

CHILDREN AND EDUCATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE	AGENDA ITEM No. 5
8 SEPTEMBER 2022	PUBLIC REPORT

Report of:	Nicola Curley, Director of Children's Services	
Cabinet Member(s) responsible:	Councillor Lynne Ayres, Cabinet Member for Children's Services, and Education, Skills and University	
Contact Officer(s):	Nicola Curley, Director of Children's Services	Tel. 01733 864139

DIRECTOR REPORT: CHILDREN & SAFEGUARDING

RECOMMENDATIONS	
FROM: Director of Children's Services	Deadline date: N/A
<p>It is recommended that the Children and Education Scrutiny Committee:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Note and comment on the performance indicators and other measures of the effectiveness of Children's Services within the report; Note and endorse the updated children's workforce framework Note the publication of the Independent Review of Children's Social Care and the National Safeguarding Panel Report. Note the likely inspection activity by our regulator, Ofsted, over the next 4 months. 	

1. ORIGIN OF REPORT

1.1 This report was requested by the Children and Education Scrutiny Committee.

2. PURPOSE AND REASON FOR REPORT

2.1 This report provides Members with an overview of Children's Services performance in Peterborough, introduces the new children's workforce framework and provides information about the Early Help redesign in consultation with staff currently. The report provides an update on the budget issues for Children's Services within the wider corporate context and addresses preparation for the imminent Inspection by Ofsted of our Children's Services. Information is also provided in relation to the national reports published in relation to Children's Services – the Independent Review of Children's Social Care and the National Safeguarding Panel review into the deaths of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and Star Hobson.

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
- Social Care of Children.
 - Safeguarding; and
 - Children's Health.

3. TIMESCALES

Is this a Major Policy Item/Statutory Plan?	NO	If yes, date for Cabinet meeting	N/A
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4. BACKGROUND AND KEY ISSUES

Background

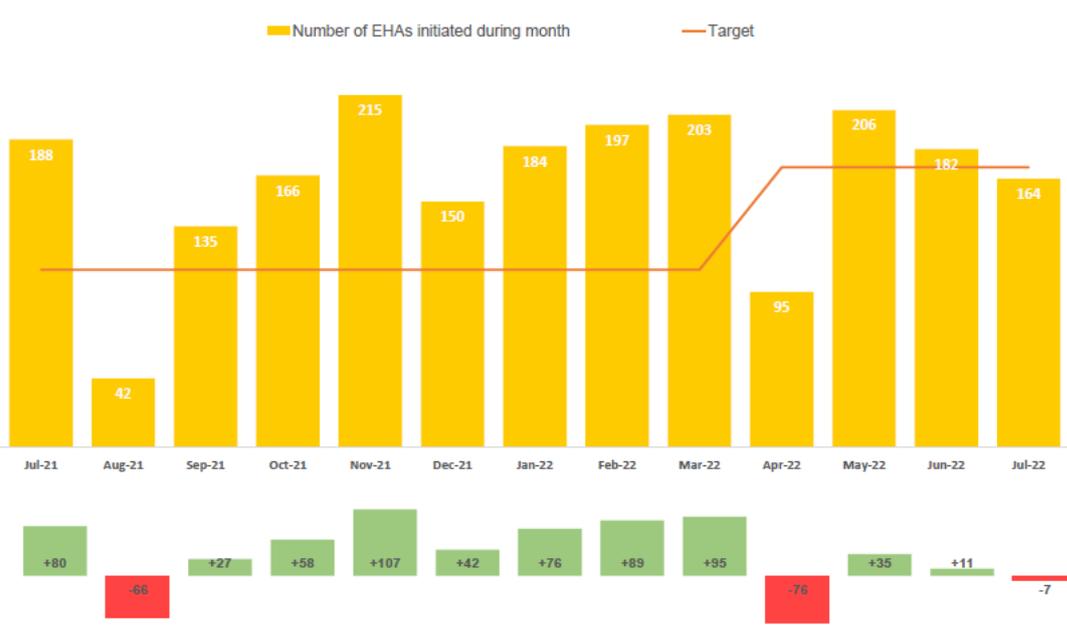
4.1. This report provides an overview of the performance of Children’s Services in Peterborough, starting with Early Help, the work of the Integrated Front Door, including the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub, services to children in need provided by the Family Safeguarding service, and finally considering corporate parenting services. All performance information is as at the end of July 2022, the most recent data available at the time this report was prepared.

4.2. The report also asks the Committee to endorse the new Children’s Workforce Framework, attached as an appendix to this report. The two national reports are also summarised for the Committee’s benefit and information is provided about the current savings targets.

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

4.4. This section provides information about the number of contacts and referrals into Children’s Services, how many of these progressed to assessments, and information about the number of children and young people who have an active Early Help assessment.

