

CREATING OPPORTUNITIES AND TACKLING INEQUALITIES	AGENDA ITEM NO. 8
18 JANUARY 2016	PUBLIC REPORT

Report of the Corporate Director for People and Communities

Contact Officer(s) – Lou Williams

Contact Details - 864139

REVIEW OF PLACEMENT STRATEGY FOR CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE IN CARE AND THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE FOSTERING ACTION PLAN

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1. This report provides Scrutiny with an updated position in terms of overall number of children and young people in care in Peterborough, comparing this to the national picture and the position of our Statistical Neighbours.
- 1.2. Some additional information about the changing characteristics of the population of children and young people in care in Peterborough is also provided, comparing this with the national characteristics of the population of children and young people in care.
- 1.3. This report also provides Scrutiny with an update in relation to progress relating to the Fostering Action Plan. The report identifies that despite some success in terms of increasing the proportion of children and young people in care who are placed with 'in-house' foster placements over the last 12 months, recruitment activities have not resulted in the Council attracting sufficient numbers of carers from black and minority ethnic communities or who are willing to offer homes to more challenging older children and young people. This factor has formed part of the context to the decision to explore whether an alternative delivery model may enable the Council to reduce the use of foster placements provided by Independent Fostering Agencies.
- 1.4. Accordingly, this report also provides a brief update to Scrutiny on progress towards developing a Peterborough Permanency Service.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1. Committee is asked to note the contents of this report, and in particular the changing demography of the child in care population and the overall reduction in numbers of children and young people in care.
- 2.2. Committee is recommended to seek an updated report on the child in care population in Peterborough and the mix of placements for children and young people in care in 12 months' time.

3. LINKS TO THE SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY

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

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1. This report updates Members on changes in the population of children and young people in care in Peterborough, drawing comparisons with the national and statistical neighbour information as this is available. It also details progress against the Fostering Action Plan, which is concerned with the improved recruitment of fostering households to look after Peterborough children and young people in care.
- 4.2. The report provides a brief update on the progress of proposals to develop a Peterborough Permanency Service, which would be a new service delivered by a partner provider under contract to the Council following a tender exercise.

Context

- 4.3. The term 'Children and Young People in Care' is used throughout this report. This reflects messages from national research that children and young people in care prefer this term to 'Looked after Children' or 'Children Looked After' because for them, 'in Care' more accurately describes their experience and makes more sense to them.
- 4.4. Most children and young people achieve the best lifelong outcomes by growing up within their families. While all families experience short term crises from time to time, in most circumstances, families are able to call on their own extended family or friendship networks to support them through such crises without the need for any other external support.
- 4.5. Not all families have access to informal support mechanisms, however, making it more difficult for them to manage the sort of challenges experienced by us all. In addition, some groups of families – those with a child with a complex disability for example – may have considerable support from their family and friendship networks, but still need this to be supplemented if they are not to come under significant pressures.
- 4.6. A small group of children are unable to be safely cared for within their families without an intensive programme of assessment and support. A still smaller group cannot remain with their families at all because the risks to them are too great. This latter group of children and young people may be cared for by relatives, but if this is not a viable option for them, they will come into the care system.
- 4.7. Where children do have to move from their birth families, it is better that they do so at as early an age as possible. This is so they can make secure attachments to their new permanent carers, who are either adopting them or who have applied for a Special Guardianship Order or Residence Order.
- 4.8. Our overall strategic aim is therefore to protect early help and prevention services, enabling families to access support in order to prevent difficulties from emerging, to offer a range of intensive support services for families who are experiencing a crisis, while seeking to identify at an early stage where it seems unlikely that it will be in the best long term interests of a child to remain with their parents.
- 4.9. Where it is not likely to be in the best long term interests for a child to remain with their parents, we explore whether members of the extended family may be willing to provide a permanent alternative home for the child or children, often through a Special Guardianship Order. Such arrangements are frequently made within Family Group Conferences, where extended family and friends work together to develop a family plan that will ensure that the child remains safe and well cared for.

