

CHILDREN AND EDUCATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE	AGENDA ITEM No. 8
18 JULY 2019	PUBLIC REPORT

Report of:	Lou Williams, Service Director, Children and Safeguarding	
Cabinet Member(s) responsible:	Councillor Lynne Ayres , Cabinet Member for Children’s Services and Education, Skills and University	
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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 content of the report in relation to performance by children’s social care and actions being taken to maintain and improve this in certain areas; 2. Notes the information relating to oversight by Ofsted through the Inspection of Local Authority Children’s Services framework; 3. Notes the work of the newly appointed Cabinet Member for Children’s Services in carrying out her duties. 	

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 key performance measures within children’s services, and updates Committee on recent Ofsted oversight and the 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 an overview of relevant performance monitoring of children’s services, before briefly discussing likely Ofsted oversight of Children’s Services over the coming months, before concluding by providing an introduction to the Committee by the new Lead Member and portfolio holder.

Service Director Report

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

- 4.3. Charts are referred to throughout this section; these can be found in Appendix 1 to this report.

Early Help, Enquiries, referrals and the timeliness of assessments

- 4.4. Members will note that the appearance of the various charts at appendix 1 has changed in the time since the last Service Director report. This reflects changes in the reporting systems in place, as well as recent updates to the recording system used, LiquidLogic. The reporting available has also changed slightly. This, together with the changes implemented in the Integrated Front Door means that the way we count referrals and therefore also re-referrals has changed, making comparison with reporting over the last 12 months difficult.

- 4.5. The new Integrated Front Door system, operated jointly with Cambridgeshire and including a new model of Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub or MASH, has been subject to one inspection and one in-depth review since it became operational in December 2018. Ofsted looked at the new model closely as part of the Ofsted inspection of children’s services in Cambridgeshire in January 2019, and assessed the new approach to be highly effective, despite only having recently been established at the time of the inspection.

- 4.6. More recently, the arrangements have been scrutinised further as part of the Department for Education led diagnostic test relating to the provision of funding to develop Family Safeguarding in Cambridgeshire. This testing included an in-depth assessment of the whole Integrated Front Door, including the MASH, and again found that the arrangements across the two authorities were effective.

- 4.7. Chart 1 shows the position with respect to the number of early help assessments initiated by month. Early Help in Peterborough is an area of strength, with a relatively high number of children and young people receiving support through a combination of additional support through their schools or community health services, supported where needed by commissioned services.

- 4.8. Early Help Assessments are completed by practitioners working with the family in partnership with the parents and the child. They help to identify needs, and enable services and support to be provided. This is also the mechanism by which we deliver our Connecting Families approach – the local name for the Government’s Troubled Families programme. Peterborough has a very good record in evidencing sustained improvements in outcomes for families supported through this approach, with current performance within the top 10% nationally.

- 4.9. Chart 2 shows the number of enquiries and the proportion of these progressing to a referral. We continue to receive high numbers of enquiries about children, and the percentage of these that we treat as referrals, which means that we make further enquiries about before deciding whether

or not to complete an assessment of need is also higher than we think should be the case. It is important to note that the arrangements relating to the front door remain relatively new, with the guidance to the contact centre on how to treat enquiries – whether to pass them through to children’s social care, the MASH or to early help – continuing to be revised as the system beds in. Changes to the way in which LiquidLogic is reporting performance information as we upgrade the system means that data may not be fully accurate until July 2019. This combination of factors means that what we are seeing at the moment may not be reflective of long term trends.

- 4.10. It is important, however that we continue to work with partners to reduce the number of enquiries about children, as we continue to use resources to determine that a significant proportion are more appropriately supported by early help services. The Local Safeguarding Children Board continues to support practice in this area by offering regular multi-agency training on how best to access support services for children and young people.
- 4.11. Chart 3 shows the position in relation to the proportion of referrals that are repeat referrals within the last 12 months. This has been higher than we would expect, although it has improved in the last month. At least some of the reason behind higher rates of re-referrals is likely to have been the consequences of changes in the way we have operated the front door, and changes in the LiquidLogic system. It is an area that will be kept under close monitoring as where re-referral rates are too high, this 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 re-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.
- 4.12. Chart 4 shows the position with respect to the timeliness of single assessments. Performance in this area has suffered over recent weeks because of an increasing issue with vacancies within our assessment teams. We have sought to address this by seeking temporary agreement from the eastern region to pay a higher rate for agency social workers than the agreed eastern region rate, but with only limited success.
- 4.13. Many authorities struggle to achieve a higher rate than around 80% of single assessments being completed in time, but we should be completing a considerably larger amount than just under 60% within the target 45 working days. In addition to the general staffing shortage affecting this performance, we have also been one team manager down in the assessment service, which has also had an impact. We have appointed permanently to that vacant role, however, and we expect our performance to improve in this area over coming months.