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



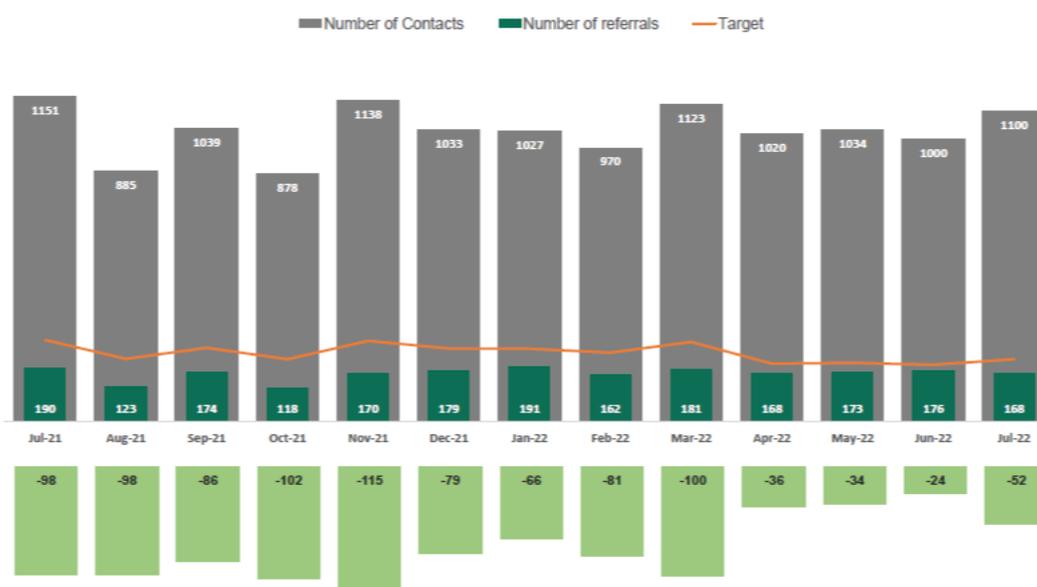
4.6. The number of Early Help Assessments initiated in July 2022 shows the usual decline we expect to see as we move into the summer holiday period as most Early Help assessments originate in schools. The number of EHAs per 10,000 children has decreased slightly but remains within range of the target set.

4.7. It is of note that we have seen a significant pattern over the last 3 months of Early Help assessments completed in relation to potential Autism Spectrum Disorder/ Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder diagnosis requests, which were over 50% in both May and June. We are aware that this is an area of concern for families and work is underway with both partners and our parent partnership groups to understand this increase in demand for assessment.

4.8. Many more children than the numbers shown in this chart are being supported at an Early Help level. Early Help assessments are completed where a child or young person has more complex needs such that they may require the additional support from two or more services.

4.9. Early Help services in Peterborough remain highly effective. Our Early Help strategy, Strong Families Strong Communities, required some level of redesign to bring our Early Help services together with Cambridgeshire and align both Authorities to be in the best position possible to take forward the Family Hubs initiative and the implementation of contextual safeguarding as a coordinated model to address issues of criminal exploitation, sexual exploitation, and significant mental health services are vital in ensuring that children, young people and families receive the support they need without their difficulties escalating to the point that support is needed from statutory Children's Services. We are also very pleased that Government has recognised the consistent effectiveness of our delivery of the Supporting Families programme and has offered us the opportunity to apply for Earned Autonomy. This status will mean that our grant will be guaranteed over the next 3 years and is very beneficial in enabling us to plan reliably for services for children in the medium term.

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



4.11. Our year-to-date performance in this area is that 16.5% of contacts proceed to referrals, which is a little below our target of 20%. Our performance is generally consistent in this area, which is positive considering the various contextual challenges at present.

4.12. We undertake regular dip-sampling of the decision as to whether a contact may indicate a need for further enquiries to be made and so become a referral; this audit process consistently shows that decision making in this area is consistent and appropriate. The lower conversion rate from contact to referral is therefore likely to be a continuation of pattern of other agencies giving us information about children and young people that we do not need.

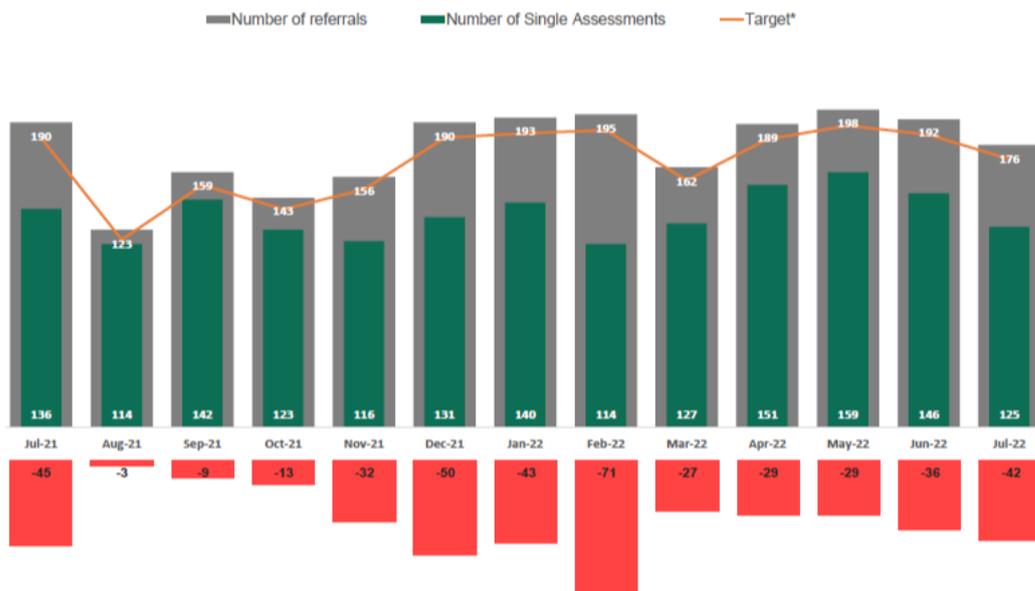
4.13. We continue to work with our partners in this area; many are understandably worried that by not passing on information about a child or young person, something may be missed, and a child may experience harm as a result. Receiving too many contacts also has its risks, however, since we need to sift through more information about more children which may make it more likely that we miss information about a child about whom we should be concerned.

