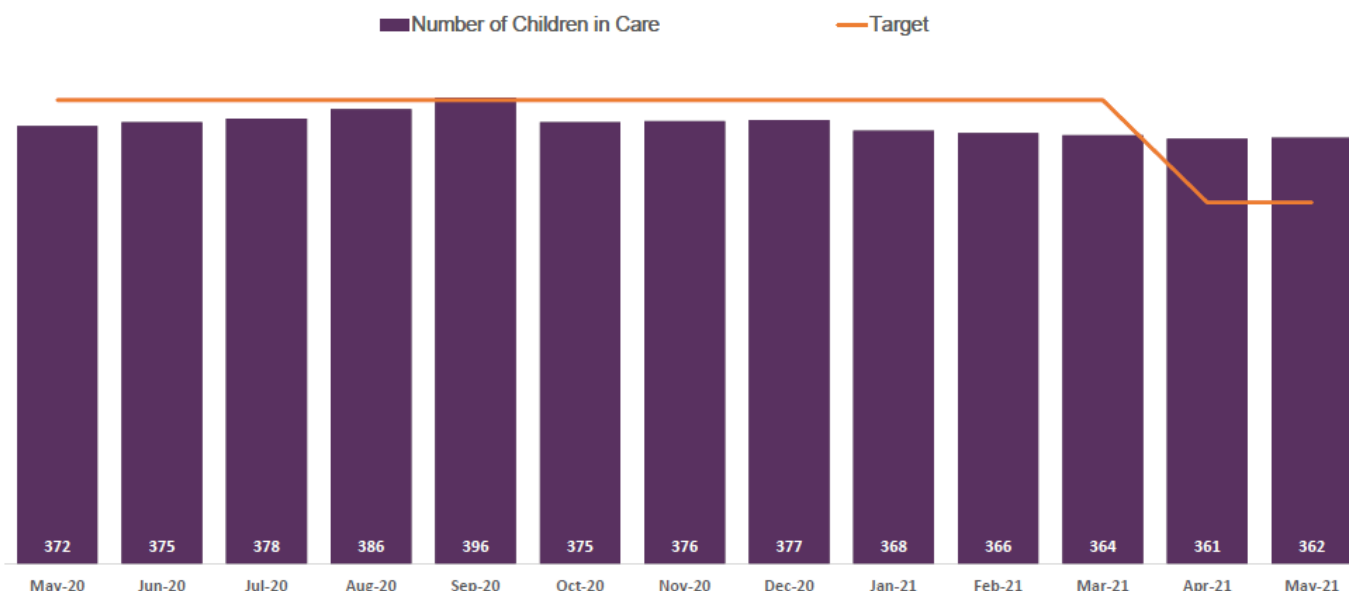
4.41. Current performance is 98.5% - just above our stretch target of 98%. There will always be some situations where visits do not take place as expected; this might be because the worker is unwell or is pulled away on other urgent matters; it could also be that the family is deliberately frustrating visits. Performance of above 98% is really very good performance, particularly in the context of increased numbers of children subject to plans.

4.42. As will be seen in the next section, the increase in numbers of children subject to plans has not yet translated in an increase number of children in care. As society re-opens, we hope that families can once again benefit from all of the support available to them, including extended family support, and that by continuing to work in partnership with families, we can progress plans for children successfully, and see numbers subject to plans falling back to longer term levels. That said, all things being equal, and increase in numbers of children subject to a child protection plan would ordinarily be expected to feed through into higher numbers of children in care since a proportion of children subject to a child protection plan would be expected to need to come into care in order to be appropriately safeguarded.

4.43. In the meantime, the Council has identified additional funding to increase staffing capacity to help us manage the additional numbers of children in need of protection.

