

CHILDREN AND EDUCATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE	AGENDA ITEM No. 6
11 NOVEMBER 2024	PUBLIC REPORT

Report of:	John Gregg, Executive Director for Children and Young People	
Cabinet Member(s) responsible:	Councillor Katy Cole, Cabinet Member for Children's Services	
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CHILDREN'S SERVICES IMPROVEMENT: ACTION PLAN & PROGRESS MONITORING

RECOMMENDATIONS	
FROM: Executive Director for Children and Young People	Deadline date: N/A
<p>It is recommended that the Children and Education Scrutiny Committee reviews the content of the report and agrees to continue to support officers in delivering continuing improvement.</p>	

1. ORIGIN OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report is submitted to Scrutiny Committee following their Group Representatives meeting.

2. PURPOSE AND REASON FOR REPORT

- 2.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Scrutiny Committee with a summary and overview of monitoring and progress in respect of Children's Services Ofsted Inspection Action Plan, implemented following the ILACS inspection which took place from 27th November to 8th December 2023. Peterborough Children's Services was graded Inadequate for 'Overall Effectiveness,' and eight key improvement recommendations were identified.

- 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:

1.Children's Services including:

- a) *Social Care of Children.*
- b) *Safeguarding; and*
- c) *Children's Health*
- d) *Targeted Youth Support (including youth offending)*

2. How does this report link to the Children in care Promise?

The improvement work being undertaken in Children's Services supports the delivery of the Children in Care promise. It will ensure that Children's Services can provide good quality services to children and families in Peterborough that will keep them safe, ensure that they feel valued and respected, and are involved in decision making about their lives.

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 In November 2023, Ofsted notified Peterborough City Council of a standard ILACS inspection. This commenced with immediate effect, in line with the regulatory framework. Following a week of offsite evidence gathering to inform key lines of enquiry, the Inspectorate were on site at Sand Martin House from 27th November to 8th December 2023.
- 4.2 The inspection report was published on Monday 29th January; Peterborough received an Inadequate outcome overall for the effectiveness of Children’s Services and subsequently are subject to monitoring visits every six months. These focus on the areas where the need for improvement has been identified and will ensure that performance in other areas has not declined. The first monitoring visit took place on the 30th & 31st July 2024 (Letter appended).
- 4.3 This two-day ‘visit’ focused on the support and provision for care leavers aged 18 to 25 – a priority area for improvement established following the full inspection. Feedback illustrated that the work undertaken to set the underpinning elements for successful improvement in train is starting to make a difference but there is more to do.
- 4.4 There are eight key improvement recommendations arising from the ILACS inspection, which have been incorporated into the Local Authority’s Ofsted improvement plan and is overseen by Children’s Services Improvement Board.
- The quality of support, advice, and guidance for care leavers, including those with additional vulnerabilities, to ensure that this is timely, consistent, and responsive to levels of need.
 - Social work support for disabled children in need of help and protection.
 - The identification and response to increased vulnerability when children are electively home educated or missing from education.
 - The consistency in quality of social work assessments.
 - The sufficiency of suitable placements that can meet children and young people’s assessed needs.
 - The consistency of support for children who go missing from care.
 - The quality of supervision, so that social workers are supported to think through complex situations, to help children make progress.
 - Service capacity, particularly in the Safeguarding Teams, Care Leaver Service and Emergency Duty Service.
- 4.5 Peterborough City Council’s commitment to improve the lives of children, young people and care leavers in the City following the ILACS outcome, saw additional financial investment in Children Services. This enabled additional capacity in social work teams and development of supportive resources to help drive the improvement agenda.
- 4.5.1 Whilst recognising the backdrop of considerable financial challenge, current budget pressures present a continuing test of the ability to sustain and progress improvements attained to date and embed longer term change.
- 4.6 The programme of Sector Led improvement work (SLIP) with Leeds Relational Practice Centre (LRPC) and Hertfordshire, developed in response to the eight key Ofsted ILACS recommendations continues to progress. It ensures a clear focus on practice improvement to make Peterborough an area where children and families can thrive and is reinvigorating the previously successful multiagency Family Safeguarding Teams.