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



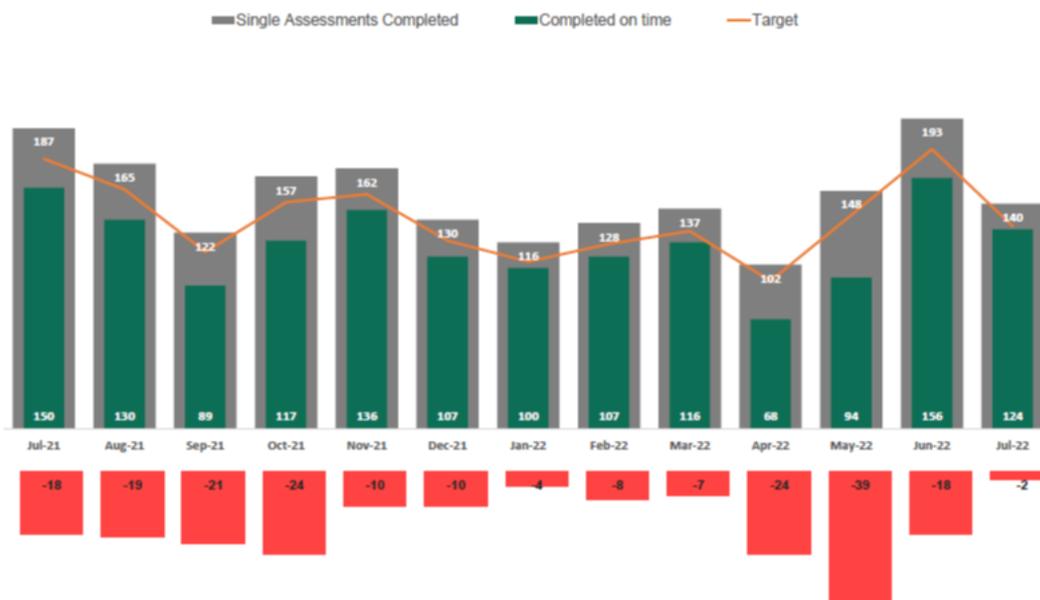
4.15. Our year-to-date performance is that 16.6% of referrals are re-referrals; this compares increasingly well with both national and statistical neighbour performance, which is 23%, and implies that we are making good decisions first time on most occasions. It is possible for a re-referral rate to be too low; this would indicate that the service is keeping cases open for too long. This would result in increasing caseloads for social workers, and families experiencing delays in the progression of care plans. There will be a dip-sample thematic audit of re-referrals in September 2022 to understand further any learning for MASH and the Assessment Teams to ensure children and families are receiving the right help at the right time.

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



4.17. This chart shows that fewer than the target of 95% of referrals progress to an assessment; this has been a consistent picture for some time. This is positive in that it means we are not progressing cases to assessment unnecessarily, but we do need to amend the performance target, and this will be addressed before the next Committee.

- 4.18. The chart below shows the proportion of single assessments completed within 45 working days. Our year-to-date performance is currently standing at 75.8%, which is below national performance of 84% and statistical neighbour performance of 86%.
- 4.19. Performance was affected by some staffing issues earlier in the year, and the loss of a Service Manager in the spring. It is worth noting, however, that performance in June was that of 80.8% assessments completed within timescale and in July, this increased again to 88.6%, so the service is now moving firmly in the right direction.

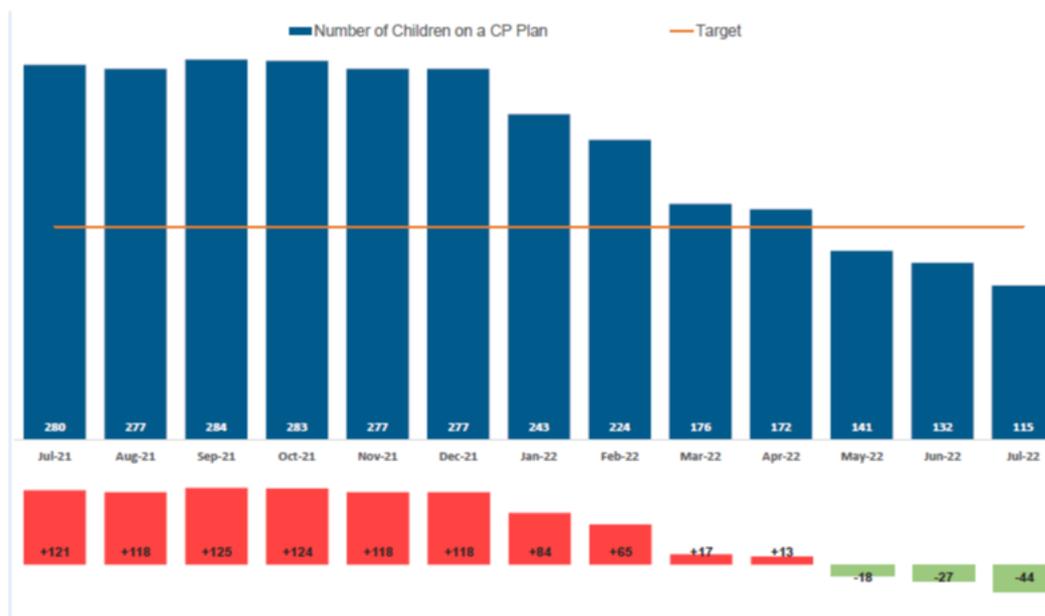


- 4.20. Audits of the quality of assessments show a generally good picture; they generally include a good analysis of risks and protective factors and develop effective plans to address identified needs. They make good use of information held by partner agencies. The lived experience of the child is mostly considered well, and the extent to which cultural competence is considered and included within plans for children is improving.
- 4.21. Overall, the picture that emerges from the Early Help service and the assessment area of the children's social care service is a positive one, despite some continuing issues around timeliness.