- 4.10. Where there are no extended family available to take on the care of the child or young person, and where they would otherwise be at risk of suffering significant harm, the local authority will act to seek to bring the child or young person into care, whether by agreement with the parent or through the courts.
- 4.11. The Council will always seek to identify permanent carers for this group of children and we have a very positive track record in identifying adoptive families in Peterborough. A significant number of children and young people who come into care will return home to their parents after a period of time – nationally, 34% of children and young people leaving care leave to return home to a parent or parents. However, a significant proportion of children and young people who come into care, and particularly those who come into care aged 7 and above, will remain in care throughout their childhoods.
- 4.12. For this group, long term outcomes are usually best where they are placed within a family based setting – a foster placement – and where they do not experience any number of unplanned placement changes.

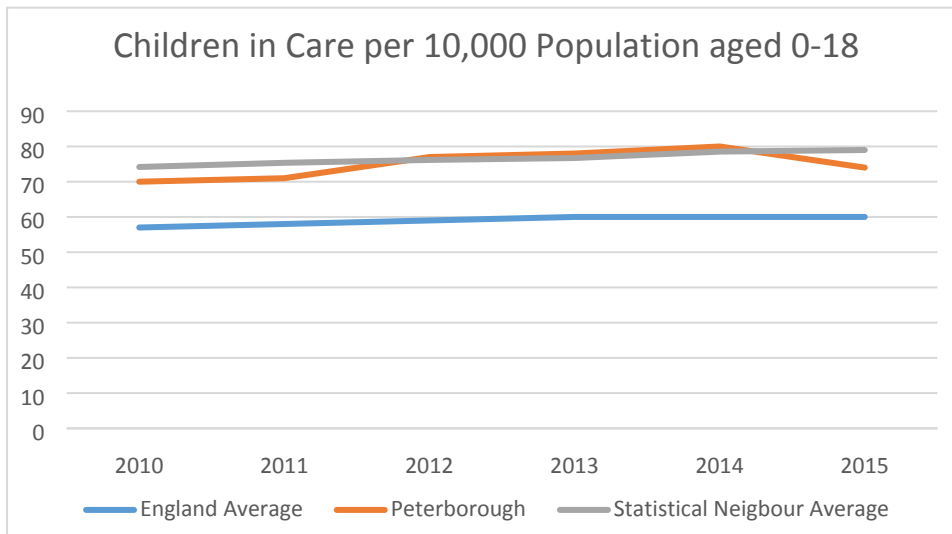
Overall Numbers of Children and Young People in Care

- 4.13. The overall number of children and young people looked after as of the end of November 2015 was approximately 340 [the number is always approximate as it fluctuates slightly on a daily basis as children enter and leave the care system]. Numbers of children and young people looked after in Peterborough increased gradually between 2012 and May 2014, when they peaked at 385. Numbers have been declining since May 2014 and are now close to the numbers in care at the end of 2012.
- 4.14. The most common way of expressing numbers of children and young people looked after is the rate per 10,000 population of children and young people. This enables comparisons to be drawn with national and similar authority trends and performance.
- 4.15. There is one change that took place in 2014/15 which makes direct comparisons with earlier years more difficult, however. The Office for National Statistics [ONS] has reviewed all local authorities and revised each group of their statistical neighbours. Our statistical neighbours have changed slightly as a result. These changes are summarised in the table below:

Peterborough Statistical Neighbours	
Prior to 2014	2014/15 onwards
Bolton	Bolton
Sheffield	Rotherham
Derby	Sheffield
Coventry	Derby
Telford and Wrekin	Telford and Wrekin
Walsall	Walsall
Southend-on-Sea	Medway Towns
Portsmouth	Portsmouth
Southampton	Southampton
Plymouth	Plymouth