4.6.1 The implementation of Family Valued with Leeds has at its core a central focus on the child and their experience – underpinned by a belief in strengths in families and supporting them to find solutions. It is a whole system approach to transforming outcomes for children, and centres on developing practice, leadership and culture with children and families, partners and the organisation, to be more restorative and relational - building the relationships needed to support change.

4.6.2 A shared review and plan approach is in place, outlining the areas of improvement activity Peterborough and Leeds are prioritising in the next 12 months. This includes a core programme of relational culture, leadership and practice improvement learning and development opportunities.

Over September and October 24, 'Introduction to Relational and Restorative Practice' awareness for all staff commenced alongside Action Learning Sets for Heads of Service and Service Managers. Action Learning Sets for Team Managers are planned for January-March 25; Reflective Practice with Teams in February 25.

The impact of this activity will be reviewed in March 2025. The review will highlight the progress made by Peterborough and inform its ongoing improvement plan and priorities.

4.6.3 In respect of Family Safeguarding, strategic and operational governance arrangements have been established (Oct 24) and a suite of training and development opportunities are being provided by the Centre for Family Safeguarding Practice as part of the partnership. Development workshops with relevant teams and service areas commenced in October (24).

4.7 The Children and Young People's Transformation Portfolio Board continues to oversee the transformation agenda that supports Children's Services journey of improvement through five key workstreams.

- International Recruitment
- Centre of Professional Excellence (COPE) - Social Work Academy
- House Project
- Step-Into
- Fostering

4.8 International recruitment is a key part of the improvement plan and will provide key capacity and resilience in social work teams in direct response to the areas for improvement identified by Ofsted following the ILACS inspection.

Six International Social Workers started with the service on 2nd October, and this has enabled a reduction in reliance on agency staffing which allows for more consistent workforce and brings opportunities to strengthen and improve quality and effectiveness of practice and service with children and families; aligned to this is cost effectiveness. Four more are scheduled to join in January 25 and five by the end of March 25. Timing is impacted by some delay with Social Work England registration/Visa process that is not in LA control.

Support is in place for new starters including a training schedule and induction as part of the Centre Of Practice Excellence (Social Work Academy) programme.

4.9 Aligned to the timeline for international recruitment is the development of the Centre of Practice Excellence (COPE) – the Social Work Academy.

This is now established and in operation with the first cohort of Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSWs) starting in September 24 - supported allocation of children to NQSWs is in place. Initial feedback from NQSWs has been positive and this in turn will support positive practice with children and families to grow and flourish.

Delivery of workforce modelling that aims to reduce reliance on agency staffing is progressing with the advent of COPE - this will support consistency of practitioners working

with children and families and set the foundations for effective high quality relational practice.

It was agreed at Portfolio Board 24/10/24 that COPE would now close to Transformation to become Business as Usual.

- 4.10 The House Project implementation is on track to support young people leaving care into suitable accommodation and ensure they have the knowledge and support to live independently.

Following the House Project Lead commencing in post in the last reporting period, facilitator roles are now recruited to. Ofsted registration requirements are being finalised, and most policies required have been completed and agreed by CSLT.

Work to confirm the first group of young people to move into the House Project is in train and several events and communications have been and are being undertaken to support progress.

- 4.10.1 There has been some delay with the property move-in date (likely to be Jan 25) linked to existing tenant notice extension but support is being sought to enable access, to scope renovation and equipment needs and costings.

As regards the numbers of care experienced young people (19-21) in Peterborough who are living in safe, suitable accommodation. This is 91.6% at the end of Q2 which is better than the comparator performance data available from national and nearest neighbour averages (both at 89%) and is a key achievement in the context of housing sufficiency challenges in Peterborough and surrounding areas.