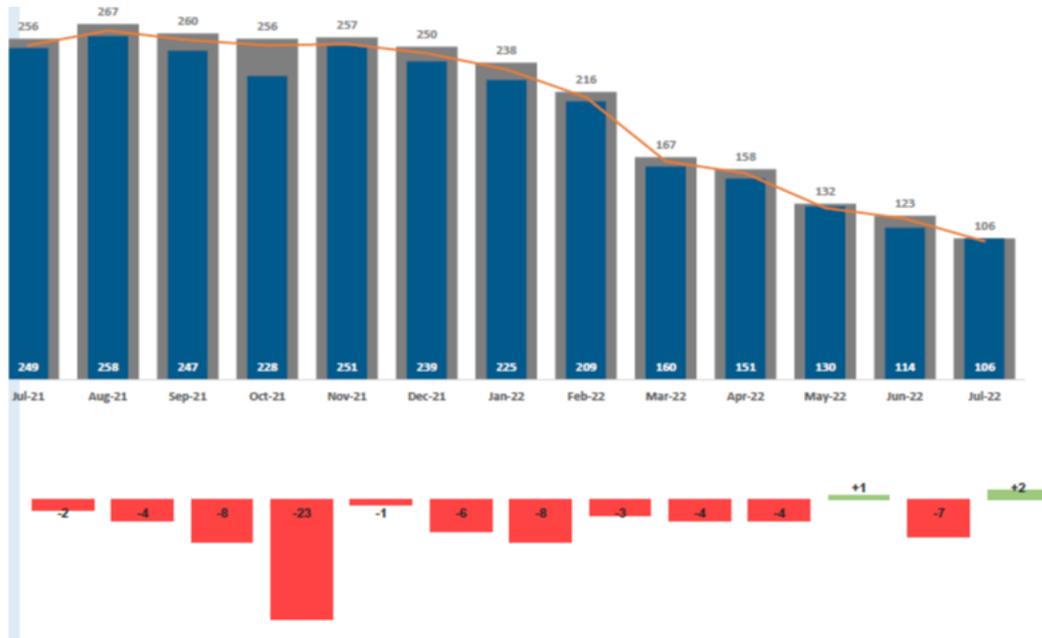
Family Safeguarding

- 4.22. Our Family Safeguarding teams work with children and young people in need and in need of protection, as identified by their child and family assessment. Where issues cannot be safely resolved for the child, this part of the service is also responsible for issuing care proceedings and/or seeking other legally permanent parenting options for the child.
- 4.23. The Family Safeguarding service consists of multi-disciplinary teams that include adult practitioners who work with parents who are struggling with domestic abuse in their relationship, substance or problematic alcohol misuse or mental and emotional health difficulties. The original pilots have now been expanded into one of 3 national rollout programmes under the banner of the Strong Families Supporting Children sponsored by the Department for Education. Peterborough is often asked to advise or support other Local Authorities when they are considering adopting the model and we are part of the national development programme led by Hertfordshire.
- 4.24. As noted in previous reports, Family Safeguarding is associated with better outcomes for our most vulnerable children and young people and the need to issue fewer care proceedings and so have lower numbers of children coming into care than would otherwise be the case.

- 4.25. Children living in the community who are subject to child protection plans are the children about whom we are most concerned. As noted in previous reports, this was an area where we had seen an impact from the Covid-19 pandemic and associated lockdowns. Children and young people were less visible to services during lockdowns, which resulted in some children being referred to our service later than they might otherwise have been, and after the risks they were facing had escalated.
- 4.26. Child Protection numbers had risen significantly in the lockdowns. As these concluded, numbers stabilised and then began to reduce significantly as can be seen in the chart below. Reassuringly, this reduction has not been accompanied by an increase in the numbers of children coming into care, suggesting that our Family Safeguarding model has continued to be effective in enabling our most vulnerable families make the changes they need in order to provide the stable and loving homes that their children need:



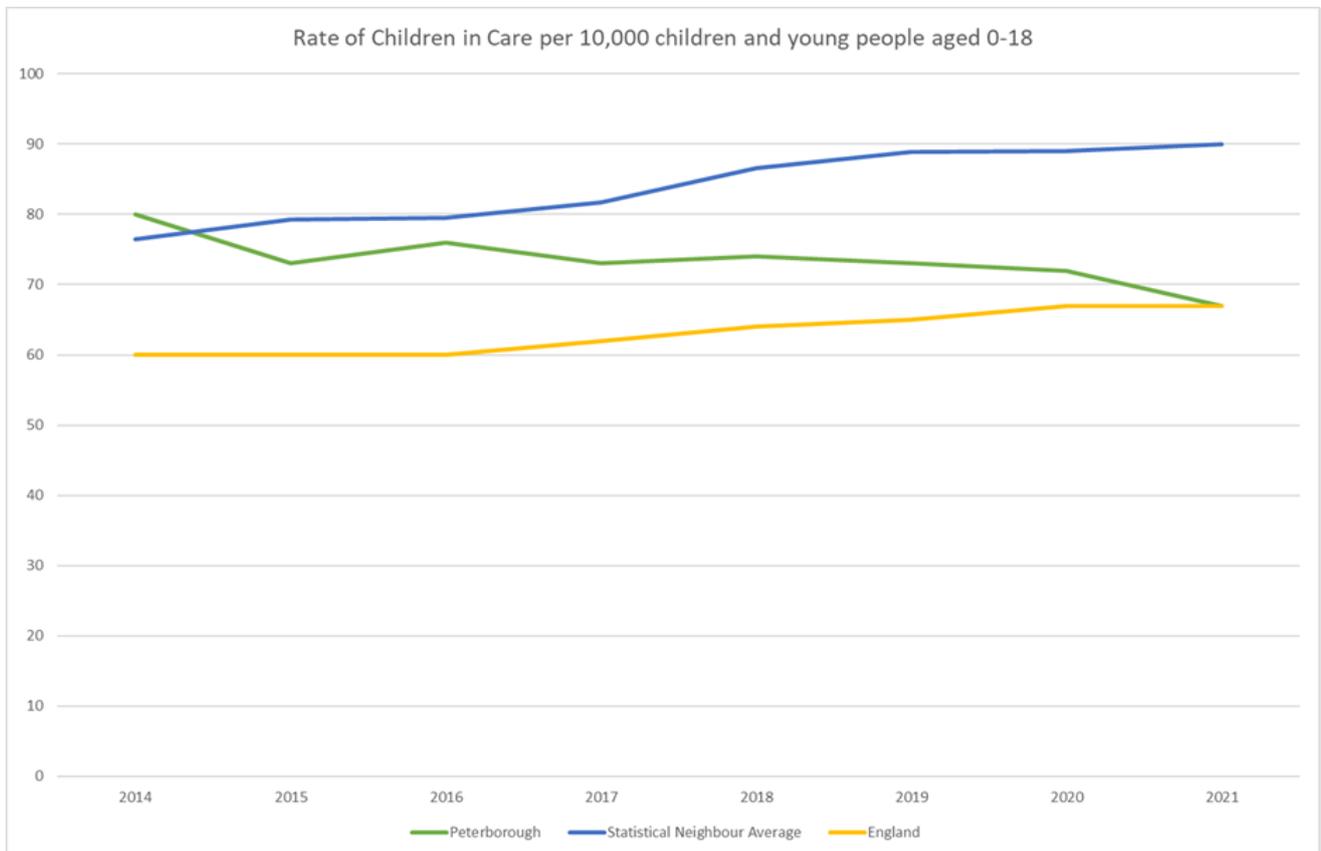
- 4.27. Prior to the pandemic, the number of children subject to a child protection plan was consistently below the 180 mark compared with 115 children as of the end of July 2022. This is a low figure and takes us to a rate of 21.9 per 10,000. This is significantly lower than our statistical neighbours, and indicates the success of the Family Safeguarding approach, which is associated with lower numbers of children on a child protection plan. Using Family Safeguarding means that we are able to prevent more children from reaching the 'in need of protection' threshold. We are conscious that this is a significant reduction in a relatively short period of time, and so we are undertaking additional auditing and dip-samples to ensure decision making is safe and consistent. We would expect to see a small rise in numbers again as we approach the autumn.
- 4.28. Other indicators of our performance in supporting good outcomes for children subject to child protection plans also remain positive; we currently have no children subject to a plan who have previously been subject to a plan in the last two years. This is important because where there are these levels of concerns about a child, then we should ensure that plans to safeguard them proceed without delay.
- 4.29. The chart below shows the proportion of visits to children subject to child protection plans that have been carried out in accordance with the required timescales:



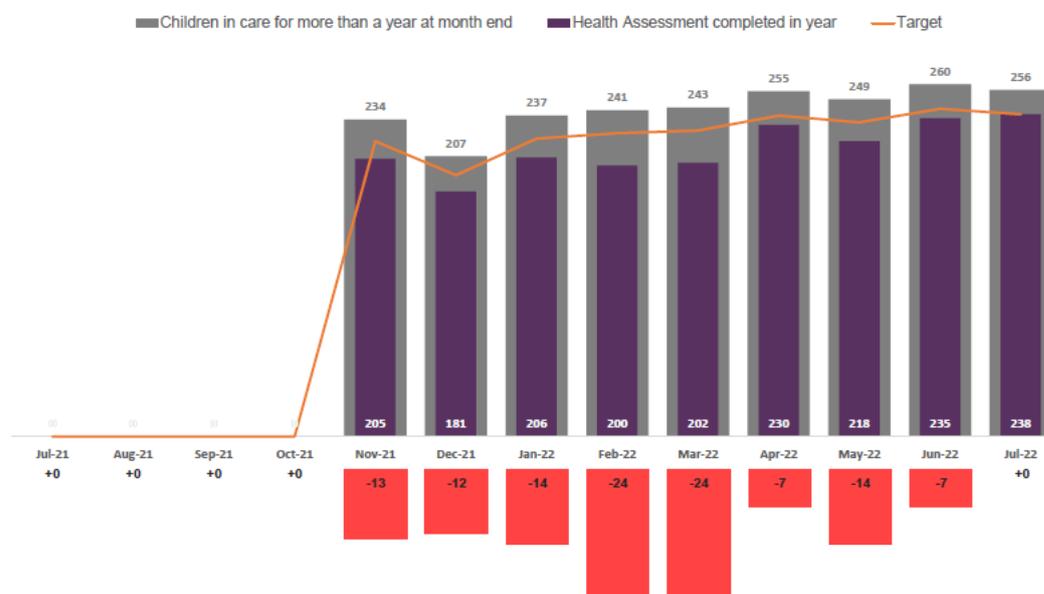
4.30. Current performance is 100% - this is excellent performance and becomes more possible as numbers reduce.