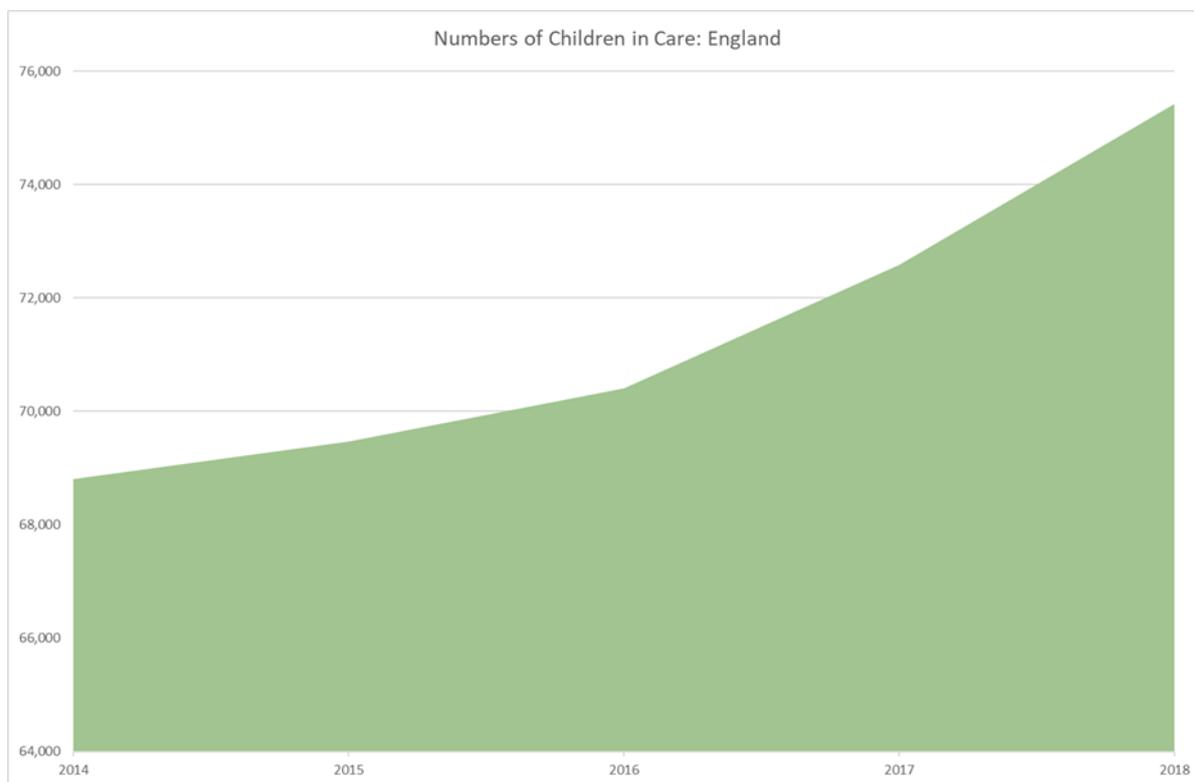
Safeguarding and Child Protection

- 4.14. Chart 5 shows the number of children subject to child protection plans. This indicator is showing good progress, with a generally lower number of children subject to child protection plans than the equivalent rate among our statistical neighbours. This is an expected result of the Family Safeguarding approach in children’s services in the City. It means that only those children at most significant risk are subject to a child protection plan, as should be the case. Children subject to child protection plans benefit from the Family Safeguarding model, where our multi-disciplinary teams work with parents on issues they commonly face, including lower level mental health or emotional wellbeing issues, substance or alcohol difficulties and/or domestic abuse.
- 4.15. 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 6 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, with no children have been subject to a child protection plan for longer than two years. Of the 217 children subject to child protection plans as of the end of October 2018, only 12 have been subject to a plan for longer than 12 months and none for longer than two years, which is very good performance

