

CHILDREN AND EDUCATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE	AGENDA ITEM No. 8
12 JANUARY 2023	PUBLIC REPORT

Report of:	Elaine Redding, Executive Director for Children's Services	
Cabinet Member(s) responsible:	Councillor Lynne Ayres, Cabinet Member for Children's Services, and Education, Skills and University	
Contact Officer(s):	Elaine Redding, Executive Director for Children's Services	Tel. 01733 863655

SERVICE DIRECTOR REPORT: CHILDREN & SAFEGUARDING

RECOMMENDATIONS	
FROM: Executive 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"> 1. Note and comment on the performance indicators and other measures of the effectiveness of children's services within the report; 2. Note the likely inspection activity by our regulator, Ofsted, within the next month. 	

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 and outlines the impending Ofsted Inspection of the service.

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.

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

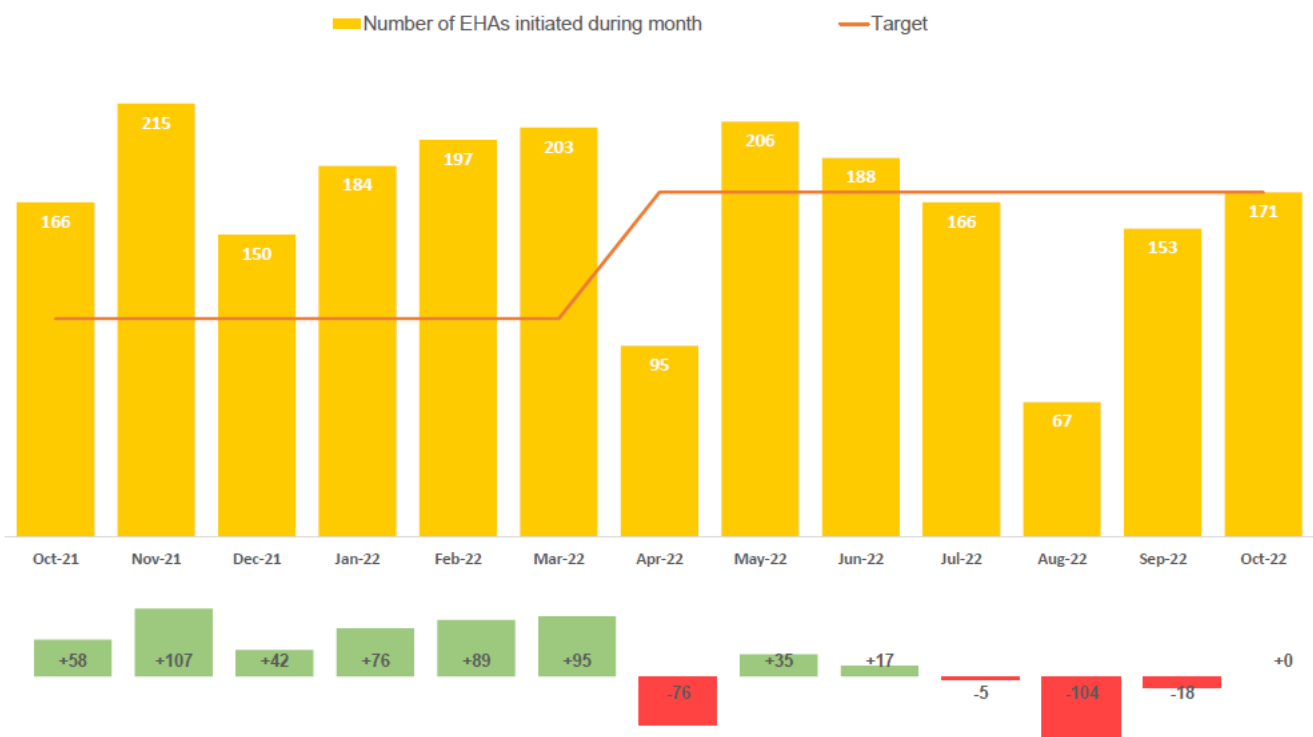
Background

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 October 2022, the most recent data available at the time this report was prepared.

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

4.3. 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.

