

CHILDREN AND EDUCATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE	AGENDA ITEM No. 6
5 MARCH 2020	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	
Contact Officer(s):	Lou Williams	Tel. 01733 864139

SERVICE DIRECTOR REPORT FOR CHILDREN AND SAFEGUARDING AND PORTFOLIO HOLDER PROGRESS REPORT

RECOMMENDATIONS	
FROM: Service Director, Children and Safeguarding	Deadline date: <i>n/a</i>

It is recommended that the Children and Education Scrutiny Committee:

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 brief update in relation to the transfer of the Permanency Service back to the Local Authority;
3. Notes the information relating to oversight by Ofsted through the Inspection of Local Authority Children’s Services framework;
4. Notes the work of the 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, provides information relating to the transfer of the Permanency Service into the Local Authority, and updates Committee on likely future 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

Service Director Report

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

- 4.3. A number of changes in the reporting system have taken place over the last 12 months, including a move to a fully updated version of LiquidLogic. The reporting available has changed slightly, particularly in relation to performance information at the front door. This, together with other 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. The effect of these changes will have worked through over the next 12 months.
- 4.4. 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.
- 4.5. 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.
- 4.6. Chart 1 shows a steadily increasing number of Early Help assessments being completed over the autumn term, with a steep drop in December. This reflects the fact that the majority of these assessments are completed by our schools.
- 4.7. 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.
- 4.8. With the support of the Safeguarding Children Board, we have been leading efforts to work with partners to reduce the number of contacts about children. There is an understandable concern among our partners to report things to us that they think may reflect a concern about a child. The consequence of this is, however, that we spend more and more of our precious resources sifting through information about children, looking for indications of an individual child who is at risk of significant harm.
- 4.9. Because there are timescales for decision making in place under Working Together, the volume of referrals means that more will move through to an assessment of needs by Children's Social Care. A high proportion of these assessments result in either a recommendation of a step down

to Early Help or no further action. Not only is this a further drain on our resources as our social workers are completing assessments that do not result in the child progressing further into the system, but research indicates that the experience of a social work assessment by families reduces the likelihood of them engaging in other support services in future. We therefore need to get this right in order to use our resources more efficiently as well as in order to improve outcomes for children and young people.

- 4.10. Chart 3 shows the position in relation to the proportion of referrals that are repeat referrals within the last 12 months. This reported position is high, and investigations suggest that there is a system reporting issue that has emerged since we moved to the new model of the front door teams making recommendations to the assessment teams about whether or not a child should progress to assessment, as opposed to making a decision about this. Where an assessment team manager subsequently decides that an assessment is not required, it appears that the system counts this event as a referral, whereas it should continue to be regarded as a contact. Should the child progress through to a referral at any time in the following 12 months, the system will then count this as a re-referral, rather than as a referral. This technical issue was being explored as at the time of preparing this report for committee.
- 4.11. Chart 4 shows the position with respect to the timeliness of single assessments. Performance in this area suffered during the summer months. This was directly related to the impact of social worker vacancies in our assessment teams during this period. While we have largely addressed this through the employment of agency social workers above the agreed Eastern Region hourly rate [for which we have permission], the annual figure is based on a rolling 12month performance and so will take time to show improvements. The monthly figures show a sustained improvement over recent months, with the December figure of 82.6% reflecting generally good performance, even if still below our stretch target. For comparison, our statistical neighbour average performance for 2018/19 was 79% and the England average 83%.