4.31. **Corporate Parenting**

4.32. The local authority continues to perform very well in relation to preventing children and young people coming into care and in ensuring that those who do need to come into care spend the minimum time in care before moving to permanent homes through adoption, Special Guardianship, or a return to the care of their parents. The following chart shows the relative performance of Peterborough against the average of our statistical neighbours and the England average:

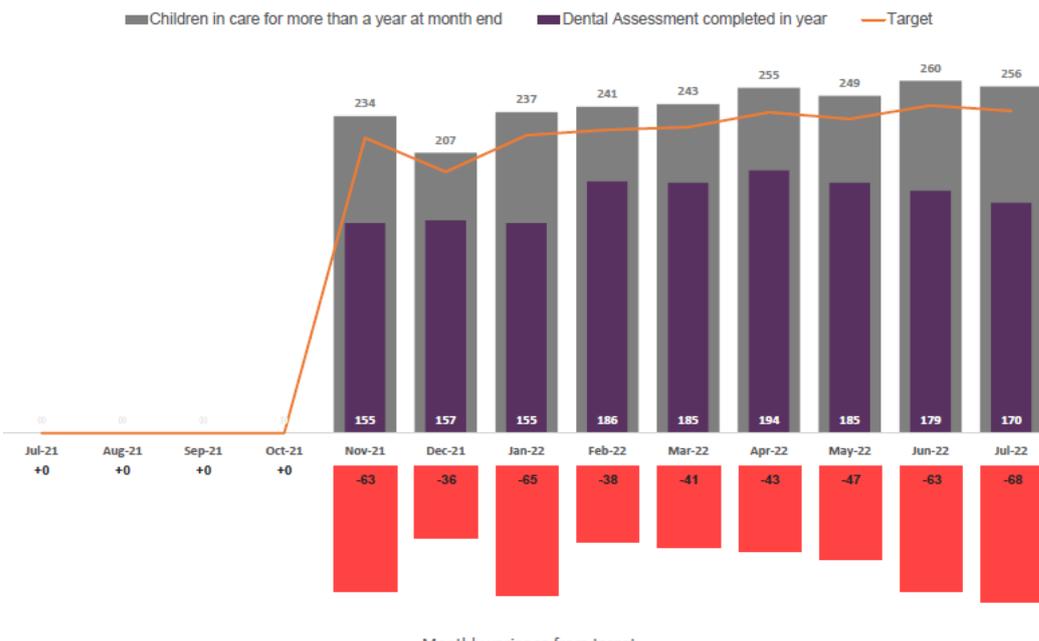


- 4.33. We currently have around 354 children and young people in care, equivalent to a rate of 67.4 per 10,000, just very slightly above the England average rate of 67 per 10,000 as of March 31st 2021, and significantly below the rate of our statistical neighbours, which was 90 per 10,000 in March 2021. It is generally accepted that there is a close correlation between children in care numbers and the level of deprivation. Deprivation levels in Peterborough are considerably higher than the England average, emphasising again the effectiveness of our approach in enabling children to remain at home with their families. To have sustained this throughout the pandemic with very limited fluctuation is also impressive and shows the consistent application of good practice across the whole Service. If we had the same number of children in care as our statistical neighbours, this would amount to an additional 122 children.
- 4.34. Our performance in relation to the proportion of children and young people in care who are in stable placements is also good, while the proportion of children and young people in our care who experience three or more changes of placements has continued to improve and is now at 7.1%, almost 2% better than statistical and England averages. Our performance in relation to placement stability also needs to be viewed in the context of our low overall numbers. A smaller overall population of children in care means that a higher proportion of those in care will have very complex needs. Maintaining placement stability rates above national performance levels is therefore more of an achievement that it might first appear. This is also in the context of serious placement sufficiency challenges across the entire country.
- 4.35. Performance in respect to the timeliness of visits is at 96.2% - this is a little below our stretch target of 98% but we are now evidencing strong and consistent performance, demonstrating the impact of the focus from the service in the last 3 months.
- 4.36. The chart below details the proportion of annual health assessments for children in care that are undertaken within timescale:



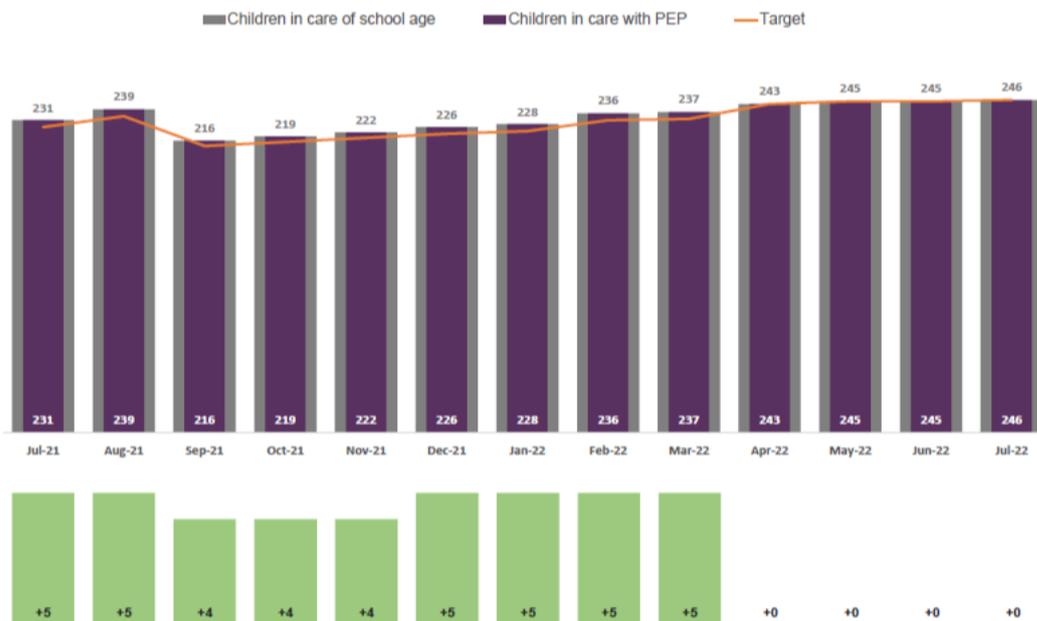
- 4.37. Current performance is 93%, which means that we have now reached the agreed target for this indicator. For comparison, the England average is 91%, and we have worked extremely hard with our Looked After Children Health Team to reach this position. It may be difficult to sustain, as some young people in particular will decline a health assessment, meaning that exceeding our stretch target is challenging. That said, we will continue to try and build on this success.
- 4.40 Availability of dental services was severely affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, and access to dentists for those newly into care [as opposed to those who are already registered with dentists] remains a challenge as Members are aware. While numbers of children accessing dental checks