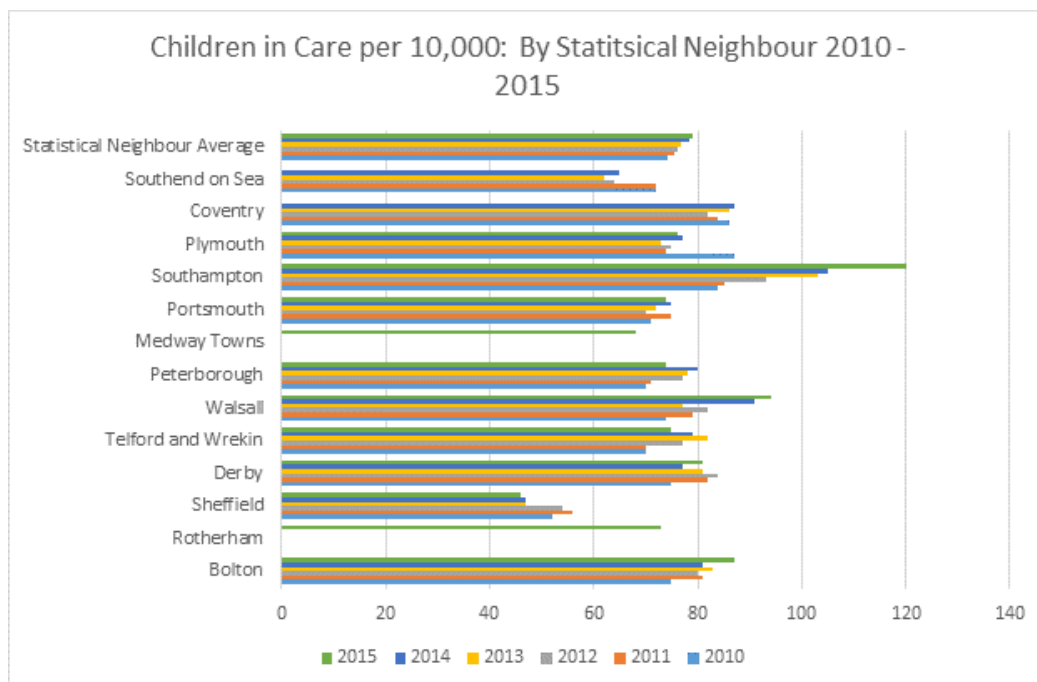
- 4.16. As can be seen from the above, most of our statistical neighbours have remained as previously, but we have 'lost' Coventry and Southend on Sea, and gained Rotherham and the Medway Towns.

4.17. The chart below compares the rate of children looked after in Peterborough with the average of our statistical neighbours and the England average over the last six years, up to and including the year 2014/15:



4.18. As can be seen from the chart, the most recent data indicates that the rate in Peterborough has dropped slightly below the statistical neighbour average, having been broadly in line with this average since 2012. Our current [as of end of November 2015] rate of children in care per 10,000 is 73, compared with an average of our neighbours of 79 per 10,000. This difference equates to approximately 26 children and young people overall – in other words if we had 366 children and young people in care instead of the 340 we actually have, we would be in line with the statistical neighbour average.

