

CHILDREN AND EDUCATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE	AGENDA ITEM No. 8
20 SEPTEMBER 2018	PUBLIC REPORT

Report of:	Lou Williams, Service Director, Children and Safeguarding	
Cabinet Member(s) responsible:	Councillor Sam Smith, Cabinet Member for Children's Services	
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OUTCOME OF OFSTED INSPECTION OF PETERBOROUGH CHILDREN'S SERVICES, SERVICE DIRECTOR REPORT AND PORTFOLIO HOLDER REPORT

RECOMMENDATIONS	
FROM: Service Director, Children and Safeguarding	Deadline date: N/A
<p>It is recommended that the Children and Education Scrutiny Committee:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Notes the positive outcome of the Ofsted inspection of Children's Services under the new inspection framework: The Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services [ILACS]; 2. Acknowledges the commitment and dedication of staff within Peterborough in children's and allied services and the support provided by partner agencies in improving outcomes for vulnerable children and young people in Peterborough; 3. Notes the areas for development noted in the inspection report and agrees to receive an update on progress against these areas within the next Service Director and Portfolio Holder report; 4. Notes the further detailed performance information contained within the report; 5. Continues to offer support and challenge to the Cabinet Member and senior officers in Children's Services in order to improve outcomes for all children and young people in Peterborough, and vulnerable children and young people in particular. 	

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 fulfils a number of functions; it provides Members with an overview of the outcome of the inspection of children's services in Peterborough, undertaken between 25th June and 6th July, provides a brief additional summary of key performance measures within children's services, and updates the Committee on relevant activities and functions completed 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 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 priorities relating to the safeguarding of vulnerable people.

2.4 This report directly relates to the children in care pledge as it is about the performance of children's safeguarding services including services for children in care and young people who have left care.

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 section begins by providing a summary of the recent inspection of children's services in Peterborough by Ofsted. The full inspection report is attached as Appendix 1 to this report. The report then moves on to providing some further information about relevant performance monitoring of children's services, before concluding by providing a brief summary of key relevant activities of the Lead Member and portfolio holder.

Ofsted Inspection of Children's Services

4.2. Inspections of children's services now take place under the new inspection framework, which is called the 'Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services', or ILACS for short. Under this framework, Ofsted aims to carry out full inspections once every three years. Authorities who were most recently assessed as Good or Outstanding have a shortened inspection, with inspectors on site for one week. Authorities with a previous inspection finding of 'Requires Improvement in order to be Good' [or 'RI'] have a standard inspection, with inspectors on site for two weeks. When last inspected, Peterborough was judged to be RI at our last full inspection in 2015. Authorities who were assessed to be inadequate at their last inspection continue to be inspected under the previous Single Inspection Framework.

4.3. In accordance with the above, Ofsted carried out a three week inspection of children's services in Peterborough under the new inspection framework, which was launched in January 2018. The two week onsite inspection took place between 25th June and 6th July; although inspection activity began on 18th June with inspectors scrutinising a range of information they requested us to provide. Inspections under the ILACS framework are unannounced. The full inspection report is attached as Appendix 1 to this report.

4.4. Peterborough was last inspected in 2015 under the Single Inspection Framework, or SIF. The outcome of that inspection was that Peterborough 'Requires Improvement in order to be good' in all areas with the exception of adoption services, which were assessed as being good.

4.5. The outcome of the 2018 inspection was that Peterborough was assessed as 'Good' in all four inspection areas:

- The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families;
- The experience and progress of children who need help and protection;
- The experience and progress of children in care and care leavers;
- Overall effectiveness.

4.6. This represents very good progress since the last inspection, when inspectors were clear that our services were at the lower end of the 'Require Improvement' [or RI] judgement. For comparison, the table below shows all inspection outcomes for children's services published in 2018 up to 12th August:

	Impact of Leadership on Social Work Practice	The experience and progress of children needing Help & Protection	The experience and progress of Children in Care & Care Leavers	Overall Effectiveness
Buckinghamshire [SIF]	Inadequate	Inadequate	Inadequate [adoption – good]	Inadequate
Bolton	Good	Good	Good	Good
Darlington {SIF}	RI	RI	RI [adoption Good]	RI
Herefordshire	Inadequate	RI	RI	RI
LB Brent	Good	RI	Outstanding	Good
LB Havering	Good	RI	Good	Good
LB Hillingdon	Outstanding	Good	Good	Good
LB Lambeth [SIF]	RI	RI	RI [Adoption – inadequate]	RI
North Yorkshire	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding
Oxfordshire	Good	RI	Good	Good
Peterborough	Good	Good	Good	Good
Rochdale	RI	RI	Good	RI
Sunderland [SIF]	Inadequate	Inadequate	RI [adoption – good]	Inadequate
Surrey [SIF]	Inadequate	Inadequate	RI [adoption – good]	Inadequate
Wakefield	Inadequate	Inadequate	Inadequate	Inadequate

- 4.7. Of inspections carried out so far this year, only Bolton and North Yorkshire have equalled or bettered the outcome in Peterborough. Some local authorities continue to be inspected under the Single Inspection Framework or SIF – these are all authorities that were assessed as ‘Inadequate’ in their previous inspection. The SIF inspection has a separate judgement relating to adoption that is no longer part of the inspection outcomes under the ILACS framework.
- 4.8. The ILACS framework is almost entirely based on inspectors’ evaluation of the quality of direct work with children and young people. Inspectors spend almost all of their on-site time meeting social workers, auditing their cases and talking about their experience working for the local authority. They then triangulate their findings by meeting children, young people and their families and interrogating our performance data.
- 4.9. This is in contrast with the SIF approach, where there are a significant number of meetings with partners, senior leaders and others, and where there is less analysis of the impact of direct case work than under the new framework. The new approach means that there is really no place to hide; rather than spending time talking to senior leaders about their approach to ensuring that the services for which they are responsible are delivering good outcomes, for example, inspectors assess this by investigating the quality of practice with children and their families. There is almost no opportunity for senior managers to put a ‘spin’ on the quality of services.
- 4.10. Under the new ILACS inspection framework, leaders are required to provide a self-assessment of children’s services, indicating areas where practice is good and describing areas where improvement is still needed. Critically, inspectors want to see what action is being taken to address any areas for development, assessing the credibility of these.
- 4.11. The self-assessment is a very important document as it provides inspectors with evidence that leaders and managers know their services well, understand the areas where improvement or development is needed, and have clear plans in place to ensure the continuous improvement of the services for which they are accountable. It is therefore assessment of the credibility of the leadership.
- 4.12. It is therefore welcome that in their report, inspectors said that ‘A stable leadership team has an accurate understanding of strengths and areas for improvement within the service, prioritising the areas that make the most difference for children. All areas for improvement are being addressed.’ Inspectors also said that ‘Corporate decision-making prioritises vulnerable children, with investments, partnerships and innovations in services all having a positive impact on children and their families.’

- 4.13. The commitment of Members to supporting children's services is a key area of concern for inspectors since this provides reassurance in relation to the on-going sustainability of children's services in any particular area. Inspectors said that 'There is very strong political and corporate support for children's services. This ensures that children's needs are prioritised, and that corporate decision-making, including significant areas of investment, is having a positive impact on children. The lead member and local safeguarding children board (LSCB) are providing effective challenge to the senior leadership team.'
- 4.14. Inspectors also complimented the changes to corporate parenting arrangements since the last inspection in 2015, saying: 'There has been significant progress in strengthening corporate parenting. Young people run alternate corporate parenting committee meetings and support active children in care councils for different age groups. Elected members make changes based on the feedback that they seek from young people. In addition, members act as 'corporate parenting champions' for improvements in specific areas of need, an example of this being the successful challenge to improve children's uptake of dental checks.'
- 4.15. Inspectors identified strengths across all areas of service delivery. They particularly complimented early help services in Peterborough, finding that our innovative delivery model was highly effective in terms of securing improved outcomes for children and young people, while also representing effective value for money. In large part, it is the network of lead professionals in schools, colleges, community health services, children's centres and other community facing services to thank for this outcome, supported by our small but highly effective central early help service. The delivery model of early help services in Peterborough is very different from that in most areas. The small central team works with schools, health services and so on to support them to delivery effective support to children and young people where there are signs of emerging difficulties.
- 4.16. In many areas, local authorities fund teams of practitioners to undertake direct work with families and children. In Peterborough, much of the engagement and support comes via practitioners and schools already working with the family concerned. This is not only more sustainable, but often achieves better engagement since it is less stigmatising than being referred on to another service. This workforce is supported by a range of commissioned support services that are made available particularly where the issues affecting children and young people are more entrenched.
- 4.17. This operating model seeks to emphasise sustainability wherever possible. An example is in the provision of evidence-based parenting support programmes. Our approach has been to deliver a number of 'train the trainer' sessions, offering key practitioners in schools and elsewhere training in the delivery of such programmes. This means that programmes can be run without the need for continued funding. Schools buy-in to this approach because they can see the impact on children and young people attending their schools.
- 4.18. Inspectors also noted significant improvements in our more specialist services for children in need, in need of protection and who are in care or are care leavers since the last full inspection in 2015. The Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub was seen as effective, while the quality of our assessments of vulnerable children have continued to improve.
- 4.19. Inspectors complimented the work of our alternatively qualified children's practitioners, which we introduced after the inspection in 2015 to help us to improve recruitment and retention and tackle caseloads that were then too high. Inspectors noted that staff turnover was much improved, and that children, young people and families benefited from a highly skilled and experienced children's workforce.
- 4.20. Inspectors found our approach to child protection and safeguarding to be robust and that risks to children at most risk were well managed. They identified that the multi-disciplinary family safeguarding teams, established following our successful bid for innovation funding, are making a difference to families, although they said that these developments are still in their early days.