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



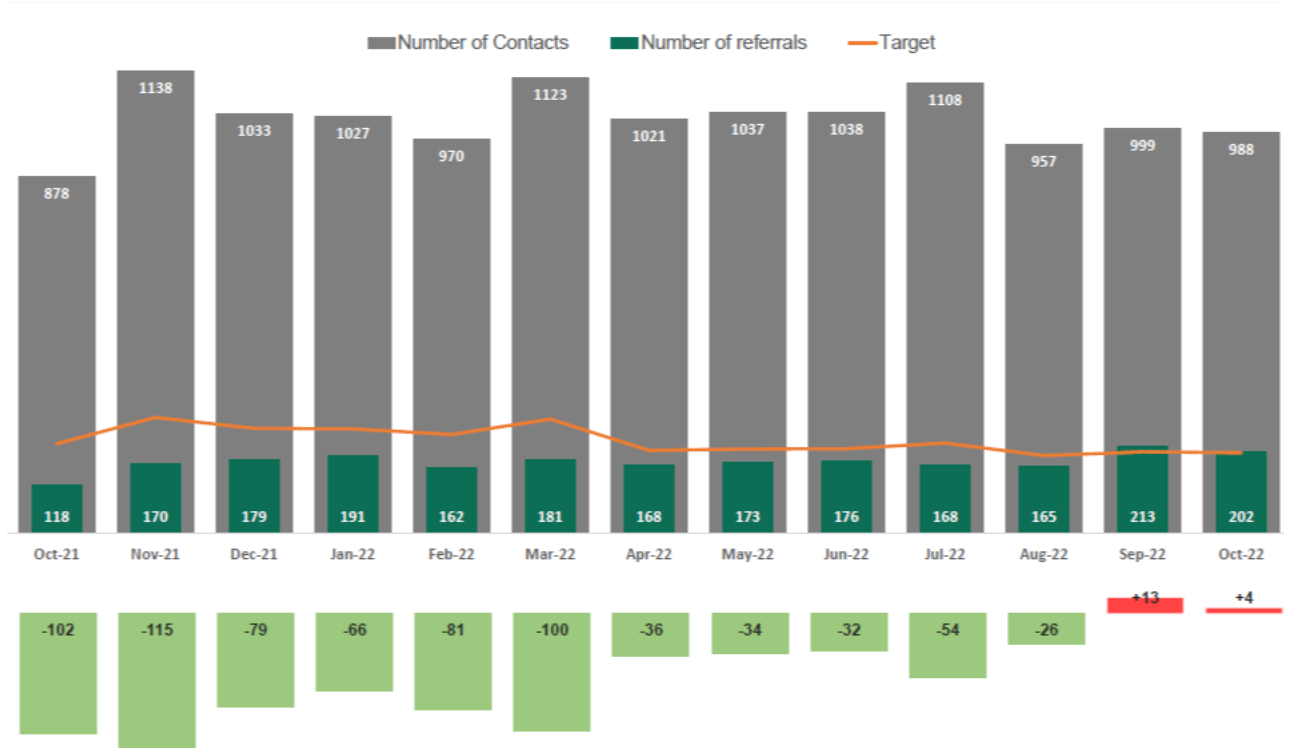
4.5. The number of Early Help Assessments initiated in October 2022 shows an increase, this is often the case following the summer holiday period.

4.6. 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.