Safeguarding and Child Protection

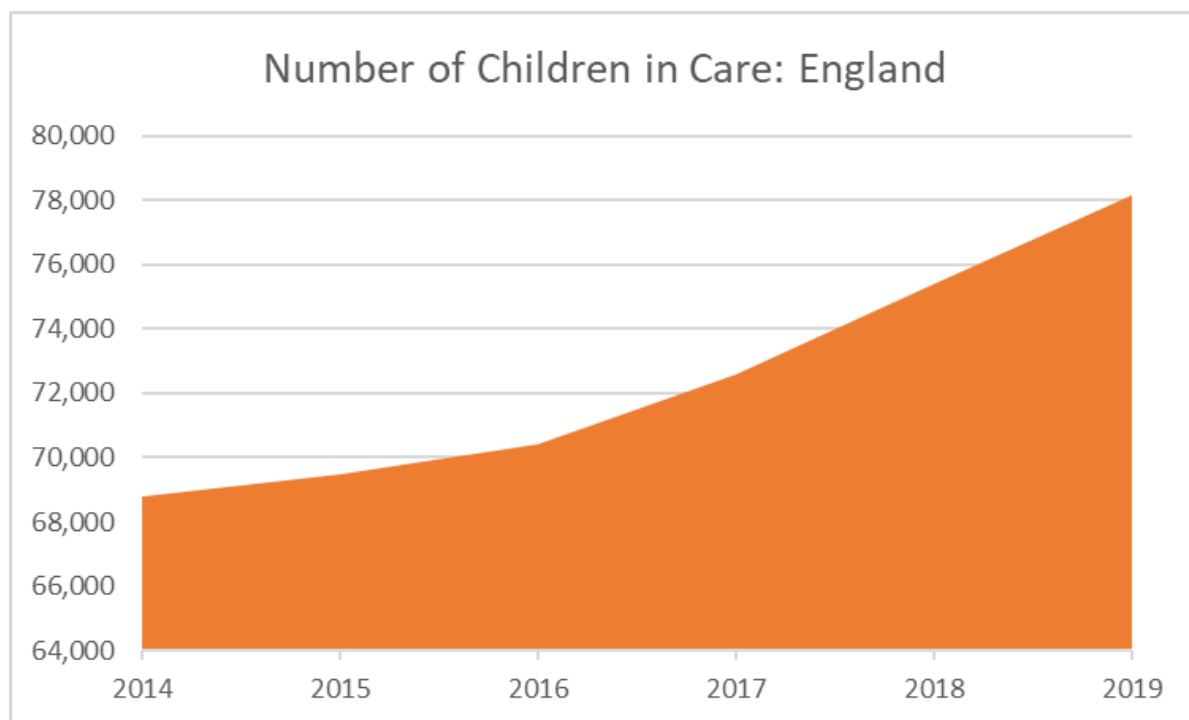
- 4.12. Chart 5 shows the number of children subject to child protection plans. This indicator continues to show good progress, with generally fewer children subject to child protection plans than the equivalent rate among our statistical neighbours. This is an expected result of the Family Safeguarding approach in Children's Services in the City. Children subject to both child in need and 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.
- 4.13. The Family Safeguarding approach is enabling families to achieve sustainable improvements more quickly, which in turn means that fewer need to progress to child protection plans. This is clearly good for families and children but is also good for us and for our partners: Child protection plans are high-cost interventions for all concerned.
- 4.14. Where children do need to become subject to child protection plans, these 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, and we frequently have no children subject to a child protection plan for two years or more. The December data is showing 5 children subject to plans for two years or more; this number includes a sibling group of 4. Supervision orders have been made in respect of these children and the likelihood is that they will be stepped down to child in need plans at the next review, which is scheduled for March 2020.
- 4.15. 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.

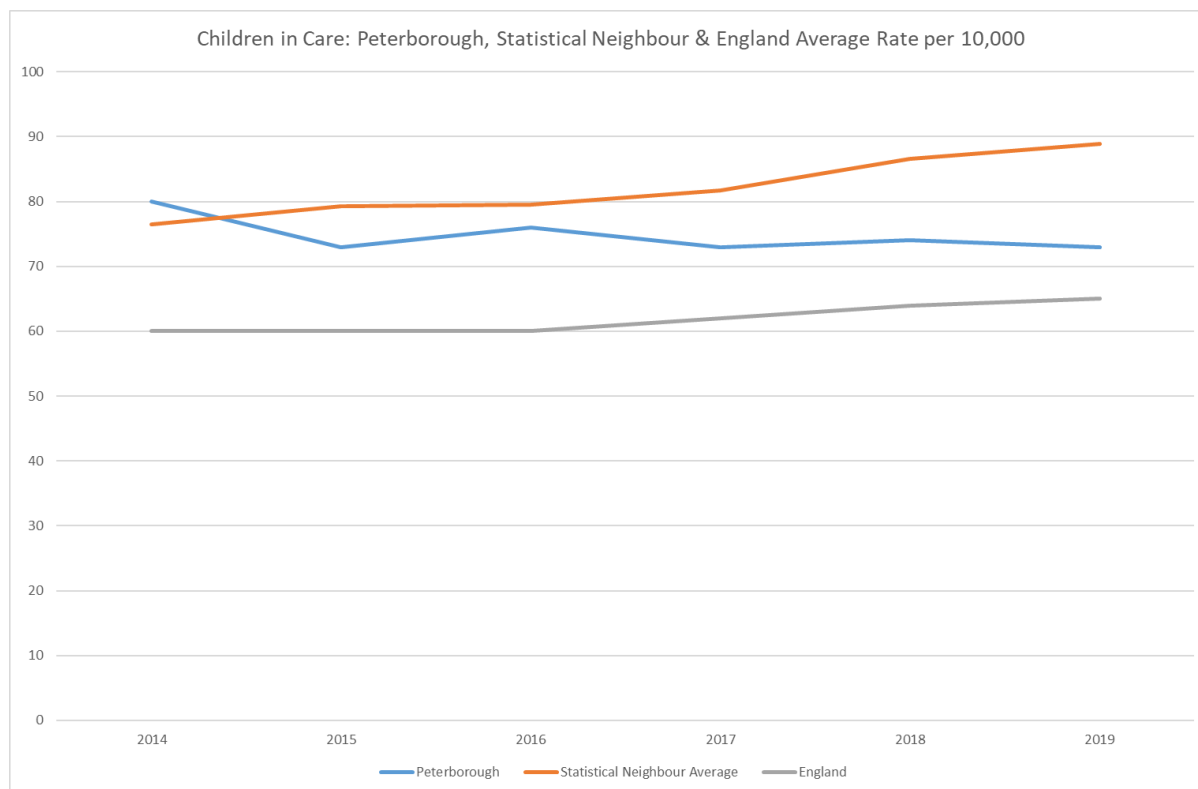
- 4.16. Chart 7 shows the timeliness of visits to children who are subject to child protection plans. A stretch target is in place for this indicator of 98%. A small number of visits will always not take place as planned for a number of reasons. Some visits will not take place because families are not 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.
- 4.17. These variables make achieving more than 98% of visits on time a challenge, and the achievement of 100% in November is exceptional performance. The figure for December has dropped back to 85%, but this figure is affected by the Xmas shutdown. Managers maintain a very close focus on this indicator, and we are confident that performance will improve as we move past the effects of the Xmas period.
- 4.18. Importantly, managers and leaders of the service receive a weekly report detailing visits that have not taken place and the reasons why. 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