has improved from the low point during and after the lockdown periods, performance has declined, and we are now reporting a 66.4% completion rate in timescales.



4.41 This is an area where we will continue to improve performance wherever we can, including by working with our colleagues in the NHS to help us to identify dentists that are able to accept children and young people in care onto their patient lists. The Corporate Parenting Committee has written to NHS England expressing concern for our young people and the lack of local provision.

4.4.2 Performance in relation to the proportion of children and young people in care who have Personal Education Plans [PEPs] continues to be very good, reflecting the close working relationship between Children’s Services and the Virtual School:



4.5 Children’s Workforce Framework

4.5.1 As you will see from Appendix 1, the Service has recently updated its Children’s Workforce Strategy and has renamed it a Framework so that it can sit more effectively as part of the wider People’s Strategy that is now in development.

- 4.5.2 A national shortage of social workers, particularly experienced social workers, has presented a challenge for many Local Authorities, including Peterborough.
- 4.5.3 The current context for recruitment of qualified social workers is highly challenging nationwide. Due to a lack of national centralised planning, challenges in valuing the role, especially of children's workers and now the long-term impact of the pandemic, there is a chronic shortage of effective, experienced workers in the field.
- 4.5.4 In the same year, 4,995 left the profession nationally¹ – an increase of 16% on the previous year and the highest recorded figure since comparable records began. There are now 6,522 vacancies for permanent workers across the country, a 7% increase from the year before. Although agency worker registrations have also increased, they only amounted to 5,977 workers, creating a shortfall of 545 posts; this is not evenly spread across the country.
- 4.5.5 Locally, our vacancy rate in some frontline teams has ranged from 11% - 20%, and these posts have been covered by agency staff at increasing cost to the Council. As numbers of both permanent and agency staff reduce, we need to respond more proactively and build on existing initiatives such as our retention payment and progression schemes. Our refreshed recruitment campaign launched last autumn in conjunction with Cambridgeshire County Council continues to produce some candidates and we have a number of newly qualified staff about to start with us as in previous years, but we wanted to offer a new deal to existing staff and be clear what our offer is to new recruits.
- 4.5.6 That is the purpose of the new children's workforce framework, whose priorities have been designed in conjunction with managers and employees across the service, and, alongside the accompanying action plan, they will help achieve our ambitions for the service. The priorities are as follows:

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion	"Our workforce represents and respects our diverse communities."
Recruitment	"Cambridgeshire & Peterborough are great places to practice as a social worker."
Retention	"Our social workers stay and build their careers in Cambridgeshire & Peterborough."
Workforce Development	"Our workforce grows with us."
Workforce Engagement	"Every colleague matters, and our workforce is led by the voice of colleagues."
Organisational culture, values and behaviours	"Our values & behaviours align to the themes of the Corporate People Strategy and are embedded in our day-to-day work."
Partnership Working	"to create a shared responsibility and focus the whole City & County Children's workforce"

- 4.5.7 In addition to this, we will be working with Learning and Development and Adult Services colleagues to develop a medium-term strategy to ensure we have a stream of continuing candidates into the service via apprenticeships, links with the new university and other initiatives.
- 4.5.8 The Children's Workforce Development Group will provide oversight and challenge, which will monitor progress against the strategic priorities and the effective and timely delivery of the action plan every month.
- 4.5.9 Operational managers will work closely with the Workforce Development Lead to ensure the action plan is progressing, and regular updates will come to the Children's & Safeguarding Departmental Management Team. In addition, further scrutiny will be provided by the Recruitment & Retention Board, chaired by the Executive Director of People & Communities.

¹ [Children's social work workforce, Reporting the Year 2021 – Explore education statistics – GOV.UK \(explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk\)](https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk)

4.6 Independent Review of Children's Services and the National Safeguarding Panel Report

4.6.1 As noted above, both of these national reports have been published since the last Director's report. The Independent Review led by Josh McAllister reported in May, setting out its recommendations for children's social care services. This is a wide-ranging review of the whole system and offers around 80 recommendations broken down across the key areas of:

- Early Help
- Child Protection and Extra Familial Harm
- Family Arrangements as alternatives to Care
- Changes to the Care System
- Ambitions for Care Experienced Young People
- Workforce
- System and Regulation Changes

4.6.2 There is an appreciation that the children and families we work with are very much products of their environments, and that a great deal of change is also required in public health, housing, income and deprivation before real inroads can be made into many of the issues impacting on positive outcomes for children. This has very much influenced the Review's core tenet that the system needs far more investment at an Early Help level, and many of the recommendations address a realignment of resource and focus on that direction.