Corporate Parenting

4.44. The chart below shows the number of children and young people in care in Peterborough over the last 12 months:



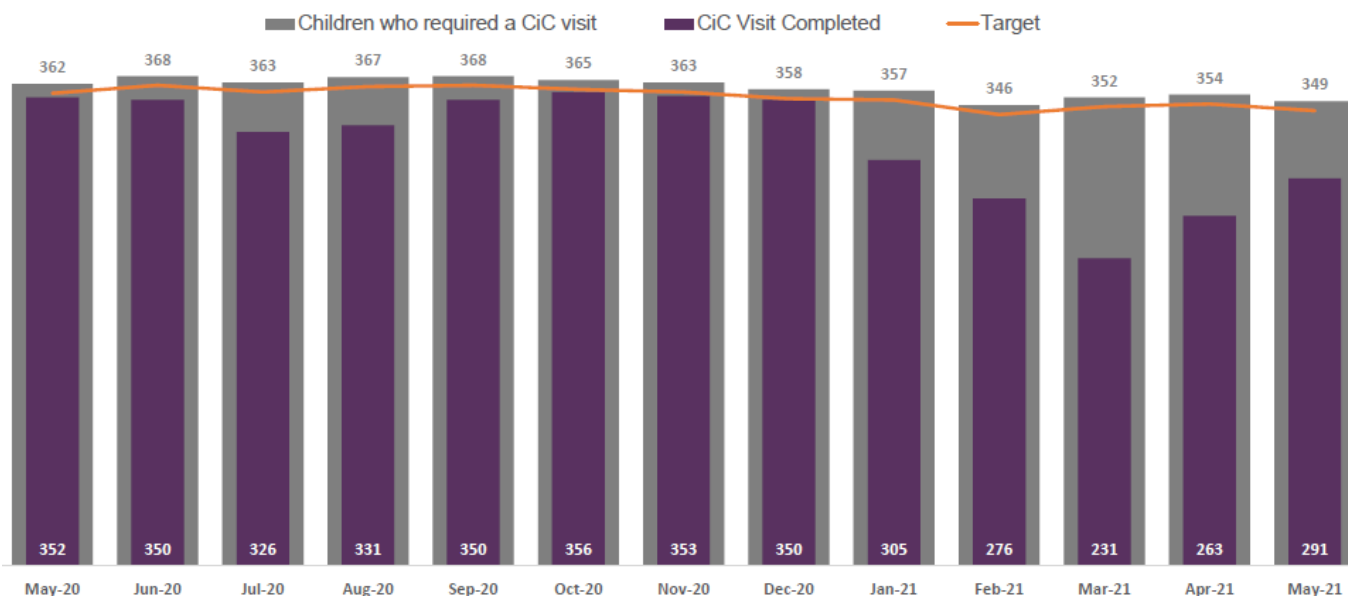
- 4.45. The numbers have remained broadly steady, and our current rate of children and young people in care is 71 per 10,000. This compares with a statistical neighbour average rate of 89 per 10,000 and an England average of 67. The target line is another glitch in the report and should be indicating current numbers – i.e. a rate of around 70 per 10,000.
- 4.46. This is very good performance, and as noted above, lower numbers of children in care are associated with a successful Family Safeguarding approach. Family Safeguarding is not the whole story, however; we also have good care planning arrangements in place that seek to ensure that children in care remain in care for as short a period as possible. This may mean a return home to parents once issues have been addressed, or permanent alternative arrangements such as adoption or a permanent family through Special Guardianship Order.
- 4.47. Peterborough has, for example, a history of strong performance in fostering for adoption, as the provisional data from the Adoption and Special Guardianship Board shows:

ASGLB Quarter 4 2020/21 - Adoption Data (PROVISIONAL)