- 4.19. Nationally, numbers of children have been rising rapidly over the last three years, as shown by the graph below:



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



- 4.21. The chart shows that local performance in relation to numbers coming into care continues to be very good, with an increasing divergence from both national and statistical neighbour performance. Reduced numbers of children in care was a direct result of the development and implementation of the Family Safeguarding model in Hertfordshire, and this experience has been repeated in Peterborough.
- 4.22. In the above chart, the average rate of children in care per 10,000 among our statistical neighbours was 89 per 10,000, compared with our current rate of 73 per 10,000, which is equivalent to 375 children and young people in care, as shown in chart 8 of Appendix 1.
- 4.23. Were Peterborough numbers in care to be in line with the average of our statistical neighbours, we would now have 455 children and young people in care; 80 more than our current number. The full year equivalent cost of looking after 80 more children and young people would be at least £3.5M in placement costs alone.¹ Actual costs would be higher, since we would require more social workers, and other staff associated with looking after children and young people. The annual additional staffing cost of the Family Safeguarding model is in the region of £800,000, which is a very good additional investment financially, as well as in relation to improved outcomes for children and young people.
- 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 is generally good, meaning that most children in our care are placed in stable homes and placements. Children will generally do best when they have a low number of placement moves, which is why

¹ Based on a weekly placement cost of £850 per week – the average cost of an Independent Fostering Agency placement.

we pay attention to this indicator. Our performance is consistently better than both the England average and the average of the performance of our statistical neighbours.

- 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 94%, below the very good November performance, but likely to have been affected by Christmas. As is the case with visits to children subject to child protection plans, achieving the target of 98% or above is very challenging as there will always be unavoidable reasons for visits not taking place including., for example, a social worker being unwell.
- 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 91.5%. 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 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 below target at 77%. 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 tends to catch up and improve towards the end 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. We continue to experience significant difficulties in recruiting permanent experienced social workers. There is also a shortage of experienced social workers in the agency or locum market, making filling vacancies on a temporary basis also a challenge. The impact of this difficulty has been exacerbated by some incidence of long term sickness and a number of people on maternity leave.
- 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. At the time of preparing this report, average caseloads for qualified social workers have been maintained at below 20 across the service. This is an average figure, however, meaning that some social workers have higher caseloads than this.
- 4.33. 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, which used to result in significant 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.
- 4.34. 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 aim to launch a new recruitment campaign during February 2020. We will measure the impact of this campaign and I will report outcomes to this committee as information becomes available.
- 4.35. 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.