Despite this positive achievement, sufficiency of appropriate housing and the related financial pressure for the local authority is a significant challenge. Work to further progress and sustain this continues to receive necessary focus, including analysis of upcoming need to inform the medium- and longer-term view. There remains close operational and strategic collaboration across Children's Services and internal and external housing partners in this respect.

- 4.11 Development of the Fostering service is a key part of Peterborough's strategy to ensure the sufficiency of suitable placements for children and young people. Positive improvement and transformation progress is evident - a successful Foster Service launch took place 30th September (24).

At the time of writing, 9 new foster carers have been approved thus far in 24/25 against a stretch target of 15. The net gain is 5 due to 4 resignations as a result of retirement from fostering and personal changes in circumstances. None were due to dissatisfaction with the service.

As of October 24, there is an increase in the number of prospective carers in assessment to 12 from 10 in September – all scheduled for panel decisions from Nov 24 to March 25.

Performance achievement range over the previous 9 months (70-70.8% Q4-23/24 to Q2 – 24/25) is better than the England average (68%) and on a par with statistical neighbours (71%) – which supports children to have better outcomes.

- 4.12 The 'Step into Fostering' project has developed over September and October 24 to explore agency fostering, semi-independent options, the House Project, Reunification, as well as in-house fostering provision for children and young people ready to move on from residential care. Two young people moved at the end of September, and this is progressing positively for them to date. Another two are being supported with moves that are due to take place in December and there are a further eleven children and young people for whom plans are in development to support transitions over the remainder of 24/25 and into 25/26, from residential care into arrangements that will support better outcomes in the longer term.

Dedicated resources in the service are having a positive impact on progress. Operational and strategic meetings have been strengthened to oversee and ensure appropriate planning for children and direction of travel for the project.

4.13 As well as the broad Transformation agenda, Children's Services' leaders have prioritised improvement across the service with a focus on the offer for care leavers, the consistency of relocation of services including MASH and the children with disabilities team, social work assessments and supervision, and missing children.

4.14 In addition to the feedback from the Monitoring Visit regarding the care leaver's local offer, further progress updates include:

- Significant milestones achieved in the initiative to support Care Leavers, including timely PA allocations, comprehensive training and workshops, the implementation of a revised local offer – promotion of which will take place in National Care Leavers Week (see below) - progress in our housing strategy review, exemptions from council tax for care leavers, enhanced access to physical and mental health support, and strengthened governance through the Corporate Parenting Board - all contributing to better outcomes.
- The proportion of Care Leavers who are in Education, Employment or Training (EET) has increased over Q2 to 46.3% but is out of line with national and near neighbour averages of 56% & 52% respectively and this remains a focused area for development.

Work is taking place to increase the suitable options for young people and support their wider engagement and success. The extension of the Virtual School offer for young people through to 25 is a key development to assist in this respect, along with activity underway to improve the quality, availability and accessibility of apprenticeships for care leavers.

Events are planned for National Care Leavers week Oct 28th – Nov 3rd, 2024, with a focus on EET. Part of this is to enhance council wide and partner understanding of the City's Corporate Parenting role and responsibilities – this will contribute to further improvements moving forwards.

- Phase 2 of the Local Offer scoping and implementation along with close management of larger projects, need to be closely overseen to prevent slippage.
- Service capacity is impacting the overall pace of change and budgetary pressures are exacerbating this. Progress in respect of Care Leaver Support is susceptible in this context.

4.15 MASH transformation is progressing well, with most actions completed or on track. Staffing improvements, including new permanent team managers, are supporting this. Minor delays are related to workforce sufficiency and decision timeliness, with teams finding it a challenge to meet deadlines despite reduced demand. Significant delays in IT system upgrades, particularly Liquid Logic, are being addressed, but the original timelines were overly ambitious and are being revised.