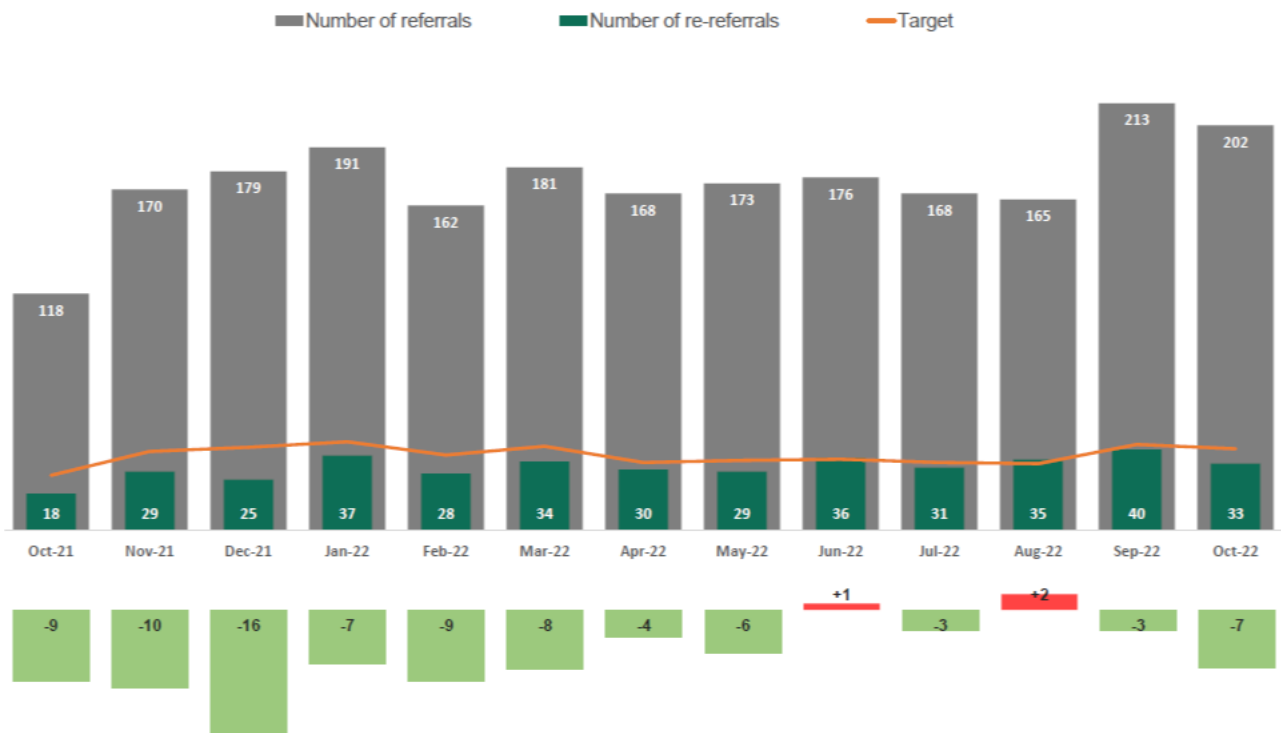
4.7. Following feedback from the Strong Families, Strong Communities consultation the service is now known as Targeted Support Service.