- 4.21. Children and young people in care, were found to benefit from good quality, well-matched placements. Decision making for children coming into care was found to be timely and appropriate, and most children and young people in care live with foster families and experience good placement stability.
- 4.22. Inspectors were complimentary about our services and support to young people leaving care. They described the team of Personal Advisors as being highly committed, knowing their young people well and acting as strong advocates for them.
- 4.23. It is pleasing to see that Inspectors found a strong learning culture within Peterborough, underpinned by a highly effective quality assurance service. Inspectors could clearly see evidence of the impact of quality assurance, learning from when things have not gone as intended and a strong focus on developing the workforce with improved outcomes for children, young people and their families.
- 4.24. Other support services for vulnerable children and young people were also found to be effective. These included our responses to children missing education and those who are electively home educated. At the last inspection in 2015, inspectors were concerned about a lack of capacity in the virtual school; in this inspection they said they could see the impact of investment in this area of the service and found it to be working well in supporting children and young people in care in learning.
- 4.25. A significant concern of inspectors at the last inspection was the lack of performance management information available to managers in order to assist them in ensuring that children from whom they were accountable were progressing well through the case and care planning process. Inspectors acknowledged that this was also an area where we have made significant improvements and again, they said that they could see how managers using this performance management information was feeding through into improving outcomes for children and young people.
- 4.26. Inspectors were impressed by our relationships with the Courts, the Child and Family Court Advisory and Support Service [CAFCASS] and with the progress of proceedings generally, and noted the high quality support of our legal service.
- 4.27. Inspectors also made a number of complimentary remarks about our approach to innovation in order to deliver improved outcomes while delivering value for money. Our early help services are one such example, about which inspectors were very complimentary as detailed above. They were similarly complimentary about the input of our alternatively qualified children's practitioners in supporting good outcomes for children in need and in supporting the work with children in need of protection, and said they could see some positive impact from our innovative Family Safeguarding approach.
- 4.28. Members will be aware that we have developed our Permanency Service in partnership with the leading children's charity, TACT. Ofsted described this new approach [the first in the country] as providing a 'seamless service' and found TACT to be delivering good quality fostering and adoption services. In verbal feedback during the course of the inspection, inspectors said that foster carers they had spoken to had described the support they received as carers since TACT began operating the service as better than it had ever been. This is really important feedback as improving support to carers was one of the key reasons for developing this model. Better supported carers are in a stronger position to meet the needs of sometime challenging children and young people placed with them, making it less likely that children experience placements breaking down.
- 4.29. All inspections identify areas for improvement, and as noted above, we welcome feedback on areas where we can secure improvements. Those areas identified as needing to improve in the inspection report were:
- **Assessments of children who are missing or who are at risk from child sexual exploitation** – Inspectors did find that the response to children going missing and at risk of

exploitation is timely, but that use of specialist risk assessment tools needed to be more consistent;