Permanency Service and Regional Adoption Arrangements

- 4.36. As was reported to Members at the September 2019 Children and Education Scrutiny Committee, TACT exercised the right to serve notice of their intention to cease operation of the Permanency Service earlier in 2019. The service subsequently transferred back to the Local Authority as of the end of October 2019.
- 4.37. All staff employed by TACT returned to the Local Authority under TUPE arrangements. The registration of foster carers can only transfer once a report has been presented to the fostering panel and the panel agrees to the transfer of the registration. At the time of preparing this report, panels were in the process of being organised, and the transfer of foster carer registrations was about to commence.
- 4.38. While this was clearly not expected given that the contract to operate the service was for a 10 year period from 2017, we are working to ensure that the impact of the change is minimal as far as our staff, carers and, most importantly, children and young people, are concerned.
- 4.39. Morale is generally good, and as an authority we remain committed to ensuring that the positive changes made by TACT, particularly in respect to the quality of support and training given to foster carers, are maintained.
- 4.40. The process of transfer is not yet complete, and it is not therefore appropriate to go into further detail about the circumstances leading to the transfer of the Permanency Service back to the Local Authority at the present time. We will share learning as appropriate once we are able to do so.
- 4.41. This change has also resulted in the need for us to amend our original proposals in relation to the development of a Regional Adoption Agency.
- 4.42. Government expects all local authorities to develop regional arrangements in relation to their adoption service by the end of the calendar year 2020. We had originally intended to explore the development of a Regional Adoption Agency in partnership with Cambridgeshire, to be delivered by a voluntary sector adoption agency. Since this is no longer possible, Peterborough City and Cambridgeshire County Councils have obtained agreement from the Department for Education to develop a Regional Adoption Agency that will be hosted by Cambridgeshire County Council on behalf of us both.
- 4.43. The Department for Education is happy to support this approach and is likely to provide a limited amount of funding to help to support the development of the Regional Adoption Agency.
- 4.44. Regional Adoption Agencies are intended to raise the profile of adoption locally and nationally, while helping to improve outcomes for children and increase efficiency.

Peterborough Annual Conversation

- 4.45. 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'.
- 4.46. 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.

- 4.47. At the time of preparing this report, we had yet to hear from Ofsted when they would want to undertake our annual conversation. Following this, it is likely that there will be some form of inspection activity – most likely in the form of a focused visit. Focussed visits look in detail at a particular part of the service over the period of a two to three day visit. I will provide a verbal update at the scrutiny meeting on any developments.
- 4.48. **Portfolio Report: Cabinet Member for Children’s Services**
- 4.49. Together with my Cabinet Adviser, I have been undertaking a significant number of meetings with teams, as well as attending a range of both formal and informal meetings. These are helping us to understand in detail how Children’s Services work to improve outcomes for vulnerable children and young people.
- 4.50. One formal meeting I attended was a review child protection case conference. I was able to see how the Family Safeguarding approach supported a young family who had been struggling to meet the needs of their new-born child. The meeting was very well attended by representatives from partner agencies, and it was so good to see how the family had made a great deal of positive progress over the preceding three months – so much so that the conference recommended that the child should no longer be subject to a child protection plan.
- 4.51. Experiences such as these have really brought home to me the importance of the work of the service in protecting sometimes very young and very vulnerable children and young people. In this particular case, without the support of social workers and others including midwifery and health visiting services, the outcome could have been very different.
- 4.52. I have been hugely impressed by the officers I have met to date; all of whom are clearly very committed to doing all they can to safeguard vulnerable children and young people in often highly complex and difficult situations.
- 4.53. I am also now attending the Safeguarding Children Board, which means that I am developing a really good understanding of how the broader partnership of organisations work together to safeguard children. The Board provides strategic oversight of safeguarding activities across both Peterborough and Cambridgeshire, which also means that we are in a good position to develop common processes where possible, while also learning from one another about what works best for children, young people and families.
- 4.54. I am really pleased to see the continuing impact of the Family Safeguarding model here in Peterborough and will be supporting the continued funding of this approach beyond the 2020/21 financial year. As this report evidences, the approach is clearly delivering very positive outcomes for children and young people, and more than funds itself by helping to keep our numbers in care at a significantly lower level than other similar authorities.

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 actions being taken to continue to ensure a smooth transfer of the Permanency Service functions into the Local Authority, and the continuing development of regional adoption agency arrangements with Cambridgeshire County Council;
 - 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 performs 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.

9.5 Carbon Impact Assessment

Neutral impact - this report relates to historic children's social care performance and is not recommending any changes to current processes and therefore the carbon impact is anticipated to be neutral.

10. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

10.1 *None*

11. APPENDICES

11.1 Appendix 1: Charts to support the narrative within the Service Director section of this report.

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