4.8. Effective early help 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.

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

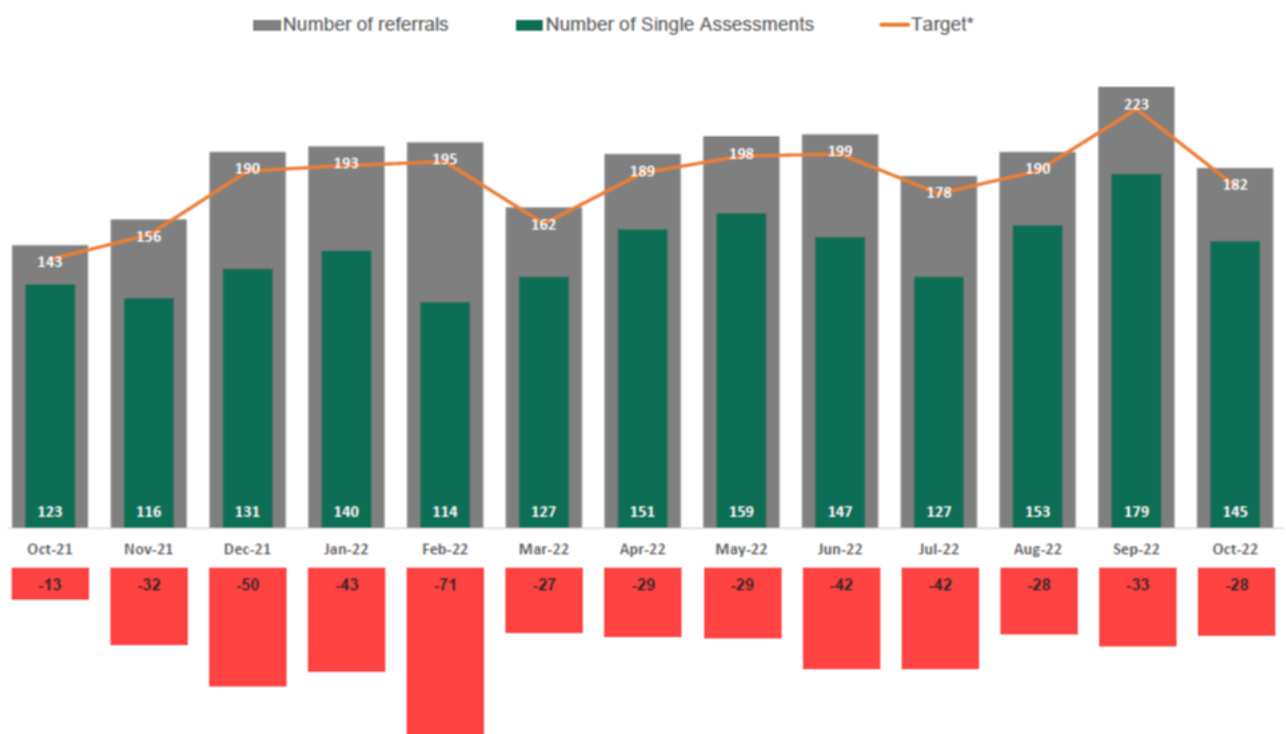


- 4.10. Our year to date performance in this area is that 17.7% of contacts proceed to referrals, which is a little below our target of 20%. Our performance is generally consistent in this area, which is positive considering the various contextual challenges at present.
- 4.11. We undertake regular dip-sampling 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.
- 4.12. 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.
- 4.13. 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:

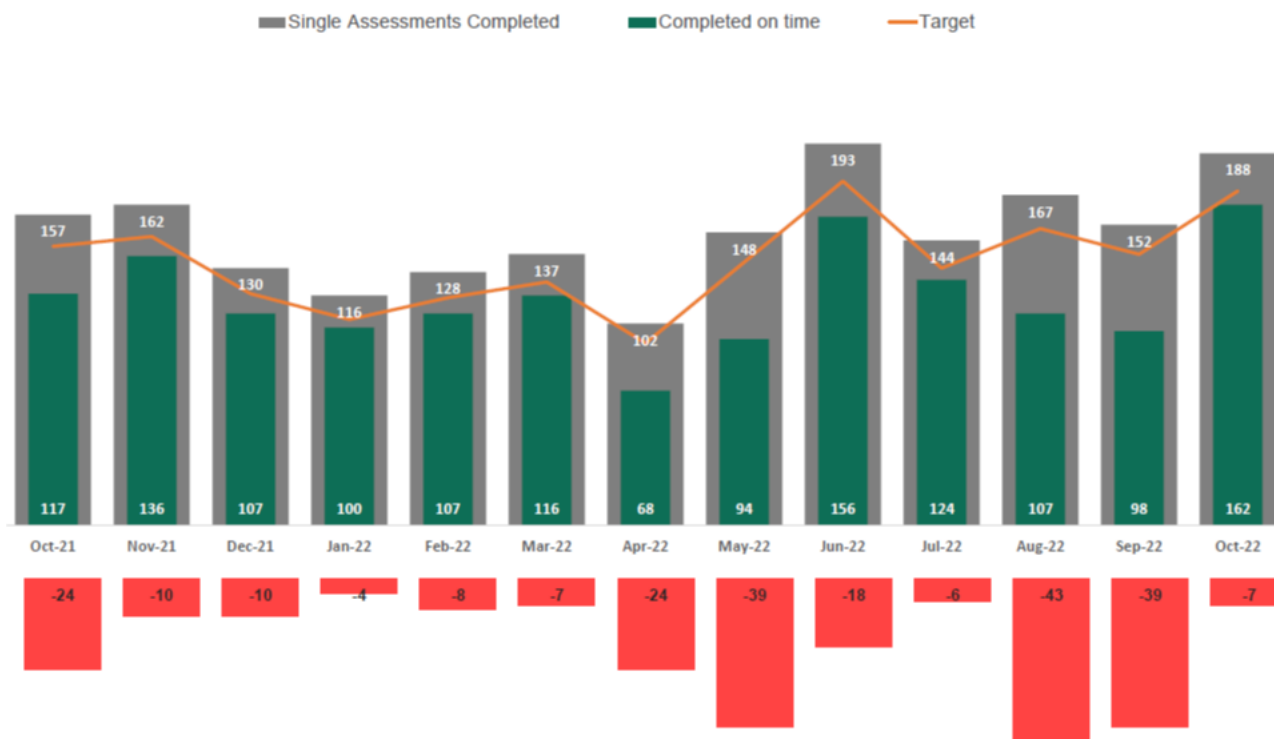


4.14. Our year to date performance is that 18.5% of referrals are re-referrals; this compares increasingly well with both national and statistical neighbour performance, which is 20%, and implies that we are making good decisions first time on most occasions. It is possible for a re-referral rate to 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.

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



- 4.16. 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, the target figure is to be reviewed.
- 4.17. The chart below shows the proportion of single assessments completed within 45 working days. Our year to date performance is currently standing at 73.9%, which is below national performance and statistical neighbour performance of 84%.