- **The use of chronologies in underpinning children’s assessments** – Inspectors acknowledged that social work practice had improved in this area since 2015, but that chronologies are not yet always informing analysis and decision-making for all children;
- **The number of return interviews that are successfully completed with children who have been missing from care** – Inspectors acknowledged that there is a process in place but this is not yet securing engagement with higher risk young people. Practice in Cambridgeshire is good in this area, and Peterborough will share in this good practice over the coming months;
- **The quality of information provided to care leavers about their rights and entitlements, including how to access their health histories** – Broadly speaking, inspectors were very positive about services for care leavers but we agree we could do more to ensure that care leavers are kept fully informed of rights and entitlements and action to improve this is already being taken;
- **Consistency of management oversight, including recording of casework supervision across all social work teams** – Inspectors acknowledged that social workers they spoke to said that they had regular supervision. They were complimentary about the additional opportunities provided by our quality assurance service to reflect on their work with children and young people. We do accept, however, that this is not always fully recorded. We will look again to see what support can be offered to managers in this area.

4.30. As noted elsewhere, Inspectors were clear that leaders and managers had a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the service and that we were taking action to address any areas where this was needed.

4.31. Peterborough is a challenging place to deliver good outcomes for children and young people; we have a fast growing, highly mobile and highly diverse community with many children and their families living in areas of significant deprivation. To receive the feedback from inspectors that we have is testament to the hard work and dedication of all those working in relevant areas within the Council and of the highly significant contribution made by partners. It is a very good result for Peterborough’s children and young people. The very last paragraph of the Ofsted report sums up their findings well, and is repeated here:

‘Children benefit from an increasingly experienced, permanent workforce. Social workers know their children well. This is a significant improvement since the last inspection. Almost all managers at all tiers are now permanent employees. Social workers have access to a range of training, including opportunities to progress as practice educators. They have time to spend with children, their visits are purposeful, and they capture children’s views about their lived experience. Social workers told inspectors that Peterborough is a great place to work.’

Service Director Report

4.32. The following section contains the usual reporting information provided on a regular basis to the Children and Education Scrutiny Committee.

4.33. Looking back over recent reports and the report to scrutiny providing information about the Joint Targeted Area Inspection on Neglect that took place in June/July 2017, I had started to make some cautiously more positive comments about how improvements in performance were now appearing to be more sustained and secure. It is really good to find that Inspectors agreed in the inspection.

4.34. Charts are referred to throughout this section; these can be found in Appendix 2 to this report.

Contacts, referrals and timeliness of assessments

4.35. Chart 1 shows the number of contacts being received into the MASH [Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub] and the proportion of these that move through to become referrals into children’s social care,

as opposed to being signposted to other services or diverted to early help. The number of contacts and the percentage moving through to referrals remains higher than we would want, which then feeds through into the relatively high numbers of assessments that are then completed, a high proportion of which end with an outcome of either no further action or a recommendation for early help services.

- 4.36. The MASH is co-located with the Cambridgeshire MASH within a shared integrated front door, based at Godmanchester. This receives all enquiries about children and young people for both authorities at present. We are currently consulting on making significant changes to the operation of this part of the service. The changes should result in fewer contacts and referrals, leading to better decision making around those children for whom it is unclear from the information initially provided as to what the best response is likely to be – i.e. a safeguarding or early help response. It is for this group of children for whom multi-agency input into decision making via the MASH is most important. Unfortunately, under the current model, because most children end up being considered by the MASH, the quality of decision making is affected because of the high volumes. We expect to implement the changes during October.
- 4.37. 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 rolling 12 month rate is within our target range, which is good progress and does represent good work within the MASH. The challenge is to increase the proportion of referrals that move to assessments of need within children’s social care, and this is where the changes proposed to the MASH as briefly outlined above are expected to have impact. This will be achieved by reducing the number of contacts and referrals, and enabling the MASH to have sufficient time to ensure that only those referrals that need to proceed to assessment do so.
- 4.38. Chart 3 shows the proportion of referrals that proceed to assessment. On a rolling 12 month basis this is around 84%, where we would like to see this at 95%. As noted above, this is one of the drivers for the changes that are proposed to take place within the integrated front door and MASH.
- 4.39. 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 high rate of children per 10,000 who are being supported through Early Help Assessments. Although reducing, the rate per 10,000 remains well above target and this illustrates the level of early help activity taking place across partner services including schools and health services.
- 4.40. Chart 5 shows the timeliness of completion of single assessments, where performance hovers at around 80% within timescale, against a target of 90%. As noted above, a relatively high proportion [around 60%] of assessments recommend no further action or a step down to early help.
- 4.41. 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. Where rep-referral rates are too low, it indicates that we may be being too risk averse and keeping too many children open to the service for too long, increasing overall volumes in the system. Performance is better than target at around 18% on a rolling 12 month average against a target of 22%. We will monitor this rate and any other indications that we are keeping children’s cases open longer than is necessary.