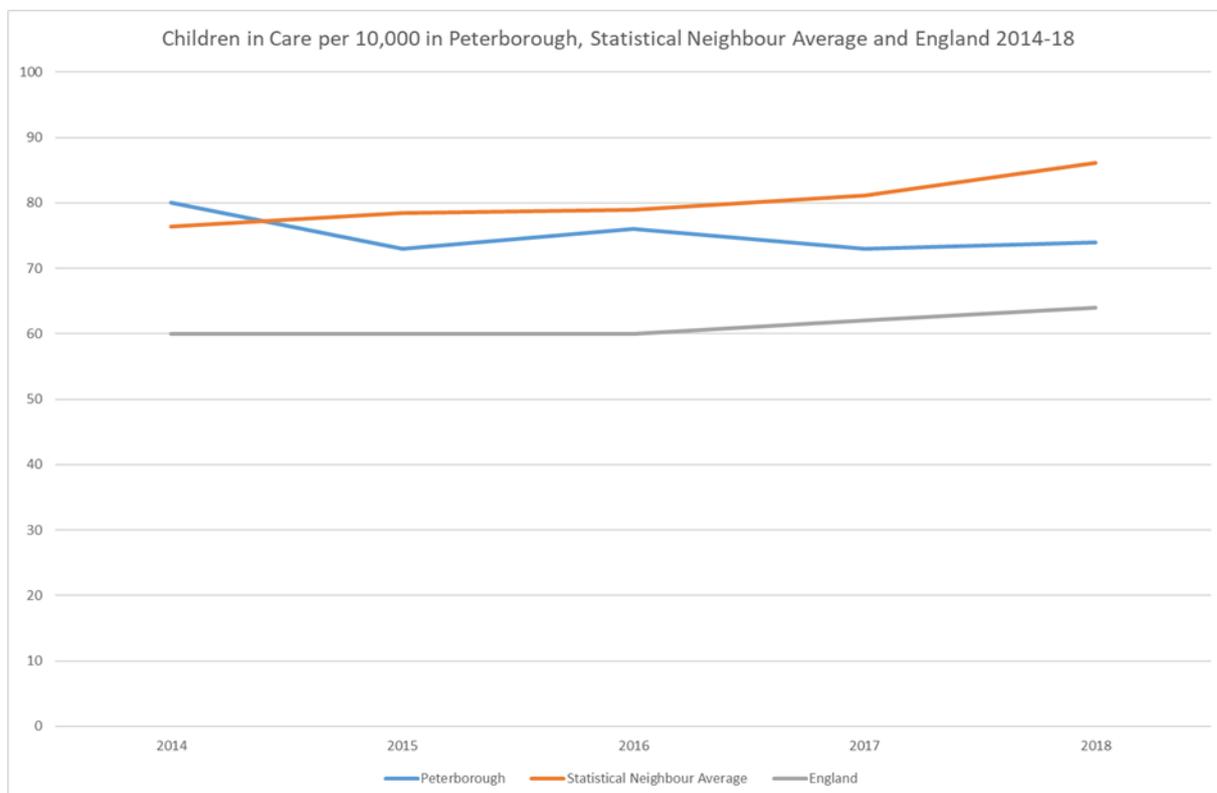
- 4.16. Any child subject to a plan for 9 months is automatically reviewed by a senior manager. Legal planning meetings are automatically considered where child protection plans have been in place for 12 months or more. It is this robust approach to oversight of children subject to child protection plans that makes a significant contribution to keeping the overall numbers of children subject to plans low compared with similar authorities and authorities nationally.
- 4.17. Chart 7 shows the timeliness of visits to children who are subject to child protection plans. A stretch target is in place for this indicator of 98%. A small number of visits will always not take place as planned for a number of reasons. Some visits will not take place because families are not available for genuine reasons, while the occasional visit will not take place because the social worker is off sick or has had to reorganise their diary at short notice because of other urgent matters arising. Families may also be deliberately avoiding visits. These variables make achieving more than 98% of visits on time a challenge, although this was achieved in April, where 99% of visits took place.
- 4.18. Most recent performance is 92%, which is a little disappointing, and managers continue to ensure close scrutiny of practice in this area. Nevertheless, 92% of visits taking place on time means that visits relating to only 7 children were not carried out in time.
- 4.19. Managers and leaders of the service receive a weekly report detailing visits that have not taken place and the reasons why. Clearly, where this is because families are deliberately avoiding visits, we will consider the need to take further action that might include escalation into care or pre-proceedings.