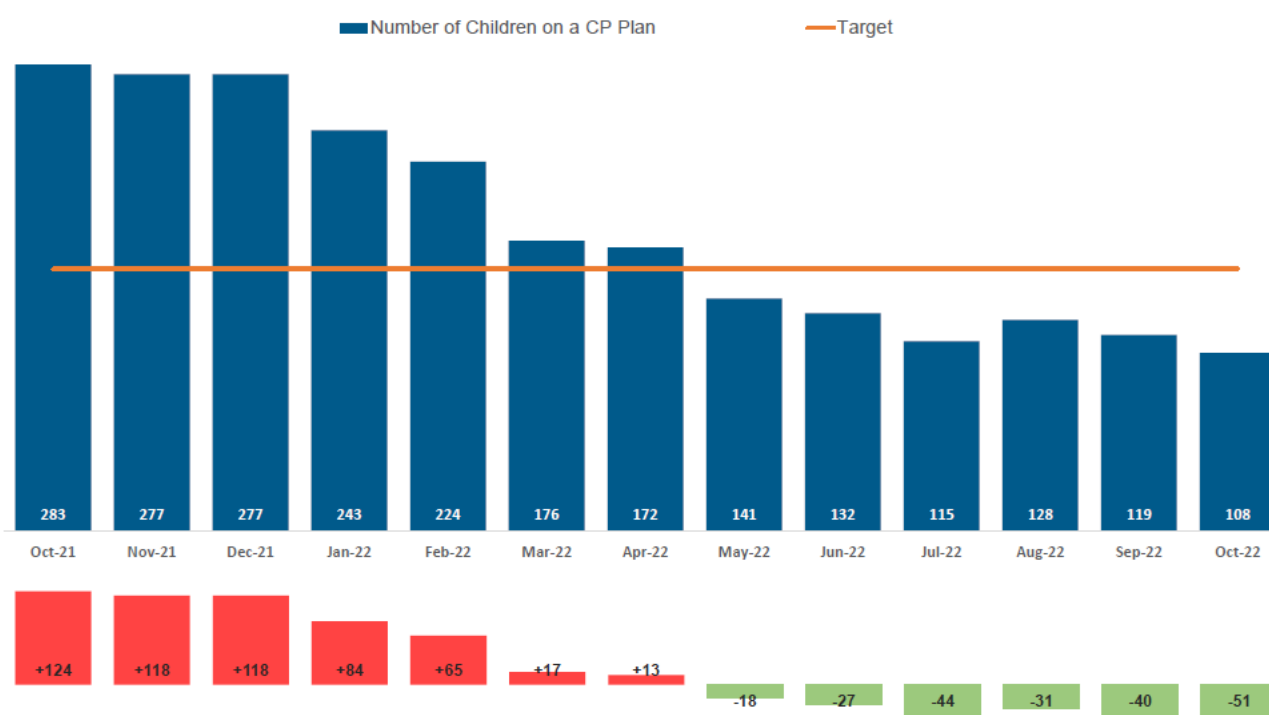


- 4.18. Audits of the quality of assessments show a generally good picture; they generally include a good analysis of risks and protective factors and develop effective plans to address identified needs. They make good use of information held by partner agencies. The lived experience of the child is mostly considered well, and the extent to which cultural competence is considered and included within plans for children is improving.
- 4.19. 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.