Safeguarding and Child Protection

- 4.42. It is in this area that we expect to see the greatest impact of our Family Safeguarding approach. Experience in Hertfordshire was that after implementation of the model, numbers of children who needed to be subject to child protection plans reduced first, followed by numbers of children in care.
- 4.43. Chart 7 indicates that numbers on child protection plans are reducing. Although this indicator is always a little volatile owing to small numbers and the potential impact of a single family with a number of children coming onto or off a plan, there does appear to be a clear reduction in numbers

from around the 250-260 and more mark 12 months ago to the 220-230 mark as of the end of July 2018. This is encouraging and it will be even more so if we can repeat Hertfordshire's experience in relation to numbers in care, which as will be seen below, have continued to increase.

- 4.44. 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 222 children subject to child protection plans as of the end of July 2018, only 35 have been subject to a plan for longer than 12 months and none for longer than two years.
- 4.45. 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.
- 4.46. Chart 9 shows the timeliness of visits to children who are subject to child protection plans. Performance remains consistently around 95% and at times above this - 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%.
- 4.47. 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.

Children in Care

- 4.48. Chart 10 shows that numbers of children and young people in care have continued to increase and are now at the average of our statistical neighbours for 2016/17. This increase has required a report to be presented to Cabinet to provide additional funding for the placement budgets for children in care. The charity TACT are now operating our Permanency Service and are beginning to make real progress in the recruitment of foster carers but have not been able to keep up with the rate of increase in overall numbers.
- 4.49. There are a number of strategies in place to reduce numbers in care and to control costs by reducing placement costs. Higher numbers of children in care are a national issue, however, and it may be that room for manoeuvre is limited, certainly in terms of bringing numbers down quickly.
- 4.50. Our quality assurance service regularly checks decision making for children and young people coming into the care system, and consistently finds that decisions are both timely and appropriate. Ofsted inspectors also looked at this area of decision making and agreed that this is the case. Given these findings, attention will focus on ensuring that we are progressing care plans so that children also leave care in as timely a way as possible, since any delay in care planning also has a significant impact on overall numbers and is also not in the best interest of the child or young person concerned.
- 4.51. The first national data for numbers in care is usually released in September of each year. Reports from regional colleagues suggest that numbers in care have increased across the region in both 2017/18 and the current financial year; publication of national data for 2017/18 will further help us in assessing the extent to which we are in line with national and statistical neighbour changes in this area. Part of the aim of Family Safeguarding is of course to reduce overall numbers in care;

this is clearly not yet happening in Peterborough but we do expect this approach to have an impact as it continues to become embedded, even if this is only to offset the impact of a fast growing population of children and young people in the City.