4.6.3 It also considers the needs of children once they are in care and has a series of expectations about how those leaving care should now be supported. It offers a new approach to training and supporting the workforce and would like changes in inspection regimes to help reinforce all of this. There is a proposal around how these complete system changes can be funded, and this will need to be considered carefully by both Government and Local Authorities.

4.6.4 The national independent Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel separately undertook a national review into the murders of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and Star Hobson, following the convictions of their murderers at the end of last year. Although initially unconnected, because of the timing of the publication of the 2 reports and areas of overlapping consideration, they do now reference each other and support key recommendations of each other's reviews.

4.6.5 The Panel's recommendations are narrower in focus around Child Protection specifically and are as follows:

- A new expert-led, multi-agency model for child protection investigation, planning, intervention, and review.
- Establishing National Multi-Agency Practice Standards for Child Protection.
- Strengthening the local Safeguarding Partners to ensure proper co-ordination and involvement of all agencies.
- Changes to multi-agency inspection to better understand local performance and drive improvement.
- A new role for the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel in driving practice improvement in Safeguarding Partners.
- A sharper performance focus and better co-ordination of child protection policy in central Government.
- Using the potential of data to help professionals protect children.
- Specific practice improvements in relation to domestic abuse

4.6.6 In the wake of the Independent Review, Ministers pledged that the Government would improve the child protection system so that it keeps children safe from harm as effectively as possible; support families to care for their children, so that they can have safe, loving and happy childhoods which set them up for fulfilling lives and ensure that there are the right placements for children in the right places, so that those who cannot stay with their parents grow up in a safe, stable and loving home.

- 4.6.7 To achieve this, the Department for Education established a National Implementation Board, of people with experience of leading transformational change and of people with their own experience of the care system. This group has continued to meet despite changes in Minister and is proposing to publish its response to the recommendations at some point this autumn. The Department for Education has also committed to developing a National Children's Social Care Framework and introducing a new Digital and Data Solutions Fund to help local authorities improve delivery for children and families through technology.
- 4.6.8 In relation to the Child Protection in England report, the Secretary of State for Education has decided to set up a new Child Protection Ministerial group before setting out an implementation plan towards the end of the year to address how the Government intends to support better outcomes for our most vulnerable children and families. It is not yet evident, however, how many of and how fully the Government plans to endorse any of these recommendations.
- 4.6.9 In the intervening period, the Local Authority and its partners are undertaking assurance activity in relation to the practice issues raised in the reports and will ensure that all appropriate learning is disseminated to staff as it arises.

4.7 Expected inspection activity in Children's Services

- 4.7.1 Peterborough's last graded inspection was in July 2018, when the outcome was Good overall. Ordinarily, graded inspections take place once every three years, but the pandemic has resulted in delays to the Ofsted inspection timetable. We are anticipating that there will be such an Inspection this coming autumn. As we are a Good authority, the inspection will be a short one of one weeks' duration. These inspections take place without notice, and the service has been preparing over the summer to be ready for whenever the Inspectors arrive.

We continue to benefit from a largely stable and very committed staff team, although do face some challenges in relation to particular areas of work. We have worked hard to mitigate these issues and are confident that our children receive a good service from the Authority. There has been senior leadership change in recent months, but it is evident that Children's Services have received support from the entire corporate team and that the Chief Executive and the Leader are well sighted on the key issues for children and vulnerable young people in the City.

That said, there are always things that we can improve on, and we welcome external scrutiny since this can help us to continue to shape our services positively.

5. CONSULTATION

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

6. ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES OR IMPACT

- 6.1 That Committee:
- Gains an overview of how key performance information in relation to children's services in Peterborough;
 - Has the opportunity to endorse the new children's workforce framework
 - Receives updates about the independent care review, the national safeguarding panel report and likely inspection activity;
 - Has an opportunity to discuss the activities of the Portfolio Holder in supporting children's services in Peterborough.

7. REASON FOR THE RECOMMENDATION

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

- 7.2 It is more important than ever that Scrutiny Committee has the opportunity to understand, explore and scrutinise the way that we support and safeguard our vulnerable children and young people.

8. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 8.1 There are no applicable alternative options available

9. IMPLICATIONS

9.1 Financial Implications

Members will be aware of the continuing challenges for the Council in respect of the financial situation for Peterborough and the increasing savings targets attached to most areas of Council business. Children's Services recognises that there is a continuing commitment to protect and promote services for children and families, and we will also benefit from the significant grant being offered to promote the development of Family Hubs over the next three financial years.

The three savings target areas for Children's Services are: reunification of children in care to their birth families in a timelier manner; increase in Council fostering places enabling us to reduce the number of children placed in more expensive agency placements; and increasing income in respect of the provision of some services for children with complex needs. The first target is on track to be addressed over this and next financial year; the increased income target is recognised to be very dependent on work with our health partners and is at risk in this financial year; and the fostering target is now accepted to be focused in the wrong way. We do need to make significant changes in our fostering service and offer, and the Service is developing a more comprehensive business case to help expand upon this.

In order to continue to make the savings required in year, we are in the process of identifying mitigations that will feed into the wider savings pot.

Legal Implications

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

Equalities Implications

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

Rural Implications

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

Carbon Impact Assessment

- 9.5 The report contains no proposals for changes to service delivery and therefore there is no decision to take which may impact carbon emissions of the council or the city

Carbon Impact Assessment

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 Children's Workforce Framework