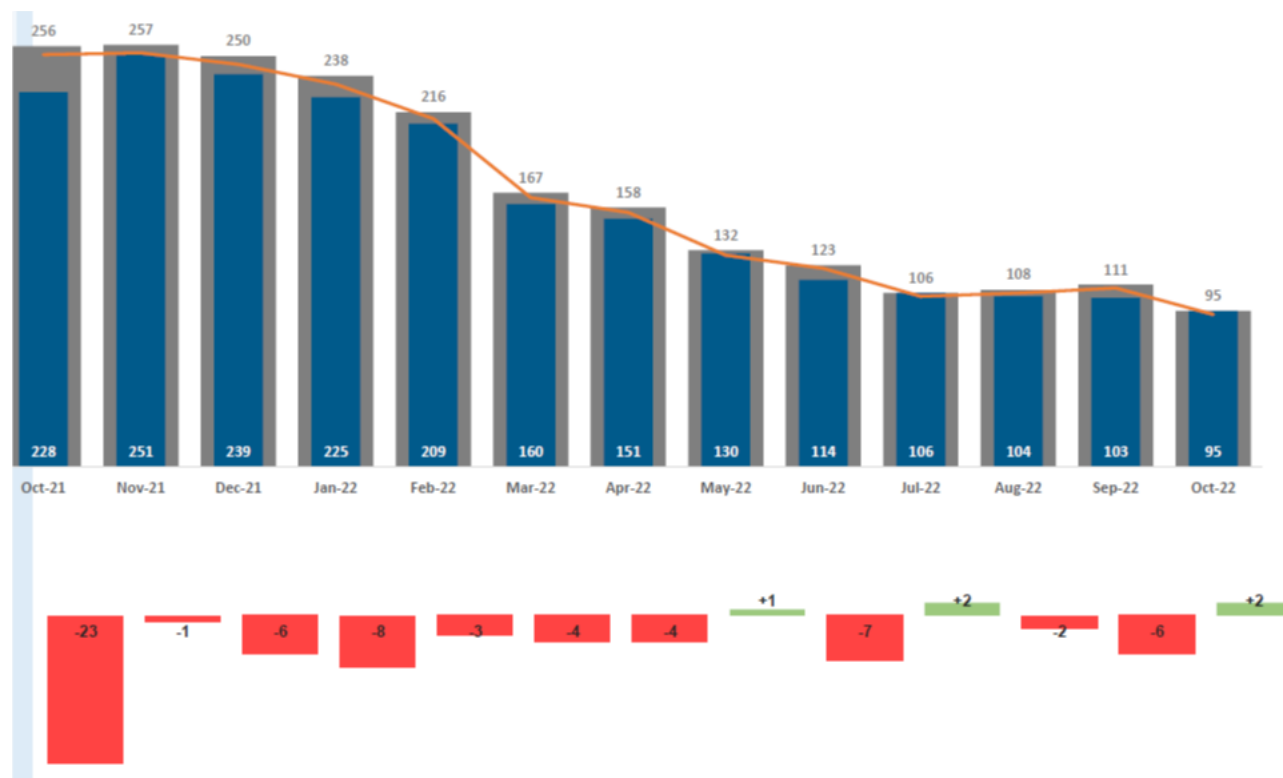
Family Safeguarding

- 4.20. 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.
- 4.21. 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.

- 4.22. 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.
- 4.23. 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 in particular, 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.
- 4.24. Child Protection numbers rose 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:



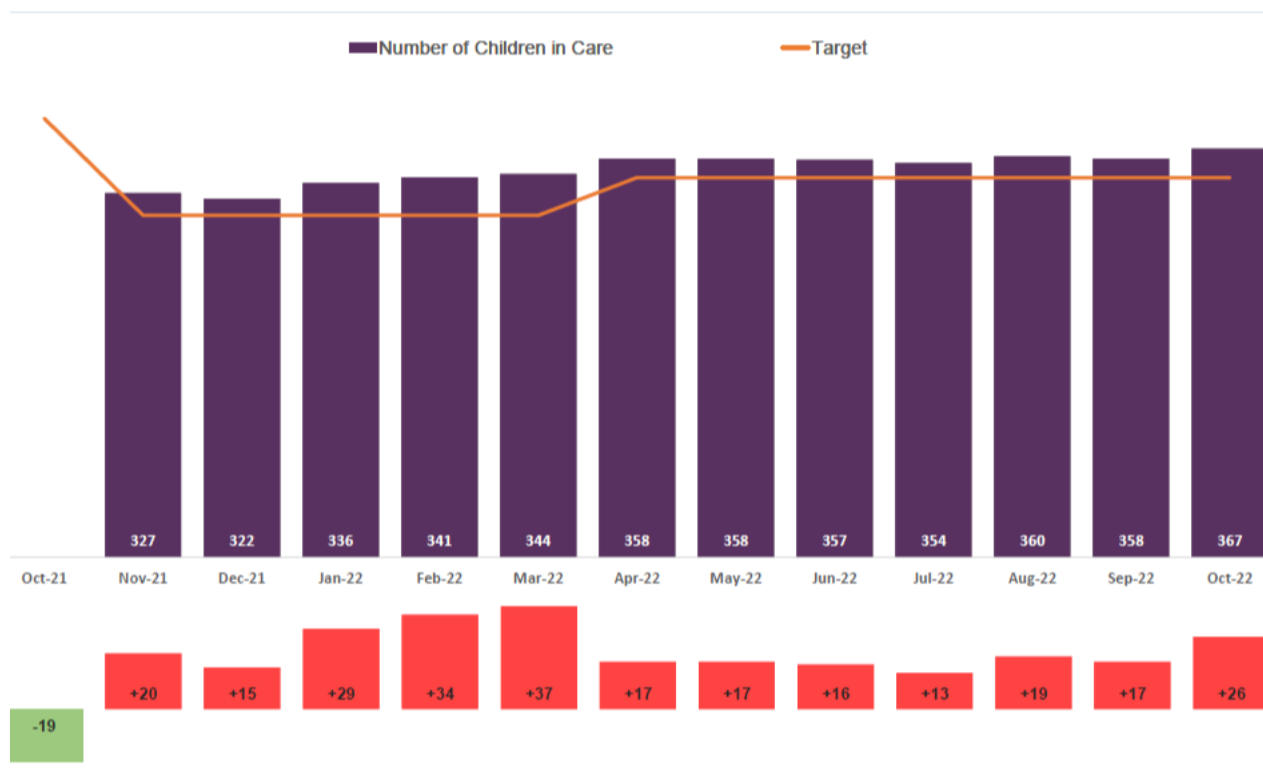
- 4.25. Prior to the pandemic, the number of children subject to a child protection plan was consistently below the 180 mark compared with 108 children as of the end of October 2022. This is a low figure and takes us to a rate of 20.6 per 10,000. This is significantly lower than our statistical neighbours, 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.
- 4.26. 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.
- 4.27. 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:



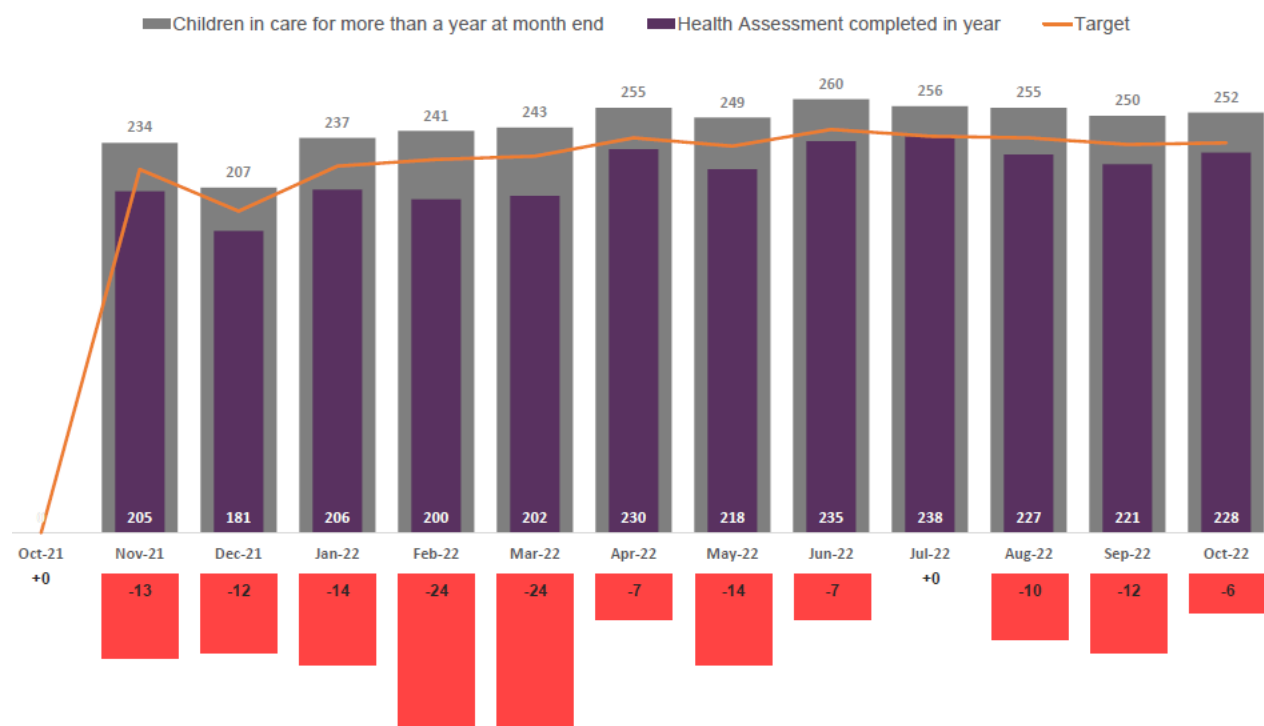
4.28. Current performance is 100% - this is excellent performance and becomes more possible as numbers reduce.