- 4.52. 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 is generally consistently good, although the data for July 18 is less positive. Monthly fluctuations can occur that appear significant because numbers are small, but this is an indicator that managers will focus on to ensure that the July performance is not the beginning of a trend.
- 4.53. Chart 12 shows performance in relation to reviews of children in care being held within statutory timescales. Performance is now at 100%, representing very 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.
- 4.54. Chart 13 of Appendix 1 shows the timeliness of visits to children in care. Performance in this area dipped towards the end of the calendar year 2017, which reflected some particularly acute recruitment challenges in the corporate parenting service at that time. Performance has now recovered and is at over 96%. 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 98% and above - particularly over holiday seasons. Fostering families go on holidays, as do social workers, which can make scheduling of visits challenging, for example.
- 4.55. Performance in relation to annual health assessments has remained fairly steady at around 90% as illustrated in chart 14 of Appendix 1, although managers are currently reviewing our approach as there appears to be a slightly downward trend emerging. While we would want to see this indicator reach 93% 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.
- 4.56. Although still below our stretch target, performance relating to the previously very stubborn indicator of dental checks does now seem to have reached a position where we are performing consistently better than was the case a year ago. The year to date figure as of July 18 is 83%, compared with 64% reported in July 17.
- 4.57. Our actual performance in 2017/18 was 96%, better than the reported rate during the year. This is an indicator that tends to under report through the year as it relies on placements [foster carers, residential homes etc.] telling us that a dental check has been carried out. Improved performance in this area was singled out by Ofsted inspectors as an area where active challenge and support from Members had also seen real impact.
- 4.58. 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 five months.
- 4.59. Chart 17 shows the percentage of children who leave care who are adopted. Small numbers make this a highly volatile indicator, but it is encouraging that current performance is just above 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.
- 4.60. **Portfolio Report: Cabinet Member for Children's Services**
- 4.61. I wanted to begin my section of this report by thanking Members of the Children and Education Scrutiny Committee for specifically requesting information about my activities as Cabinet Member. My role is both to support Children's Services and outcomes for vulnerable children in general while also providing constructive challenge and helping to hold senior officers to account in relation to delivering those outcomes.

- 4.62. It is a very positive coincidence for me that the first time I am providing a report directly to the scrutiny committee coincides with the very positive findings of the most recent Ofsted inspection. I have to begin by formally thanking the hard work, dedication and commitment of all those who work in children's services in the Council, as well as those in our partner organisations including schools, health colleagues and, of course, TACT, in supporting the vulnerable children and young people of Peterborough.
- 4.63. This positive inspection outcome does not, however, mean that we can take our collective feet off the pedals and relax. One of the things I have learned throughout my time as Cabinet Member is that there is an ever present need to make sure that our services are never complacent. We need to always ensure that services change and adapt to the changing needs of the population of Peterborough and to emerging threats to the safety of vulnerable children and young people.
- 4.64. I am a core member of the Local Safeguarding Children's Board, which now operates across both Peterborough and Cambridgeshire. The board helps to ensure that all partners working with children and young people are aware of and tackle signs of abuse or harm, including from neglect and sexual abuse. The board holds partners including Peterborough City Council to account and helps to ensure that we work together to protect vulnerable children and young people.
- 4.65. This also means that I am able to understand new and emerging risks to vulnerable children and young people. A recent example is that of County Lines where adults exploit vulnerable young people to traffic drugs across the country. The young people involved rarely see themselves as victims in this until they are arrested or in some cases, assaulted by other gang members for supposed wrongs they have committed against the controlling members of the gang.
- 4.66. County Lines is in some respects a further dimension to our growing understanding of the sophisticated methods that dangerous adults use to exploit vulnerable young people and as such, has parallels with child sexual exploitation and exploitation of often vulnerable young people in order to further extremist views of any kind. I have therefore been really pleased to have been able to contribute to the development of integrated approaches to tackle adults who seek to exploit young in any way in both Peterborough and Cambridgeshire.
- 4.67. I spend a considerable amount of my time meeting social workers, children's practitioners and others involved in the direct delivery of services to children and young people. This means that I am able to raise issues on their behalf, and also means that I can sense check the information provided to me by senior officers about the way that services are operating, particularly in respect of issues such as morale, support from managers and concerns about the work with individual children and young people – all hugely important issues but ones that do not always come across in performance information reports.
- 4.68. I am pleased to say that for the most part, what front-line practitioners tell me is in line with what senior managers also say. I am also pleased to be able to report that I have provided support to address issues such as the availability of effective information technology support for front line managers, escalating some delays with relevant cabinet colleagues.
- 4.69. I am a member of the joint governance board overseeing our highly innovative partnership with the leading charity, TACT, who are operating a number of our services on our behalf including our fostering and adoption service. This new and innovative approach to service delivery was praised by Ofsted in the recent report and also by the Chief Social Worker, Isabelle Trowler. This partnership was established in April 2017.
- 4.70. As would be expected when we are doing something for the first time, there has been a learning curve for TACT as well as for Peterborough City Council. What is clear, however, is that TACT have improved services from the perspective of those who matter most in this – our foster carers, Special Guardianship Order carers and adopters who are better supported and so are better able to provide good care to children and young people.
- 4.71. There have, however, been significant challenges in relation to a growing population of children and young people in care. While this trend in Peterborough is in line with other areas, it has

resulted in us having to identify additional funding for the placement budgets. I have worked hard with colleagues to present the information and evidence to Cabinet in order to ensure that there is sufficient funding to meet the costs of providing good care to our most vulnerable children and young people.