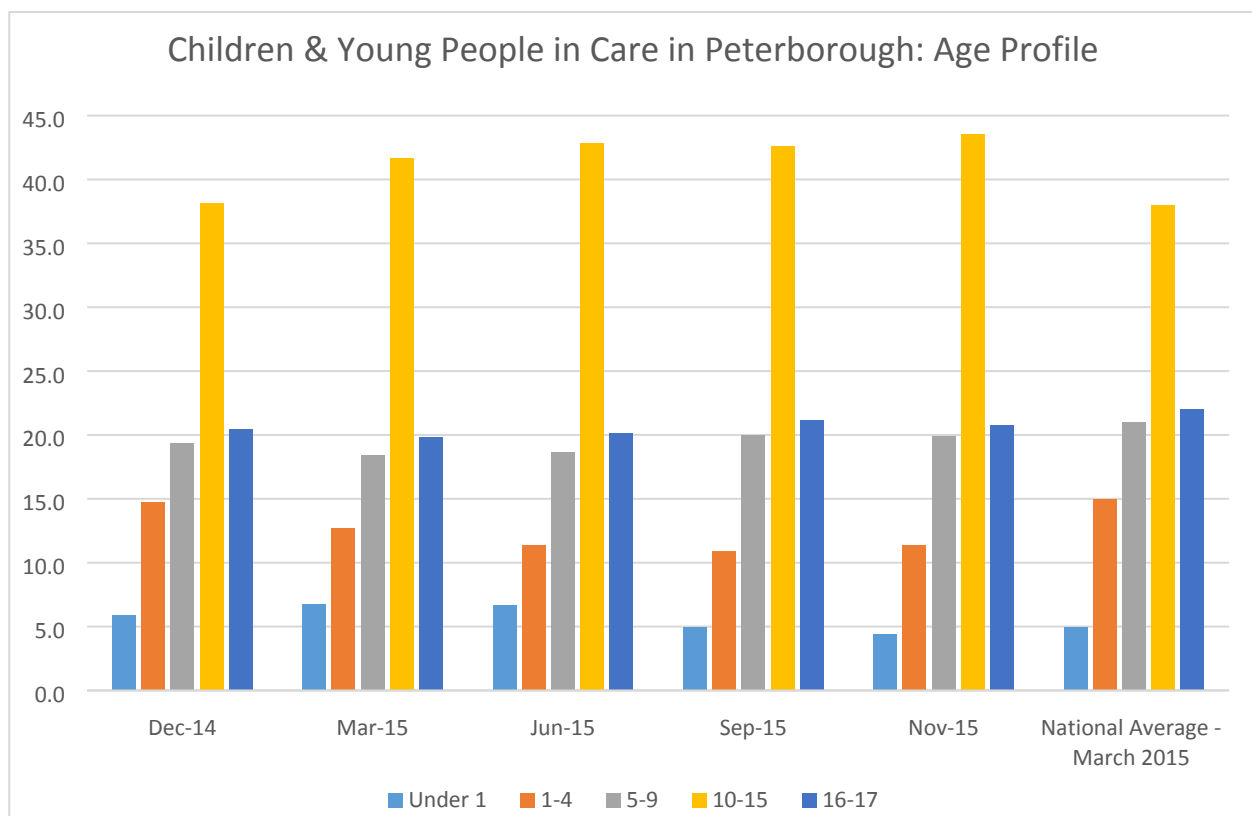
4.19. The statistical neighbour average does hide some significant variations and particularly since the makeup of our 'basket' of comparator authorities has changed in the last 12 months, it is also useful to look at performance within individual authorities over this period, as below:



- 4.20. As can be seen from the above, performance in Peterborough has remained solidly within the parameters of the performance of most of our statistical neighbours. Our two new statistical neighbours – Medway and Rotherham – are both at the lower end of the range of the statistical neighbour group as a whole, while Coventry - no longer a statistical neighbour – has traditionally had rates of children in care at the higher end of the range.
- 4.21. Where a local authority has too few children and young people in care, it could be an indication that action is not being taken to appropriately safeguard children and young people in the community who are at risk of significant harm. However, overall numbers are influenced by two factors – whether children and young people are coming into care as well as the effectiveness of planning for them once they are in care.
- 4.22. Here in Peterborough, there has been a long standing good track record on adoption. This has been supplemented over recent years a significant increase in the use of Special Guardianship Orders. Taken together, this suggests that children are likely to be spending less time in care once looked after than in some other areas, reducing overall numbers because throughput is higher.