Coverage: Local Authorities in England

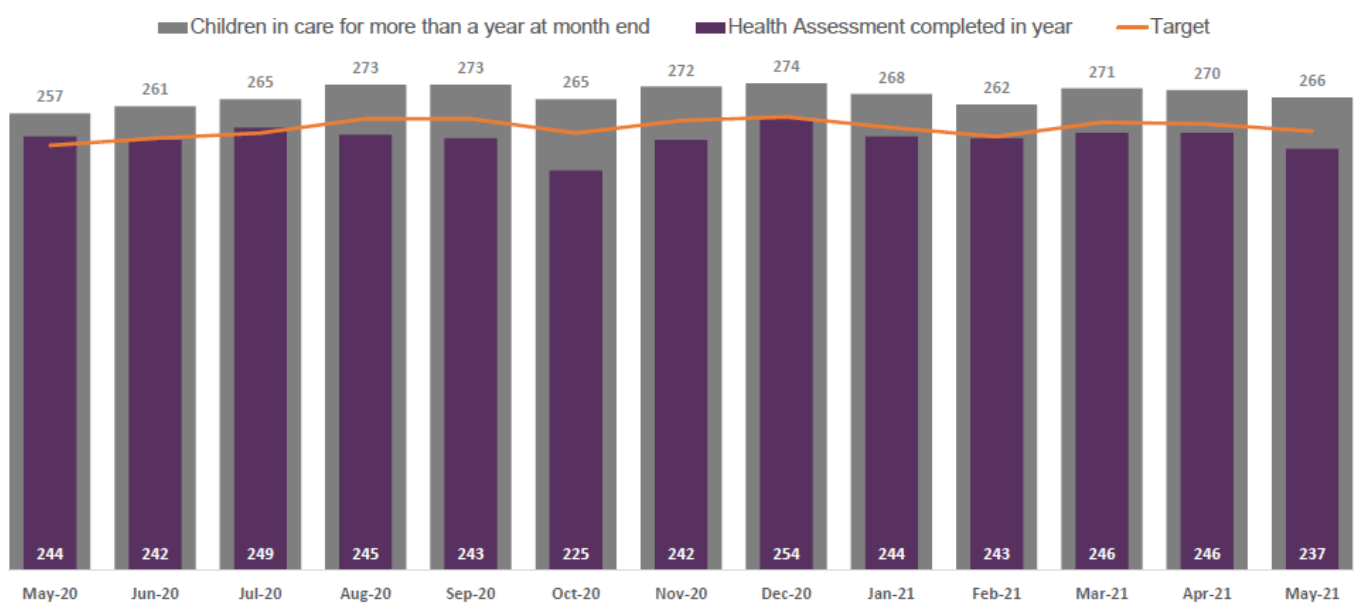
Rank	LOCAL AUTHORITY	Number of children placed in a fostering to adopt or concurrent placement Q1-Q4 2020/21
	ALL LOCAL AUTHORITIES IN ENGLAND	450
1	Kingston upon Hull	23
2	Somerset	20
3	Peterborough	19
3	Devon	19
5	Hampshire	16
6	Kent	9
7	Blackburn with Darwen	8
7	Cumbria	8
7	Buckinghamshire	8
10	Lancashire	7
10	Barnsley	7
10	Doncaster	7
10	Leeds	7
10	Wolverhampton	7
10	Norfolk	7
10	Oxfordshire	7

- 4.48. These placements involve very young children [often new-born babies] who move to a foster family under an interim care order, where the assessment is that a full care order and adoption will be agreed as being in the best long term interests of the child. Once the court has made the necessary decisions, the foster carers are able to adopt the child, meaning that the child benefits from a secure attachment from birth with no changes of carer.
- 4.49. Peterborough's performance in this area is all the more remarkable when it is considered that there are around 850 children in care in Hull, 500 in Somerset and 750 in Devon.
- 4.50. At the time of the most recent performance report, some visits to children in care were taking place virtually. The reporting system is unable to report virtual visits, which explains the apparently low number of visits being carried out within required timescales during the most recent lockdown period:



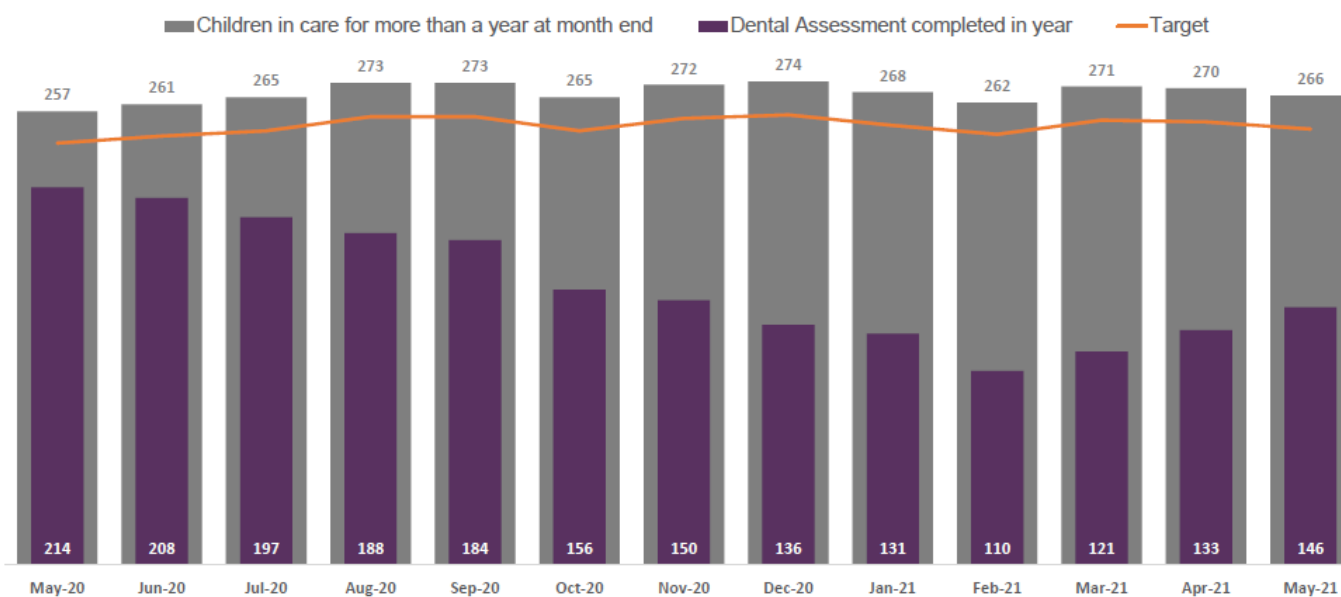
4.51. Local performance information is indicating that in May, over 95% of visits were undertaken within timescales if virtual visiting is included.