4.16 Support and response for disabled children is an area of improvement that is progressing well with all actions completed or on track, including moving the CWD team from the Adult's directorate into the Children's directorate. Work is now ongoing to provide cross service training that will fully embed the understanding of thresholds for intervention and risk identification, ensure that children are receiving the right help at the right time and that the quality of practice within the team meets the expected standards to ensure that children with specific needs are receiving the right support.

The CWD Service was externally reviewed 1st October -3rd October. A draft report has been provided and work is in train to implement the recommendations. There were a number of strengths identified as well as areas for development. Importantly, no concerns were noted.

4.17 Regular dip sampling and audits are starting to demonstrate some improvements in the quality of practice around assessments and supervisions, although there is further work to do. A comprehensive programme of training and service development will be implemented following the recruitment of the Service Director for Practice who is due to be in post from November 24. Activity to recruit to permanent positions is ongoing, but budgetary and recruitment pressures remain a barrier. Development work has begun with Leeds and Hertfordshire around practice improvement and should increase in pace when the Service Director for Practice starts.

4.18 In terms of the consistency of support for children who go missing from care, partnership work with police and health through daily missing meetings has been strengthened and guidance is in place to support a robust, consistent and supportive response. QA activity demonstrates an improved response for missing and exploited children. A Partnership Missing Protocol is in final draft for CSMT to consider at the end of October and then will proceed to the Safeguarding Partnership for their approval.

Return home interviews following missing episodes are only accepted 61.3% of the time. Further qualitative work is planned to understand why and explore ways to increase acceptance and engagement.

4.19 Peterborough is a challenging climate in which to deliver good outcomes for children and young people. It is expanding, has diverse communities with significant levels of deprivation and the Council is facing sizeable financial pressures.

Leaders in Children's Services and improvement partners are confident that the key issues needing to advance to provide good quality services for children and families in Peterborough have been clearly identified and well-articulated. They have prioritised taking this forward, with comprehensive action planning and a substantial programme of transformation. There is evidence of impact to date across a range of areas for improvement, and for this to be sustained and progressed further as is required, continued budgetary commitment and strong corporate parenting support, as well as collaborative working between members, stakeholders, and officers is essential.

5. CORPORATE PRIORITIES

5.1 The updates covered throughout this report for committee contribute to the Corporate Strategy and Priorities. Specifically, protecting and supporting vulnerable children in care.

1. Our Places & Communities
 - Lives and Work
 - Health and Wellbeing
2. Prevention, Independence, and Resilience
 - Education and Skills for All
 - Children
3. Sustainable Future City Council
 - How we Serve

Environment & Climate Change

Although there will be a slight increase in travel emissions associated with additional staff recruitments, these will be minimal. The report contains no proposals for significant changes which would impact carbon emissions of the council or the city.

6. CONSULTATION

- 6.1 Consultation has taken place with relevant managers and staff in the development of this report.

7. ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES OR IMPACT

- 7.1 For Scrutiny Committee to review the contents of the report and continue to support the Children's Services journey of improvement.

8. REASON FOR THE RECOMMENDATION

- 8.1 As corporate parents, it is critical that Members continue to support the improvement of services for children in Peterborough to ensure that children and young people can achieve best outcomes.

9. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 9.1 There are no alternative options for the Committee to consider as it is important for the Committee to monitor the service's progress against the action plan

10. IMPLICATIONS

Financial Implications

- 10.1 There has been significant Corporate financial investment into Children's Services to support the improvement activities referenced in this report.

Legal Implications

- 10.2 There are no specific legal implications arising from the contents of this report, as the report is for information and updating the committee.

Equalities Implications

- 10.3 An Equalities Impact Assessment is not needed because the issues covered are for information purposes only, therefore the Council's full EIA process does not need to be applied.

11. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

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

- 11.1 N/A

12. APPENDICES

- 12.1 Appendix 1 - Ofsted letter – Monitoring Visit to Peterborough Children's Services July 24.
- 12.2 Appendix 2a - Peterborough City Council Children's Services Inspection Action Plan (submitted to Ofsted April 2024).
- Appendix 2b – Ofsted Programme Overview

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