4.23. **Characteristics of Children and Young People in Care Population**

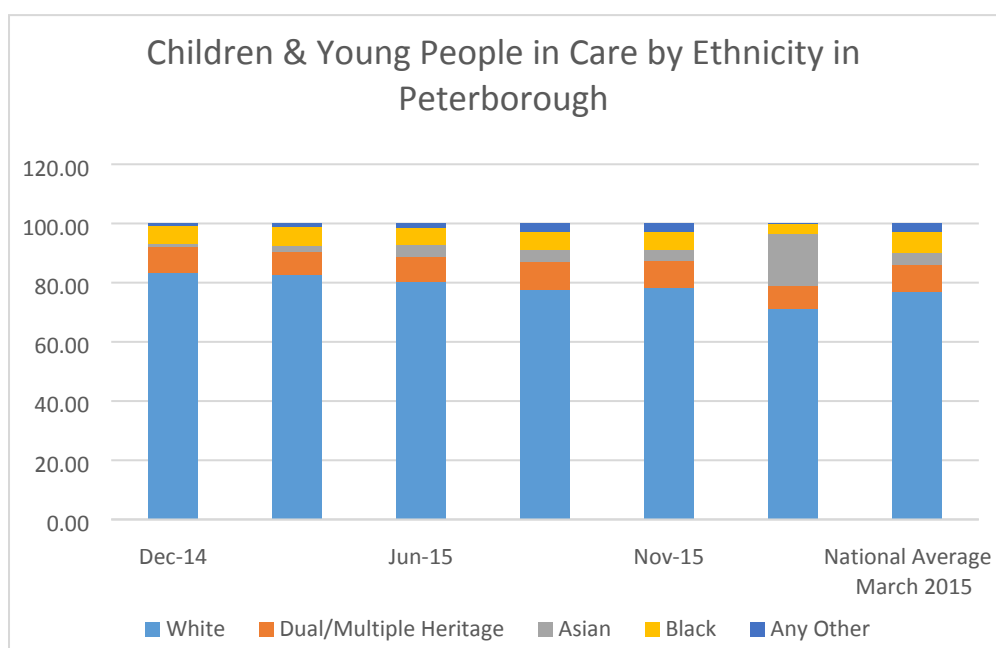
4.24. The chart below shows the changing makeup of the Peterborough care population by age:



4.25. All other things being equal, this chart indicates that a smaller proportion of younger children are in care in Peterborough than is the case nationally. This is an area that will maintain under review, as it is generally better for there to be higher proportions of younger children in care as this contributes some evidence that risks are being identified in a timely

way. Having a lower proportion of older young people in the care system can be seen as indicating that there are effective measures in place to prevent young people coming into the care system in crisis.

- 4.26. However, there are some Peterborough-specific factors that have an impact on the age profile of our in care population. We have also seen a significant increase in unaccompanied asylum seeking young people coming into the care system in Peterborough over the last 12 months. For context, as of the end of December 2013, three young people in care were unaccompanied asylum seekers. This had risen to 7 by the end of December 2014 and has risen to 25 by the end of November 2015. This means that proportionately we would expect there to be higher numbers of young people in the older age bands as unaccompanied asylum seekers are mostly 15 or above when they arrive into the country.
- 4.27. To provide some national context, as of March 2015, 3.8% of children and young people in care were Unaccompanied Asylum seekers. In Peterborough as of the end of November 2015, 7.3% of the child in care population were unaccompanied asylum seekers.
- 4.28. Nevertheless, this increase in unaccompanied asylum seeking young people in Peterborough does not alone explain the differences in proportions of the ages of children and young people in care in the City.
- 4.29. There are also other that may be at play. As noted above, Peterborough also has a strong record in adoption, and the length of time children wait for adopters is considerably shorter in Peterborough than the national average [385 days compared with 533 days]. As adoption largely affects younger children, faster adoptions would reduce the proportion of children in younger age groups in care.
- 4.30. Factors such as these may help to explain the different age profile of our population of children and young people in care, but this variance will continue to be closely monitored to ensure that services are identifying and responding to risk in a timely way.
- 4.31. The following chart compares the ethnicity of children and young people in care in Peterborough with the national average population in care:



- 4.32. The above chart illustrates how the local population of children and young people in care in Peterborough has changed over the last 12 months in terms of ethnicity, comparing this with the Office for National Statistics (ONS) Estimate of the percentage of children and young people in the broader Peterborough population and with the England average of the care population as of March 2015.
- 4.33. The population of Peterborough is becoming increasingly diverse. The ONS estimates that around 10.5% of the 0-18 population in the City are from 'White Other' backgrounds. As of the end of November 2015, the proportion of children and young people in care in Peterborough from these backgrounds was 12% - broadly in line with local population estimates. The ONS estimates that 62% of 0-18 year olds in the City are from White British backgrounds, while 66% of the care population as of the end of November 2015 were from White British backgrounds.