- 4.72. Moving forward, my role is to continue to support this key partnership and ensure that there is appropriate challenge to the services in terms of ensuring that we are doing all we can to maintain control over overall numbers of children in care, while also reducing placement costs by improving recruitment of TACT/Peterborough foster carers.
- 4.73. I have also been closely involved in the development of our innovative Family Safeguarding approach. This model is based on an approach developed in Hertfordshire and involves adult-facing practitioners being seconded into children's teams. These practitioners support adults with difficulties including substance and alcohol misuse, mental health and emotional difficulties and address any issues around domestic abuse. In Hertfordshire the model has been associated with improved outcomes for children, lower numbers on child protection plans and reductions in numbers in care.
- 4.74. We are not far enough into the programme here in Peterborough to see all of these changes as yet but numbers on child protection plans have fallen and inspectors said that they could see the positive impact that adult practitioners were having on outcomes for children. This approach is currently funded by a central government grant. I have ensured that sustainability of the approach is being actively considered as we move forward.
- 4.75. I also seek to raise the profile of children and young people across the Council as a whole, encouraging other Cabinet Members to ensure that policy proposals consider the needs of children and young people in general and vulnerable children and young people including children in care in particular.
- 4.76. I regularly meet with children and young people through the children in care council and with our foster carers, who are so vital in helping us to ensure that children who grow up in our care achieve the best they can. It is particularly gratifying that the Ofsted inspection report talked about how far corporate parenting has come since the last inspection. In 2015, young people were completely disengaged with the corporate parenting panel, as it then was, describing this to inspectors as a 'snoozefest'.
- 4.77. In the most recent report, inspectors praised the work of the new corporate parenting committee and the corporate parenting champions, again saying that they could see how their activities had resulted in positive changes for children and young people.
- 4.78. One of the things I was asked to cover in my report to this scrutiny committee today was how the committee can help officers and I in our work. I would ask that you continue to do what you are doing in supporting the work of the corporate parenting committee, and continuing to challenge and scrutinise the work of children's services. As the recent inspection report shows, it is the support and challenge of Members in these forums that makes a real difference to the lives of vulnerable children and young people.

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:
- Notes the progress made since the last full inspection in 2015;
 - Acknowledges the very significant dedication, commitment and passion of our staff at all levels in the organisation to improving outcomes for children and young people in often difficult circumstances;

- Notes the positive comments about the impact of new corporate parenting arrangements including the development of the corporate parenting committee and the impact that this is having on improving outcomes for children and young people;
- Acknowledges the significant role played by partner agencies [and in particular schools and health services] in supporting good outcomes for children and young people through their commitment to supporting early help services across the City;
- Provides continued support for children's services as we strive to continue to improve services and outcomes for children.

7. REASON FOR THE RECOMMENDATION

7.1 While the outcome of the inspection is a positive one, there is always further learning to do. Services need to continue to improve just to remain at the same judgement. This is because Ofsted's expectations about service quality continue to become more demanding.

7.2 It is important therefore that this scrutiny has the opportunity to review the progress made since the last inspection and to re-confirm the Council's commitment to the on-going development of children's services in Peterborough.

8. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

8.1 There are no applicable alternative options available

9. IMPLICATIONS

Financial Implications

9.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. Children's services in general and placement costs for children in care are areas of risk for all local authorities at present and it is important that Members are fully aware of the implications of increasing numbers of children in care in particular for Council finances.

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.

9.5 This report discusses in detail findings in relation to the quality of our services to children in care.

10. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

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

10.1 Ofsted Inspection of Children's Social Care Services Peterborough City Council

11. APPENDICES

11.1 Appendix 1: Ofsted Inspection of Children's Services Peterborough City Council

11.2 Appendix 2: Charts to support the narrative within the Service Director section of this report.