4.29. **Corporate Parenting**

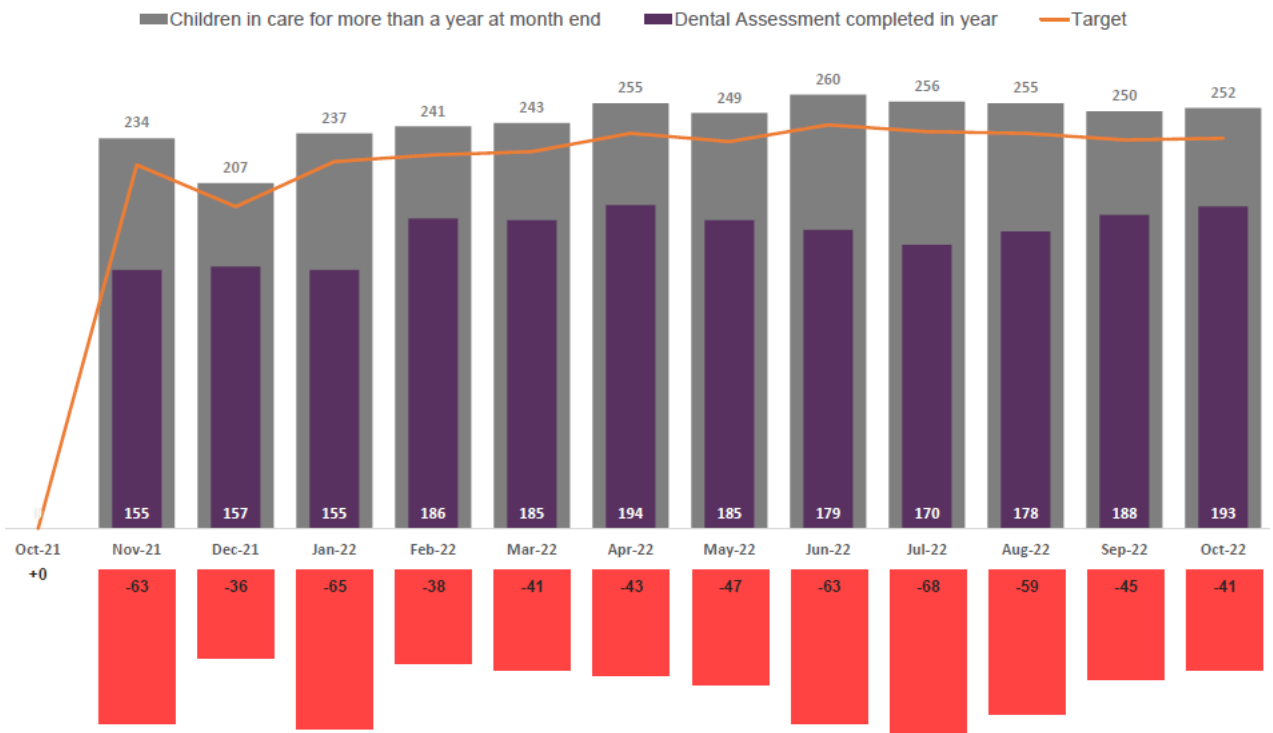
4.30. The local authority continues to perform very well in relation to preventing children and young people coming into care and ensuring that those who do need to come into care spend the minimum time in care before moving to permanent homes through adoption, Special Guardianship, or a return to the care of their parents. The following chart shows the number of children in care at the end of October 2022.



- 4.31. 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 7.6%. 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 than it might first appear. This is also in the context of serious placement sufficiency challenges across the entire country.
- 4.32. Performance in respect to the timeliness of visits is at 96.5% - this is a little below our stretch target of 98%, there has been consistency in completion of visits.
- 4.33. The chart below details the proportion of annual health assessments for children in care that are undertaken within timescale:



- 4.34. Current performance is 90.5%, our target is 93% and we continue to work with colleagues in Looked After Children Health Team to reach this position.
- 4.40 There has been an improvement in access for children in care to a dentist and in October 2022 76.6% had their dental check within time.



4.41 This is an area where we will continue to improve performance wherever we can, and we are working on ways to for children in care to access dental care.

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:



4.7 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. Because we are a Good authority, our inspection will be a short one of one weeks' duration. These inspections take place without notice, and the service has been preparing for the last few months to be ready for whenever the Inspectors arrive.

We continue to benefit from a largely stable and very committed staff team, although we 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 are still receiving a good service from the Authority. There have 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 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 None.

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