Children Looked After: Placement Mix

- 4.34. The chart below illustrates how the mix of placement types in Peterborough has changed over recent years and how it compares with national averages:

Placement Type	P'borough Nov 2012 %	P'borough Nov 2013 %	P'borough Nov 2014 %	P'borough Nov 2015 %	National Average 2015 %
In House fostering [A]	35%	38%	39%	46%	n/a
Agency Fostering [B]	38%	33%	32%	29%	n/a
Connected [C]	6%	9%	9%	7%	n/a
All Foster Placements [A+B+C]	79%	80%	80%	82%	70%
Residential including secure, secure remands & residential schools	10%	9%	7%	8%	12%
Independent Living	5%	4%	6.5%	8%	3%
Placed for adoption	5%	4%	5%	2%	5%
Placement with Parents	2%	2%	2%	2%	5%

- 4.35. The above indicates that we have continued to do well in terms of placing a relatively low proportion of children and young people in residential placements compared with national averages. This is positive as residential placements are usually associated with some of the poorest outcomes for children and young people, and are very much more expensive than other types of placement.
- 4.36. Peterborough also continues to place a larger proportion of children and young people in care in foster placements than is the case nationally. This is positive as foster placements are generally associated with better long term outcomes and are also less costly than residential placements. In-house foster placements are typically less than half the average cost of an IFA placement.
- 4.37. The percentage of children placed with in-house foster carers has also increased significantly – particularly over the last 12 months. Although this is partly a function of a reduced overall population of children and young people in care from 370 in November 2014 to 340 in November 2015, this increased use of in-house placements remains positive, and reflects positive success in recruitment of fostering households in the 2014/15 financial year in particular.
- 4.38. The percentage of children placed for adoption appears low, when compared with national averages. This is a volatile indicator, however, and 12 children have been adopted in the

three months to the end of November 2015. For the year to date, 19% of children and young people have left care for adoption – in line with a target of 20% for the year as a whole.

Recruitment and Retention of in-house Fostering Households

- 4.39. There was strong performance in the recruitment of fostering households in the financial year 2014/15, with a net gain of more than 30 mainstream [or general] fostering households.
- 4.40. Recruitment activities in 2014-15 were not targeted at foster carers able and willing to offer homes to teenagers. There was also less specific marketing directed towards black and minority ethnic communities in the City during this financial year, although attempts were made to recruit black and minority ethnic carers and carers able to meet the needs of young people at this time. The view taken was that recruitment efforts should be as wide as possible, attracting as many prospective carers as we could. It would then be that during the training, assessment and preparation process, carers would be persuaded to take an interest in offering placements to older children and young people. In the event, however, most carers recruited in 2014/15 elected to offer placements to younger children.
- 4.41. The successful recruitment in terms of absolute numbers of carers in 2014-15 has therefore resulted in an over-supply of in-house foster carers able and willing to care for younger children than we have children available. This mismatch can be a source of frustration for foster carers who want to foster but who are not offered placements, and does result in the inefficient use of resources as these foster carers continue to require the services of a supervising social worker.
- 4.42. This under-use is reflected in the in-house vacancy rate which was 35% as of the end of November 2015. This sounds very high, however the typical vacancy rate for in-house services is between 25 and 30%. Vacancy rates are measured in a way that does not always capture only true vacancies, which inflates the figure. For example, households are often approved as being able to care for 1 child, or 2 if siblings. This means that if a household is looking after a single child, the system will continue to identify a potential vacancy within that household despite the fact that none actually exists. There will also always be a number of carers who are taking breaks from caring for a variety of reasons, adding to the apparent vacancy rate.
- 4.43. There is also a tension between needing to be able to offer a degree of placement choice, so enabling the needs of the child to be matched to the fostering household, with ensuring efficient use of fostering resources by having a low vacancy rate.
- 4.44. Nevertheless, it remains the case that we continue to be more likely to place older children and young people and children with more challenging care needs in fostering households offered by Independent Fostering Agencies than with our own carers, while we continue to have higher numbers of our own foster carers with vacancies than national comparators.
- 4.45. Meanwhile, the makeup of the fostering community in Peterborough in terms of ethnicity does not match the makeup of the children and young people we have in care.
- 4.46. Of the 142 active fostering households, 89% are White British; 4% are White Other, and 1% respectively are Asian or Black or are from dual cultural heritages. This compares with a child in care population from White British backgrounds of only 67%, and where 9% of children in care are Black, and 10.5% are from White Other backgrounds.