Children in care

- 4.20. Nationally, numbers of children have been rising steadily over the last two years, as shown by the graph below:



- 4.21. This national increase is also reflected in the numbers of children in care among our statistical neighbours, as illustrated by the chart below:



- 4.22. In the above chart, the average rate of children in care per 10,000 among our statistical neighbours was 87 per 10,000, compared with our current rate of 75 per 10,000, which is equivalent to 374 children and young people in care, as shown in chart 8 of Appendix 1.
- 4.23. In contrast to the national and statistical neighbour rate, the rate of children in care per 10,000 in Peterborough has essentially remained steady over the last two years, which we associate with the development and implementation of the Family Safeguarding approach in the City. To put this into context, if we were looking after the same number of children as the average of our statistical neighbours do, we would have 430 children and young people in care – more than 50 more than our current numbers.
- 4.24. The national increase in numbers in care continues to have an impact on placement availability for children and young people in care, however. This means that it is more difficult to identify fostering placements in the independent sector, which in turn means that there is a greater likelihood of more children and young people being placed in residential placements. We do all we can to avoid this since, for most children and young people, foster care is associated with the best longer term outcomes. Residential placements are also very high cost, costing at least £3,000 per week and often significantly more.
- 4.25. Chart 9 shows placement stability for children in care. Our performance in this area, while better than statistical neighbour and England average, is not as good as our local target. Children will generally do best when they have a low number of placement moves, which is why we pay attention to this indicator. The general shortage of placements is likely to be a contributing factor here. This is because we always try to match what we know about the child or young person to the characteristics of the available placements, and make a decision based on which of the available placements is the closest to what we think will best suit the child. This of course presupposes that there is a choice; the shortage of placements means that this is not always the case.
- 4.26. Chart 10 shows the percentage of visits carried out to children in care in time. We have a stretch target of 98% for this indicator. Our most recent performance is 93%, which is a little disappointing. Managers within the service are working hard to support staff to improve performance in this area and, as is the case with visits to children subject to child protection plans, achieving 98% or above is very challenging.

- 4.27. Chart 11 shows our performance in relation to ensuring that children and young people in care receive an annual health assessment. Our performance is good when compared to other local authorities, even if it is a little below the target of 93% at 88%. We are working with partners to do our best to improve this further so that our overall performance this year is in line with our target. Achieving a higher rate than around 93% becomes very difficult since some older young people in care decline annual health assessments, affecting overall performance.
- 4.28. Chart 12 shows the percentage of children and young people in care who have had dental checks, which is also below target at 76%. This is an indicator that relies on placement providers informing us that the dental check has been carried out, and as such is one that can lag at the beginning of the financial year. Nevertheless, we do need to see this improve and managers and staff are working to improve performance.
- 4.29. Chart 13 shows the percentage of eligible children and young people in care who have a Personal Education Plan. Performance in this area is consistently good, at 100%. This reflects a successful and close working relationship between social workers in the children in care service and colleagues in the virtual school.