4.52. The chart below details the proportion of annual health assessments for children in care that are undertaken within timescale:



4.53. Current performance is 89% against a target of 93%. For comparison, the England average is 90%. Some young people in particular will decline a health assessment, meaning that exceeding our stretch target is challenging.

4.54. The picture in respect of dental checks is less positive, as shown in the chart below:



4.55. This is clearly linked to the lockdown, and restrictions in respect of dentistry, although we are seeing an improving picture as restrictions are easing. More positively, our very good relationships with health partners has meant that any children in care who need urgent treatment have been prioritised.

4.56. Ofsted undertook a focussed visit looking at the progress of children in care in June 2021; the fieldwork took place in the week commencing 21st June 2021 but with a lot of preparation in the lead up to the inspection – focused visits take place with one week’s notice.

4.57. The findings of the visit will be published in a letter on 3rd August 2021 and we cannot go into the detail of the verbal feedback from inspectors before then. That said, the feedback was generally positive, although there will always be findings relating to things that we can improve further. Our staff, foster carers and children in care all participated in this visit and gave a generally very positive message about our services, and the way in which we have worked together through the pandemic.

4.58. We welcome external scrutiny and are always ready to hear from inspectors how we continue to make improvements to outcomes for our children and young people in care.

Children and young people with disabilities and their families

4.59. Children and young people with complex disabilities and their families are supported through our 0-25 service, which is managed with adult social care. This is because the children and young people open to the service are those who are likely to continue to need support throughout adulthood. Managing the service within adult social care means that difficulties associated with transitions between children’s and adult services are avoided. Close links between the 0-25 service and children’s services are maintained, not least because while the majority of the work of the 0-25 service is to support families, some children with complex disabilities are also at risk of harm in their families, and some children open to the service are also in care.

4.60. Children with disabilities and their families have been particularly affected by the pandemic and lockdowns. Informal and formal sources of support to families were reduced as extended families were no longer able to provide informal support, while many other services including many community-based short break activities were required to close as a result of pandemic restrictions. Added to this, the increased vulnerability to serious complications from Covid-19 and the need for specialist care meant that attendance at schools was not an option for a number of children and young people. Parents were understandably very concerned about risks of infection, while for

young people who require aspirating procedures as part of their daily care, attendance at school was not possible because of heightened infection risks.

- 4.61. The 0-25 service has worked very closely with parents, parent-carer organisations, children, young people and remaining services so as to provide as much support as possible. Our short breaks' residential provision – Cherry Lodge – has offered a range of very creative support services to families affected by Covid-19, including providing care to children who have had Covid-19 themselves. As the pandemic continued, we introduced a dynamic Covid-19 risk assessment that considered all available sources of support to the child and family in order that we could prioritise those in most need to access the reduced short break services available.
- 4.62. For other families, we introduced a 're-direction of funding' approach, whereby children's personal budgets that had been associated with short breaks could instead be used by families to purchase other forms of support, with the agreement of the worker. Some families chose to purchase garden play equipment, for example.
- 4.63. The service promotes the use of Technology Enabled Care (TEC) in order to increase the child / young person's independence and to prepare them for adulthood. Any review of a child or young person's care package includes a discussion around the full range of TEC available, and how this might enable them to meet their desired outcomes (such as being able to access public transport independently by using one of the Travel Apps, or combatting anxieties by using one of the sensory pets – such as the very realistic and popular robotic Sensory Cats, which purr and provide a sense of warmth.) This has been particularly useful during and following the pandemic when anxieties have been raised for many children and young people.
- 4.64. As noted in previous reports, a small number of children and young people with very complex needs have needed to move into full time care as families have not been able to manage their care needs without the full range of support services being available. In most cases, a move to full time care would have been likely to have happened, but this change was brought forward by the pandemic.
- 4.65. There are very good working relationships between the service and key partner agencies, which include colleagues in housing as well as in education and health services. Relationships with housing colleagues are important because there can often be a need for adaptations to housing, to enable wheelchair access for example.
- 4.66. The last 12 months have been very challenging for children with disabilities and their families. Services that offer support have worked hard to respond to changing needs and provide a flexible response. Clearly the hope now is that pressures on families reduce as the lockdown eases and as children settle back into schools.