- 4.47. In order to address these issues, a much more targeted fostering recruitment campaign was undertaken during this financial year, focused on newly arrived communities and potential carers from all sections of the community who would be willing to provide homes for older children and young people with more challenging behaviour.
- 4.48. In terms of numbers recruited, this campaign has been less successful than the more general campaign run in 2014-15, as is indicated by the table below which sets out the net change in numbers of foster carers between April 2015 and the end of November 2015:

Carer Type	New Approvals	Terminations	Net Change
Mainstream	5	7	-2
Connected	0	6	-6
Link & Respite	1	0	1
Total	6	13	-7

- 4.49. 'Mainstream' is the term used to describe general foster carers who provide homes for children who are in care and who are not previously known to them. 'Connected' carers are carers approved as foster carers for specific named children who are in care but who were previously known to them [and to whom they are often related]. Link and respite carers do not take full time children; Link carers provide short breaks to children with disabilities and respite carers provide short term placements to children in order to provide their mainstream carers with a break.
- 4.50. A number of households are progressing through the assessment process as this report was prepared and it is expected that prior to the end of the financial year, there will be 8 new connected households approved [meaning a net gain of 2 connected households in the current financial year]. It is also expected that a further 4 mainstream fostering households will be approved before the end of the financial year. However a further 6 terminations of approval of mainstream carers are also expected before the end of the year, meaning an overall net loss of 4 mainstream fostering households over the 2014/15 financial year.
- 4.51. Terminations can be for a variety of reasons; carers may have retired, or may have decided to adopt children in placement, meaning that they no longer have the physical space for foster children. It is the case that terminations were given a lower priority in the 2014/15 financial year than in the current one, meaning that there has been a higher rate of terminations in this year.
- 4.52. Nevertheless, the much lower levels of recruitment this year illustrate the challenges for our current service in recruiting and supporting carers to provide homes for the more challenging, typically older child or young person in care, and in recruiting carers from black and minority ethnic groups.
- 4.53. Recruitment activities will continue and we will continue to target these groups of harder to reach potential foster carers. However, we also know from our current carers that they would require a range of additional support in order to feel confident about caring for some of our more challenging young people. This is part of the reason why we are also taking forward proposals to develop a tender and to seek a provider with experience of supporting carers to care for young people with challenging needs through the development of the Peterborough Permanency Service.

Future Plans for Fostering Services

- 4.54. Members will be aware that there are plans in place to explore whether developing a strategic partnership with another organisation may assist us in the recruitment and retention of carers able to meet the needs of more challenging older children and young people and to recruit carers from black and minority ethnic communities.
- 4.55. Success would mean that more children and young people in care from black and minority ethnic communities are placed with families who have a better understanding of their cultural histories and identity needs, and would mean that more children and young people with more challenging needs are placed within or close to Peterborough with carers we know well.
- 4.56. Reducing reliance on placements provided by the Independent Fostering Agencies would also enable us to use some of the money saved to invest in a range of services to support children and young people in care and on the edge of care. We are seeking to prioritise investment in improved support to children and young people who are subject to Special Guardianship Orders and to those who return home to parents following a period of being in care. We are also seeking to develop additional capacity within the Family Group Conference Service.
- 4.57. A Prior Information Notice and Draft Permanency Service Summary Service Specification were published on Friday 18th December 2015. This invites interested potential partners to comment on our outline proposals and enables us to meet with them and go through questions and points of clarification, prior to launching full and formal tender processes, which we aim to do in March 2016. The draft summary specification can be found at Appendix 1 to this report.
- 4.58. Foster carers have generally been open to and welcoming of this approach. They have said that they value the proposals to improve the support available to them through provision of 24/7 support that includes practical in-home support as needed, to improve access to psychological consultation and to develop new and evidenced based training programmes. They have also welcomed the potential for some to be involved in different approaches to using their skills as foster carers.
- 4.59. Directly affected members of staff have some understandable questions about the details of these proposals. There has also been an openness from members of staff about the proposals, however, and a positive response to the aims and objectives – i.e. to increase investment in some services to children and young people while protecting current levels of service and contributing to savings targets.