Recruitment Challenges

- 4.30. As noted elsewhere in this report, we have been struggling to fill vacancies across the service, with our assessment teams being particularly affected. This is, however, an issue that is also affecting our Family Safeguarding and corporate parenting services, although in the latter case, this has been more about covering maternity leave than permanent vacancies.
- 4.31. Recruiting and retaining experienced qualified staff is a challenge nationally and regionally, and so Peterborough is not alone in this position. This does not lessen the local impact, however.
- 4.32. We have been working hard to manage the impact of vacancies. So far we have mostly managed to contain caseloads within target levels and, for example, the average caseload for qualified social workers across the service in mid-June was 19, just below the overall target of 20. This is an average figure, however, meaning that some social workers have higher caseloads than this. Caseloads in assessment teams have also been higher as a result of the difficulties in covering vacancies.
- 4.33. This recruitment challenges explains in part why some areas of performance are currently slightly below our targets, and illustrates the importance of attracting and retaining staff.
- 4.34. The eastern region authorities have an agreement in place that caps the rate of pay for locum social workers. This is an important framework as it means that agencies can no longer play one authority off against another, resulting in pay inflation. A challenge for Peterborough is, however, that we are on the very edge of the Eastern Region, and a number of authorities that are geographically close to or border us are not part of the Eastern Region, which means that they can offer higher rates.
- 4.35. The clear solution is to do all we can to increase our recruitment of experienced qualified social workers, reducing our reliance on agency social workers. In partnership with Cambridgeshire, we are about to launch an innovative recruitment campaign, and we will be assessing the impact in terms of recruitment.
- 4.36. In terms of pay for permanent staff, Peterborough is competitive, and we have a retention bonus scheme for all qualified social workers and team managers. Alongside measuring the impact of the recruitment scheme, however, we will also review whether there are any other steps we can take to attract experienced staff to the authority.

LiquidLogic upgrade

- 4.37. LiquidLogic is the system used in Peterborough to complete the case recording relating to children open to early help and to children's social care, and has been in place for over 5 years now. It is currently going through a significant upgrade, again in partnership with Cambridgeshire County

Council, which is about to move to the same system. This has brought some significant improvements to the way the system operates, making it easier and quicker for social workers to use.

- 4.38. This is very positive as the system has not had any root and branch updates since it was initially installed, meaning that it had become a little outdated. Simplifying its use for social workers meanwhile, means that they spend less time recording their work with children and families.

Peterborough Annual Conversation

- 4.39. Under the Ofsted 'Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services' [ILACS] inspection framework, local Ofsted inspectors visit authorities once a year to hear from senior officers about the development of children's services, any areas where there is good progress, and any areas where there are emerging challenges. This is called the 'annual conversation'.

- 4.40. Inspectors use this meeting to discuss with local authorities what might be helpful in terms of future inspections. Peterborough had its most recent full inspection in July 2018, with the outcome of Good overall. We should not now receive a further full graded inspection until 2021, but under the ILACS framework, inspectors seek to undertake some form of inspection activity once a year. This is usually in the form of a focused visit, looking in detail at a particular part of the service over the period of a two to three day visit. This means that it is likely that we will have some form of inspection activity in children's services before the end of the year.

- 4.41. The annual conversation took place on the 8th of July – after the time of preparing this report. A verbal update will be available at the scrutiny meeting, however.

4.42. Portfolio Report: Cabinet Member for Children's Services

- 4.43. This is of course my first report to Scrutiny Committee since I have taken on the role of Cabinet Member for children's services alongside my existing portfolio of responsibility for education services.

- 4.44. There are clear links between children's and education services, so it makes sense for me to have strategic oversight of both, and I am very excited to have this new opportunity. It is, however, a large portfolio and so I am grateful to have the support of a Cabinet Adviser, Councillor Bashir, who will assist me in my work. Councillor Bashir will focus on the experience and progress of children in care and young people leaving care.

- 4.45. There is a lot for me to learn about the way in which children's services operate, and I am currently receiving an in-depth induction programme which includes visiting a number of teams so that I can speak to staff and hear their views on the strengths of the service, and areas that they believe could be improved.

- 4.46. I have been hugely impressed by the officers I have met to date; all are clearly very committed to doing all they can to safeguard vulnerable children and young people in often highly complex and difficult situations.

- 4.47. I am looking forward to attending a variety of partnership events as part of my new role including, for example, the Safeguarding Children Board. I am very keen to ensure that I promote the role of the broader partnership in supporting children and young people. We are very fortunate in Peterborough to have a whole network of partners all of whom support children, young people, and their families at an early help level and contribute to safeguarding children who are open to children's social care as children in need or children in need of protection. We could not be as successful as we are here in children's services without the commitment of the broader partnership.

- 4.48. I will report in more detail about my activities and priorities in the next of these reports, once I have had the opportunity to become better acquainted with the service and the children, young people and families it works with.

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 on-going work to ensure that children's services are delivering the best possible outcomes to vulnerable children and young people in the City;
- Notes the challenges currently being experienced in terms of recruitment, and the actions being taken to seek to address these.

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 It is important therefore that this scrutiny has the opportunity to regularly review key performance indicators relating to the delivery of children's services

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.

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