Youth Offending and Targeted Support Services

- 4.67. Responsibility for the oversight of youth offending services now sits with the Children and Young People Committee. This follows the change of line management arrangements away from the Communities Director to Children and Safeguarding. This change initially took place on a temporary basis as the scale of the challenge in responding to the pandemic became clear, and in which the Communities directorate would be required to play the lead role. The change proved to be positive in bringing the service alongside other services for children and young people, and so was made permanent later in 2020.
- 4.68. The provision of youth offending services is a statutory requirement; each top tier local authority is required to have a multi-agency board that has overarching responsibility for preventing offending and reducing re-offending. Locally, the Youth Justice Board is chaired by the Assistant Chief Constable, and includes representation from the community and voluntary sectors, the probation service, police, health and the local authority. Funding for youth justice services comes from the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner, health and probation services as well as

from the local authority. The youth offending service itself is hosted by the local authority, but some staff are seconded from other agencies.

- 4.69. The youth justice board has responsibility for determining the priorities for the service and monitoring performance and ensuring quality. The service itself undertakes a range of activities including prevention of offending and diversion work, intervening when a young person first comes to the attention of the police, for example, as well as more general prevention work. The service also offers intensive supervision and interventions for young people convicted of offences, with the aim of preventing re-offending.
- 4.70. The rate of First Time Entrants into the Youth Justice system per 10,000 children and young people in Peterborough has been steadily improving year on year for some time now. In 2016, for example, the rate was 560 per 10,000. The most recent data shows a rate of 297 per 10,000 for the 12 months to the end of March 2021. This remains slightly higher than our statistical neighbour rate in 2019 – the latest data available – which was 280 per 10,000 but evidences a positive trajectory.
- 4.71. Our rate of re-offending, at 30% is, however, considerably better than the average of our statistical neighbours, where 40% of offenders re-offend. The average number of offences per re-offender in Peterborough at 2.2 is also lower than that of our statistical neighbours at 3.7. This provides an indicator of the effectiveness of the diversion programmes operated by the Service.
- 4.72. The service also hosts the SAFE team, which is a specialist team that supports and intervenes in the lives of young people at particular risk of criminal exploitation. The team was initially established with central Government funding; it has been funded to the end of the current financial year by the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner. There are some very encouraging outcome indicators for the team, particularly in respect of the number of times young people come to the attention of the police as victim or perpetrator of an offence. Should this impact continue, it will help make the argument for continued funding for the team.
- 4.73. The service was inspected by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation in August 2020; the report was overwhelming positive about the service, finding some outstanding and many good features. The report is attached as Appendix 1 to this report.

Summary of Activities by the Portfolio Holder

- 4.74. I am pleased to be able to report on my key activities over the last year to the Children and Young People's Committee.
- 4.75. Clearly, this has been a year like no other, and the lockdowns and changes to working arrangements have had an impact on my pattern of working as they have for everybody else. It has meant that I have had fewer opportunities to see people face to face, but I have continued to work remotely, and have continued to do all I can to support improved outcomes for children and young people. In these unprecedented times, it has been particularly helpful to have met regularly with colleagues in Cambridgeshire; this arrangement enabled us to share experiences and learning as both Councils worked to meet the challenge of Covid-19.
- 4.76. In particular, I have worked with Cabinet colleagues to ensure that the bids made by children's services for additional resources in early help, children's social care and for children in care placement costs have received support. I am pleased to say that these funding requests have indeed all been supported, as would be expected given the pandemic and increased pressures that we are already seeing and expect to see for some time yet.
- 4.77. I have continued in my role of scrutiny of the effectiveness of the service, both through engagement with performance meetings with the Leader and Chief Executive, as well as through regular meetings with the Director of Children's Services and his team.
- 4.78. I have been particularly concerned to ensure that new parents have been able to access as much support as possible through the pandemic; I know how being a new parent is something that few