5. KEY ISSUES

- 5.1. Key issues arising from the above include:
 - Overall numbers of children and young people in care have reduced over the last 12 months and are currently below the average of our statistical neighbours;
 - There has been an increase in numbers of unaccompanied asylum seeking young people who have come into the care system in Peterborough over the last 12 months and over 7% of our total care population are unaccompanied asylum seekers, compared with a national average rate of less than 4%;
 - Relative to the national picture, the proportion of younger children in the care population is lower and the proportion of older children and young people is higher.

The higher numbers of unaccompanied asylum seeking young people in the care population in Peterborough will account for some of this variation, but cannot explain it entirely. This is an area for on-going monitoring;

- We have continued to be successful in maintaining higher proportions of our child in care population in family based placements and lower proportions in residential placements than is the case nationally. This is important as family based placements are generally associated with better longer term outcomes and represent a better use of resources;
- A significantly higher proportion of children and young people in care is placed with our own foster carers compared with 12 months ago, although part of this is related to the lower overall numbers of children in care;
- However, among our current population of carers there is a mismatch in provision compared with need, with an oversupply of carers willing to provide placements for younger children and a shortage of those sufficiently confident in the support they are able to access that would result in them feeling able to offer placements to more challenging children and young people;
- Attempts to target recruitment activities towards carers able to offer placements to older children and young people and at the black and minority ethnic communities in Peterborough have been less successful than earlier more general approaches to recruitment, and the indications are that there will be a net loss of fostering households in the current financial year;
- Despite the increase in the proportion of children and young people in care placed with our own carers, it remains the case that children and young people with more complex needs are much more likely to be placed with carers provided by Independent Fostering Agencies. These are carers whom we know less well, and who tend to be located further from Peterborough;
- We will continue to seek to recruit foster carers, but we are also now considering whether an alternative delivery model [the Peterborough Permanency Service] would help us to recruit more carers from black and minority ethnic groups and more carers able to meet the needs of older and more challenging children and young people;
- Progress to develop the Permanency Service that would include the current activities of the Fostering and Adoption Service continues, with a Prior Information Notice being published on 18th December 2015.

6. IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1. There are a number of HR and financial implications arising from the proposals to develop the Permanency Service, and in ensuring that service specifications, the tender process and any subsequent contracts are fully developed so that the service is able to deliver the best possible outcomes for children and young people while securing value for money.
- 6.2. In the event that the proposals to develop the Peterborough Permanency Service go ahead, there will be implications for a number of members of staff currently employed by the Council.
- 6.3. These members of staff will all be offered both formal and informal opportunities for consultation about the proposals. Informal engagement processes are already underway and a number of workshops have been held with staff, as well as with foster carers. These workshops will continue.

7. CONSULTATION

- 7.1. Consultation has taken place with relevant senior officers within Children's Social Care and with the Performance Team.

8. NEXT STEPS

- 8.1. The next steps relate to the continuing development of the proposals for the Peterborough Permanency Service.
- 8.2. Informal soft market testing will take place during January 2016 and any potential providers who approach us as a result of the Prior Information Notice will have the opportunity to contribute to the shaping of the final service specification.
- 8.3. Workshops will be held with members of staff, foster carers, and children and young people at the end of January 2016 with the aim of developing specific evaluation questions for evaluating tenders in the event that we are able to progress to a formal tender stage.
- 8.4. Representative members of staff, foster carers and children and young people in care will form part of the formal evaluation process of tenders submitted.
- 8.5. The target for awarding the contract in the event that there is a successful tender is May or June 2016. In the event that a contract is awarded, a three to six month mobilisation period will be required.

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: Permanency Service: Draft Summary Service Specification