are completely prepared for and I have been worried about how lack of access to extended family support and to other services will have added to pressures that all new parents experience. I have made sure that this issue has remained on the agenda of partners through my involvement in the Local Safeguarding Partnership Board and I am pleased that health services have protected community health delivery during the pandemic. I have, however, been concerned at the reduction in face to face visiting by health and other services, which is why I have welcomed the decision by our services to maintain face to face visiting to children identified as being particularly vulnerable throughout the lockdown periods.

- 4.79. I have been involved in regional meetings with colleague lead Members and officers to discuss the recent increase in Elective Home Education. There is a shared concern across the region and nationally that current arrangements and legislation is no longer fit for purpose as numbers of children being electively home educated have increased. While the majority families who make the decision to home educate their children do so with the best interests of their child at heart, I and other colleagues are concerned that not all parents are fully prepared for the challenges that home educating their children brings, with the potential for some children to make less progress than might otherwise be the case. I am pleased therefore that government guidance includes the need for lengthy discussions with parents before any final decision is taken. Many parents do not realise, for example, that should they decide that they want their child to return to school after a period of home education, there is no guarantee that a place will be found for them in the school they were originally attending.
- 4.80. I have also taken part in discussions regionally and with Government representatives about how we can better work together to meet the needs of unaccompanied asylum seeking children and young people. Peterborough has always played our part in this area; we participate in the eastern region rota that helps authorities like Thurrock manage the influx of unaccompanied children they see through their port, for example, and of course we also have a regular flow of unaccompanied children presenting to agencies in Peterborough. We also assist the southern counties including Kent as and when we have capacity to do so.
- 4.81. The new National Transfer Scheme, which is designed to enable a national response to supporting Kent in particular has recently been launched. I would have preferred this to have made it compulsory for local authorities to join, rather than to have a voluntary scheme. There are a number of regions that have accepted very few unaccompanied children from the south coast authorities, mostly in the south west and north of the country. That said, the Government has further increased funding to support care leavers who were formerly unaccompanied children, removing the financial disincentive to participating in the programme. This is obviously welcome.
- 4.82. Finally, I would like to welcome Councillor Ray Bisby as my new Cabinet Adviser. Cllr Bisby will support me in undertaking my responsibilities as portfolio holder for children's services that also include our university service, skills and education. Many of you will know Councillor Bisby as the chair of our Corporate Parenting Committee. I attend these regularly and particularly value the input by our children and young people in care. I very much look forward to working with him in the future. I would like to conclude for thanking my previous Cabinet Adviser, Cllr Bashir, for all her hard work in supporting me during her time in this role.

5. CONSULTATION

- 5.1 Consultation has taken place with key officers and key partner service areas including business information services for performance data.

6. ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES OR IMPACT

- 6.1 That Committee:

- Gains an overview of how key performance information in relation to children's services in Peterborough;
- Has an introduction to the work of youth offending services in the City;
- Has an opportunity to discuss the activities of the Portfolio Holder in supporting children's services in Peterborough.

7. REASON FOR THE RECOMMENDATION

7.1 Children's services support and help to protect some of the most vulnerable children and young people in the City. How well the service performance is therefore properly a matter of significant importance to leaders and Members.

7.2 In these challenging and unprecedented times, it is more important than ever that Scrutiny Committee has the opportunity to understand, explore and scrutinise the way that we support and safeguard our vulnerable children and young people.

8. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

8.1 There are no applicable alternative options available

9. IMPLICATIONS

Financial Implications

9.1 There are no specific financial implications arising from this report. As noted in the report, some additional funding has been identified as being required in order to meet likely pressures arising from the pandemic. Current indications are that the funds identified will be sufficient, although we are early in the financial year.

Legal Implications

9.2 There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

Equalities Implications

9.3 There are no direct implications for equalities issues arising from this report.

Rural Implications

9.4 There are no particular implications for rural communities in Peterborough arising from this report.

Carbon Impact Assessment

9.5 Neutral impact since this report is not suggesting any fundamental changes to the way that children's services operate.

10. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

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

10.1 None

11. APPENDICES

11.1 Appendix 1: Inspection of Youth Offending Services in Peterborough, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation.