

**SERVICE DIRECTOR REPORT: CHILDREN AND SAFEGUARDING AND DEMAND MANAGEMENT IN CHILDREN'S SERVICES**

**To: Children and Young People**

**Meeting Date: 10<sup>th</sup> March 2020**

**From: Executive Director People and Communities.**

**Electoral division(s): All**

**Forward Plan ref: n/a**                      **Key decision: No**

**Purpose:**                      **This report provides Members with an update on key areas of performance within children's services. The report also provides Members with an update on the progress being made on implementation of the Family Safeguarding model in Cambridgeshire, and some specific information about placement sufficiency for children in care.**

**Recommendation:**                      **The Committee is recommended to:**

- a) Note the information within the report relating to the performance of children's services, including information about the Focused Visit into outcomes for children in care by Ofsted on 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> February 2020;**
- b) Note the progress on implementation of the Family Safeguarding model;**
- c) Note the continuing actions to secure improvements to service delivery and ensure that our response to meeting the needs of children and young people is proportionate and consistent.**

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## **1. BACKGROUND**

- 1.1. This report focuses on a number of areas of relevance to the performance of children's services in Cambridgeshire. This includes some key information about performance across the service, the recent implementation of LiquidLogic, and information about the progress being made in relation to the delivery of the Family Safeguarding approach in Cambridgeshire. The report also provides some specific information about placement availability, or sufficiency, for children and young people in care.

## **2. MAIN ISSUES**

### **Key Performance Information and summary of progress**

- 2.1. The change for children programme was implemented between November 2018 and January 2019, meaning that the new arrangements within children's social care have now been in place for a full year.
- 2.2. Key performance information summarised below is demonstrating how the new arrangements have brought increased stability across the system. Numbers open to the service, who are subject to child protection plans or who are in care are now reducing in line with expectations. Key compliance indicators have shown consistent improvement. This places us in a strong position to now focus on improving the consistency and quality of practice across the service in line with our ambition to achieve consistently good outcomes for all vulnerable children and young people.
- 2.3. Lower caseloads and teams managed by dedicated and non-caseholding team managers, supported by oversight and challenge from our quality assurance service, is improving the consistency of practice. That said, the team managers are mostly new into these roles. The role of team manager is one of the most challenging in children's social care, and this still relatively new tier of management continues to be in need of support and on-going development.
- 2.4. Our target is to ensure that average caseloads for social workers are at or below 20 in all teams apart from assessment and care leaver teams, where up to 25 is acceptable. The table below shows the position as of 4<sup>th</sup> February 2020:

<b>Team</b>	<b>Average cases per worker</b>
Adolescents Team North	7.8
Adolescents Team South	8.9
Assessment Team Cambridge	10.4
Assessment Team East Cambridgeshire	14.5
Assessment Team Fenland	16.9
Assessment Team Huntingdon	15.2
Assessment Team South Cambs	14.2
Cambridge Children's Team 1	14.3
Cambridge Children's Team 2	14.4

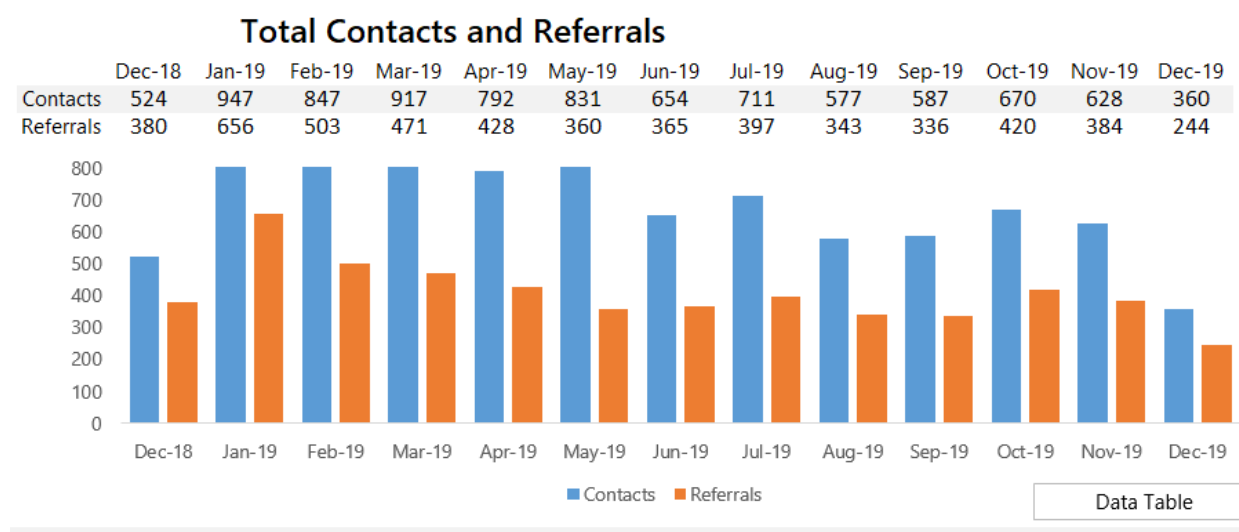
Disability Social Care Cambs	15.3
Disability Social Work Fenland	11.4
Disability Social Work Hunts	16.0
Disabled Children's Referral & Access Team	8.6
East Cambs Children's Team 1	12.4
Fenland Children's Team 1	13.1
Fenland Children's Team 2	12.6
Hunts Children's Team 1	16.7
Hunts Children's Team 2	17.7
North Care Leaver Team	15.9
North Child in Care Team 1	17.7
North Child in Care Team 2	16.7
Unaccompanied Children and Young People	23.6
South Cambs Children's Team 1	10.6
South Cambs Children's Team 2	13.3
South Care Leaver Team	19.0
South Child in Care Team 1	14.1
South Child in Care Team 2	17.9

- 2.5. The above table shows that for the most part, average caseloads have remained much improved. That said, at the time of writing this report, there continued to be a few individual practitioners with caseloads above 20, with particular pressures in the team working with unaccompanied children and young people resulting from staff sickness. Plans are in place for these to be addressed and, in the case of this specific team, we are seeking agency staffing to support workloads.
- 2.6. Managing caseloads remains an area where continued scrutiny is required. Staff turnover and sickness can have a significant impact, and often quite quickly. This is particularly the case in the current environment where recruiting agency social workers remains challenging. Issues such as these also have an impact on children and young people, who can experience too many changes of social workers as a result. The new recruitment campaign is, however, continuing to deliver results and we continue to expect to see an improving picture in this area.
- 2.7. Preparation for the full implementation of Family Safeguarding is continuing, including a review of children and young people open to the service. Children in care numbers have continued to fall in line with expectations. These factors are both leading to a continued reduction in the number of children and young people open across the service, resulting in an improving picture in terms of workload.
- 2.8. Multi-agency workshops took place at the end of February 2020 in order to begin the conversation with partners about referrals. We absolutely want to know about children where there are significant concerns, but the majority of referrals of children do not meet agreed thresholds. This means that we spend a lot of time at our front door sifting through large numbers of children referred to us, looking for those about whom there are serious concerns. This is not an efficient use of our resources, and increases the risk that concerns may be missed.

- 2.9. We have been providing support to managers across our teams in order to improve the consistency of decision making. Now that we have successfully moved to LiquidLogic as our case management system, we are in a position to strengthen performance reporting arrangements, which will again help to improve consistency and management oversight.
- 2.10. More generally, improvement journeys within children's services always focus initially on ensuring that compliance improves before a focus on improving practice will have full impact. Children's services in Cambridgeshire are making good progress in terms of compliance, but quality of practice and consistency of management oversight will continue to need support and development for some time.
- 2.11. As the system is settling, we are beginning to see changes in the level of demand away from south and towards north Cambridgeshire. This was to be expected; demographic information in respect of the county has indicated that the balance of resources has not been correct. We have begun to address this by slowly increasing some capacity in the North of the County, and this will be included within the strategic review of early help services, more details of which can be found below.

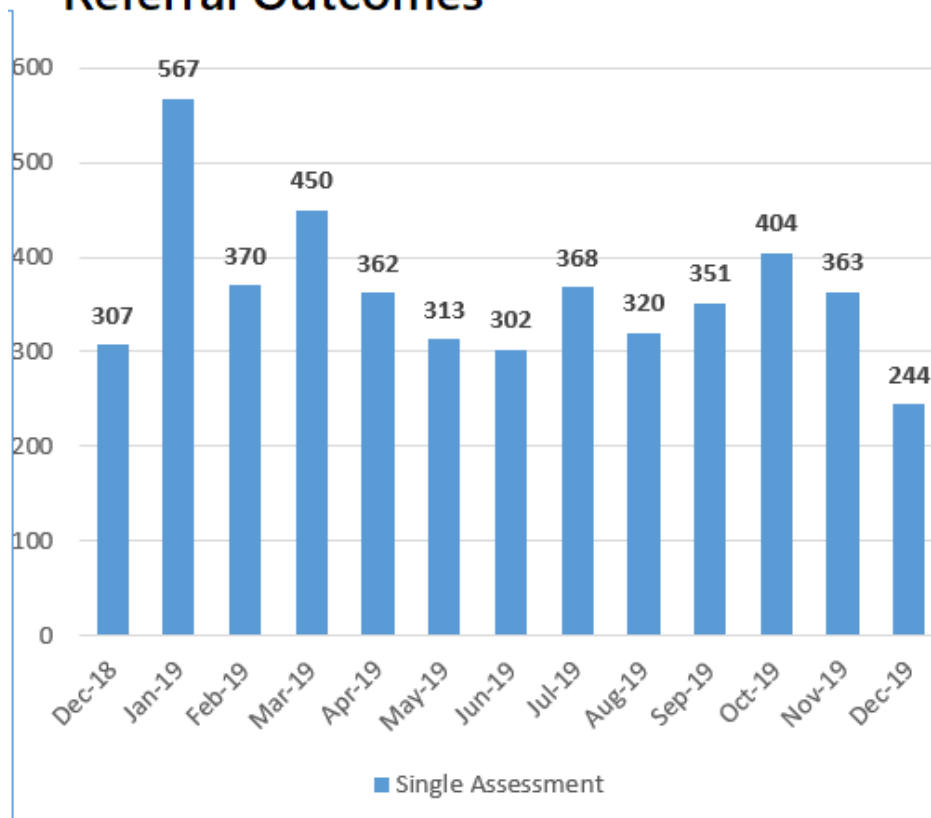
### Contacts, referrals and assessment

- 2.12. The table below shows the trend in relation to contacts and referrals into the children's social care service:

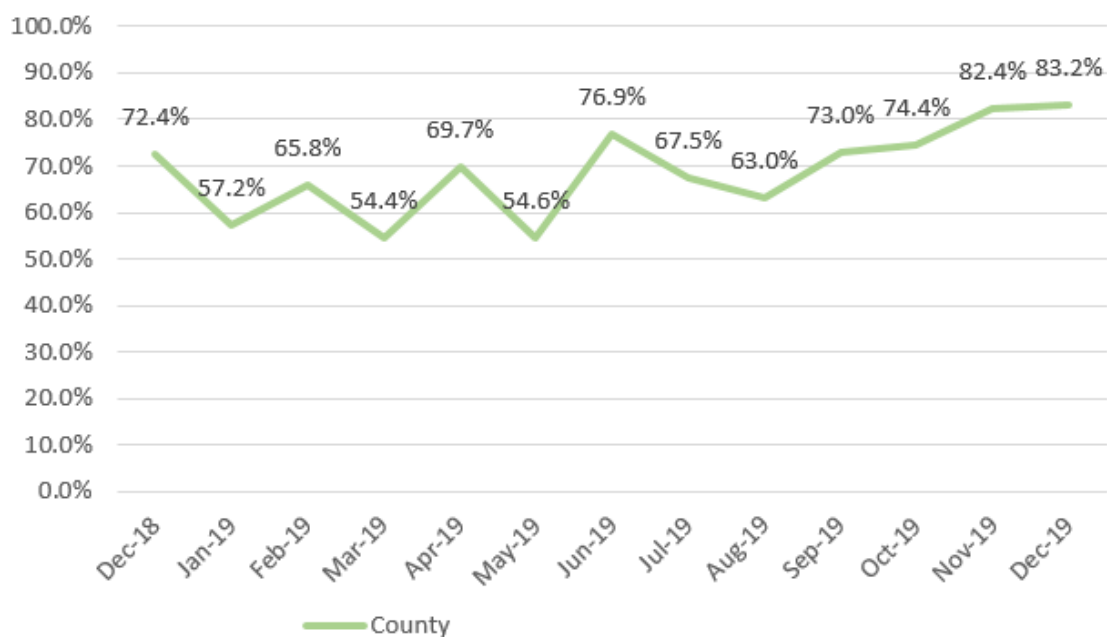


- 2.13. It is encouraging that the number of contacts about children has declined over recent months. The number that progress to a referral has also reduced, which is because we are making progress in applying thresholds in accordance with the Local Safeguarding Children Board policy. This is a good indication that the changes made to the front door at the beginning of 2019 are becoming increasingly embedded.
- 2.14. The number of referrals resulting in a single assessment has also fallen from the very high levels in 2019:

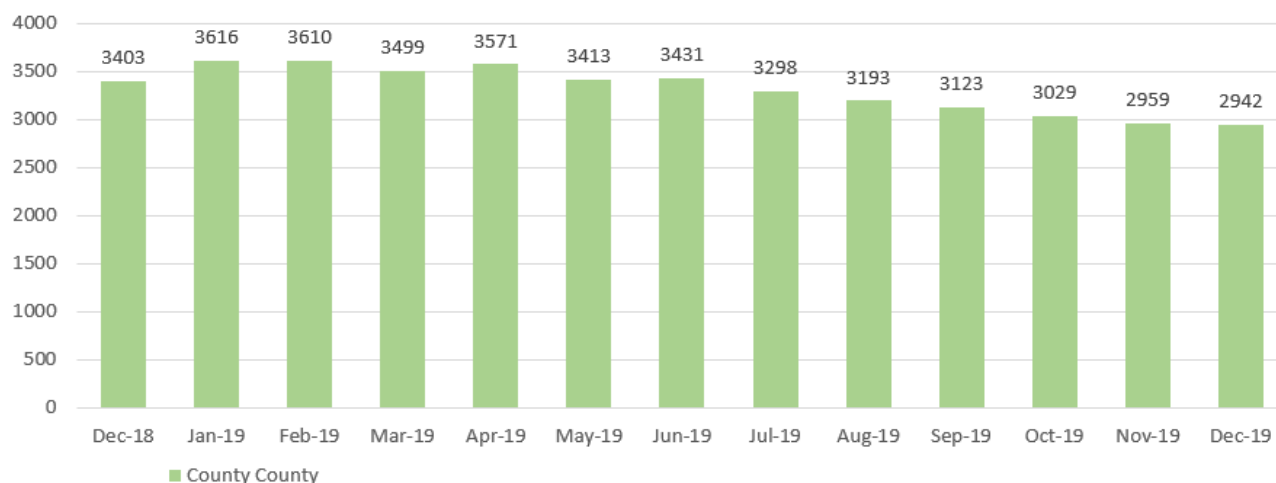
## Referral Outcomes



2.15. This is important since this indicator translates directly into higher caseloads in assessment teams, which can result in poorer outcomes for children and young people as workers become over stretched, meaning that assessments can take more time to complete and be less thorough. Indeed, performance in relation to the timeliness of the completion of assessments has now been steadily increasing since the summer of 2019:



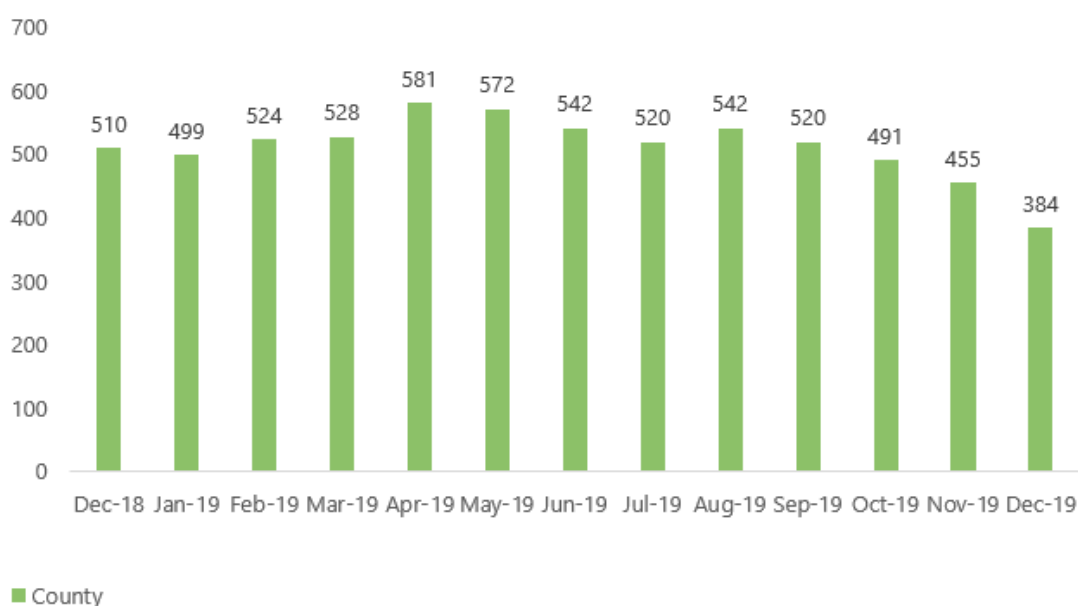
- 2.16. While there is room for further improvement, we are now in line with the England average performance [also 83%] and performing slightly better than our statistical neighbour average of 81%.
- 2.17. The total number of children and young people open to the service continues to decline. This is important as it is not appropriate for children to remain open when this is no longer necessary, and because more appropriate numbers open to the service continue to feed through into lower caseloads:



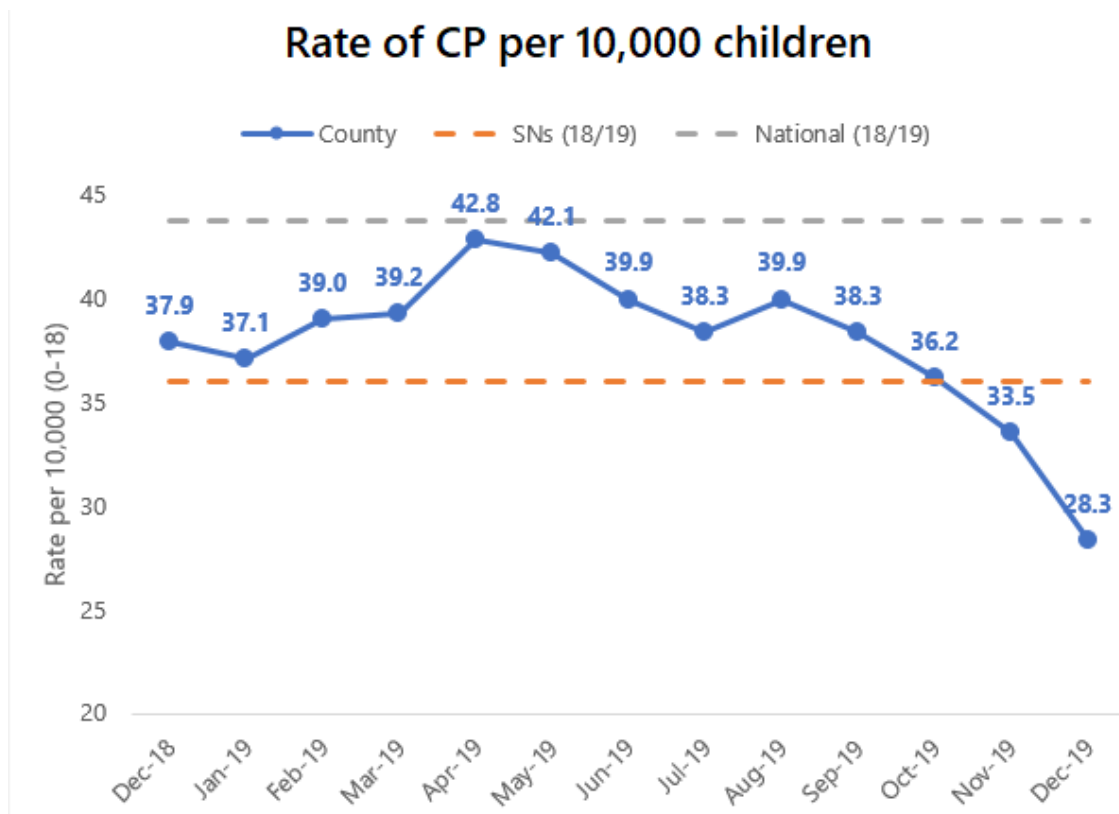
- 2.18. We expect the number of open cases to continue to reduce across the service, albeit now at a slower rate than over the last few months. As will be seen later, numbers in care are now also reducing, as are numbers on a child protection plan. We are also now holding child in need panels in order to support practitioners and managers to step down child in need work to early help where this is appropriate.

### Child Protection

- 2.19. Numbers of children subject to child protection plans have generally been falling from a peak of 581 in April 2019, as shown in the following chart:

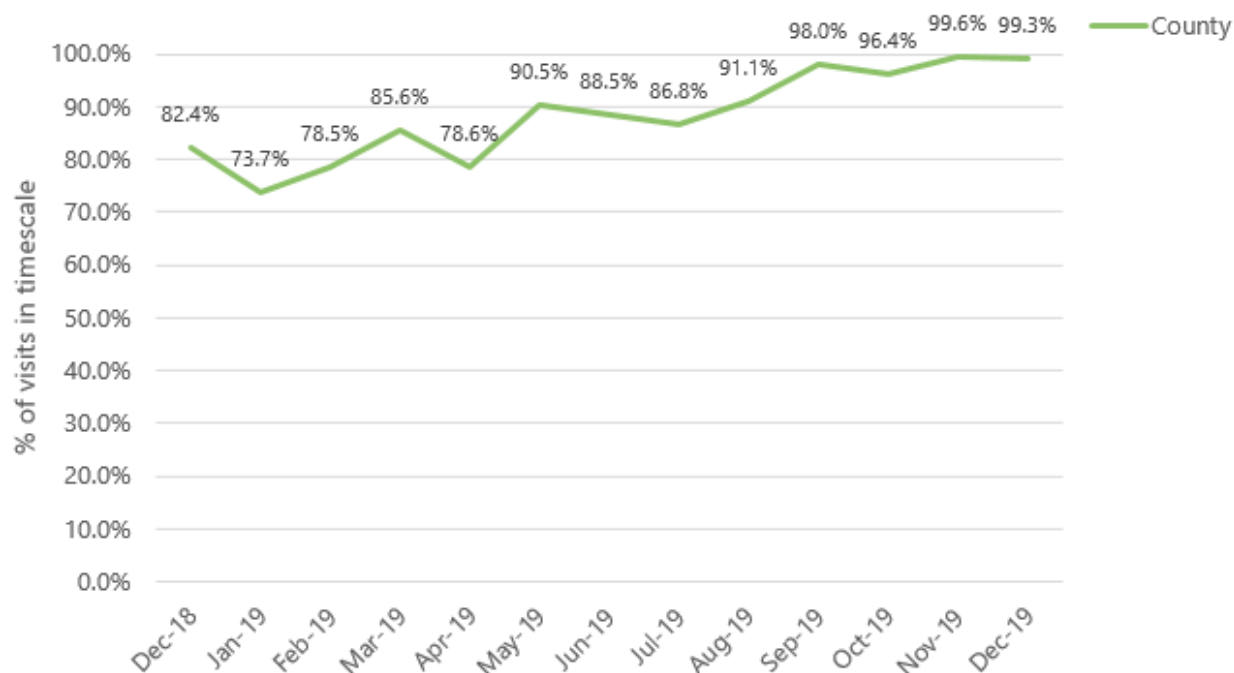


- 2.20. The chart below shows the rate of children subject to child protection plans compared with the England and Statistical Neighbour averages:



- 2.21. The rate of children subject to a child protection plan is now significantly below the average rate of our statistical neighbours. This represents a change in culture to one where we are seeking to work much more explicitly in partnership with families through child in need procedures. Many families experience child protection processes as being highly adversarial. While some children will always need to be considered within a child protection framework, long term outcomes for children are often better when we can avoid an adversarial relationship with parents.
- 2.22. Hertfordshire, one of our closest statistical neighbours, has a rate of children subject to child protection plans of 20.5 per 10,000. Hertfordshire established the Family Safeguarding approach, and it is our expectation that the rate in Cambridgeshire will continue to reduce as the Family Safeguarding model becomes embedded in Cambridgeshire.
- 2.23. There are some continuing issues around compliance with child protection conferences, including the timely preparation of reports to conference. Parents of children subject to child protection plans should have access to social work and other reports prior to the conference, so they can be prepared. This has not been happening often enough, resulting in the decision being taken that conferences will do not go ahead without the necessary paperwork being completed within the required timescales. This is having an impact on the proportion of conferences held within timescales, but will result in improved compliance and a better service to families over time.
- 2.24. The chart below shows the timeliness of visiting to children who are subject to child protection plans, which is indicating steadily improving performance:

## Percentage of CP Visits in timescale by team



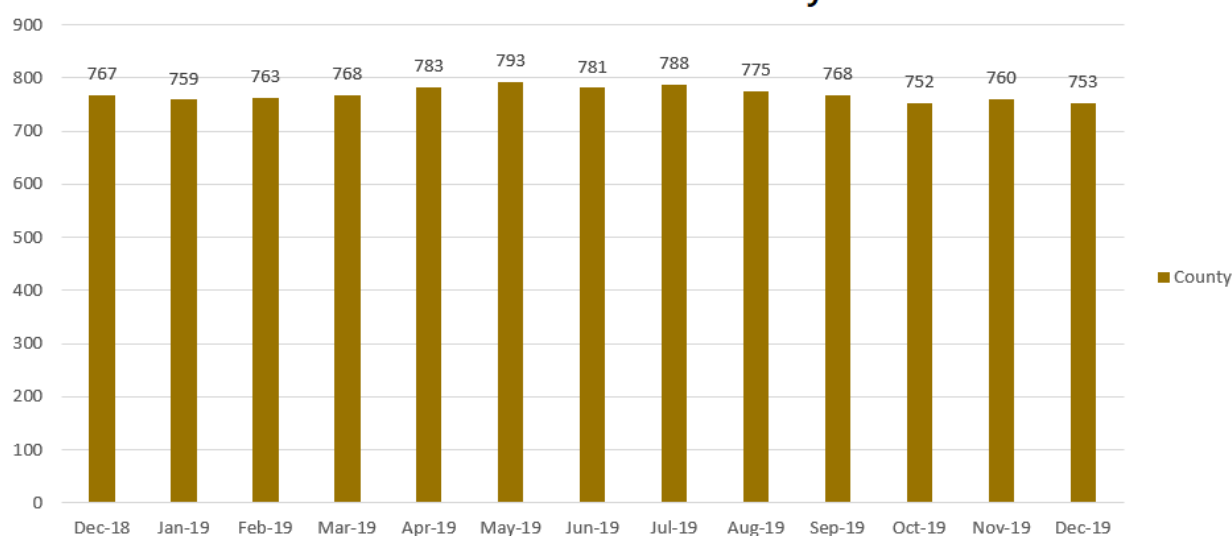
2.25. Performance over 95% is really very good indeed, and this has now been achieved consistently since August 2019.

### Children in Care

2.26. There does now seem to be a clear downward trajectory in relation to the numbers of children and young people in care. This is obviously very positive, and is in line with expectations following the restructure of services in November 2018.

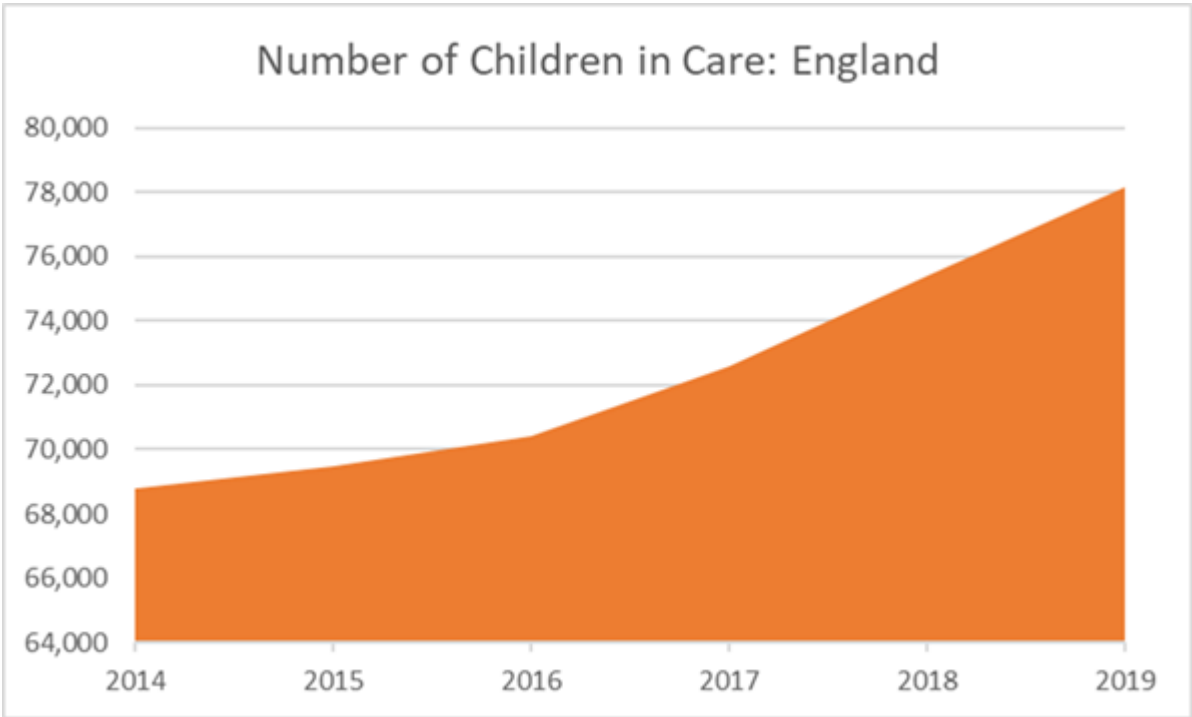
2.27. The graph below shows a clear downward trend since the summer of 2019. Numbers in care have continued to decline, and were 739 as of 4<sup>th</sup> February 2020:

### Number of Children in Care by Team



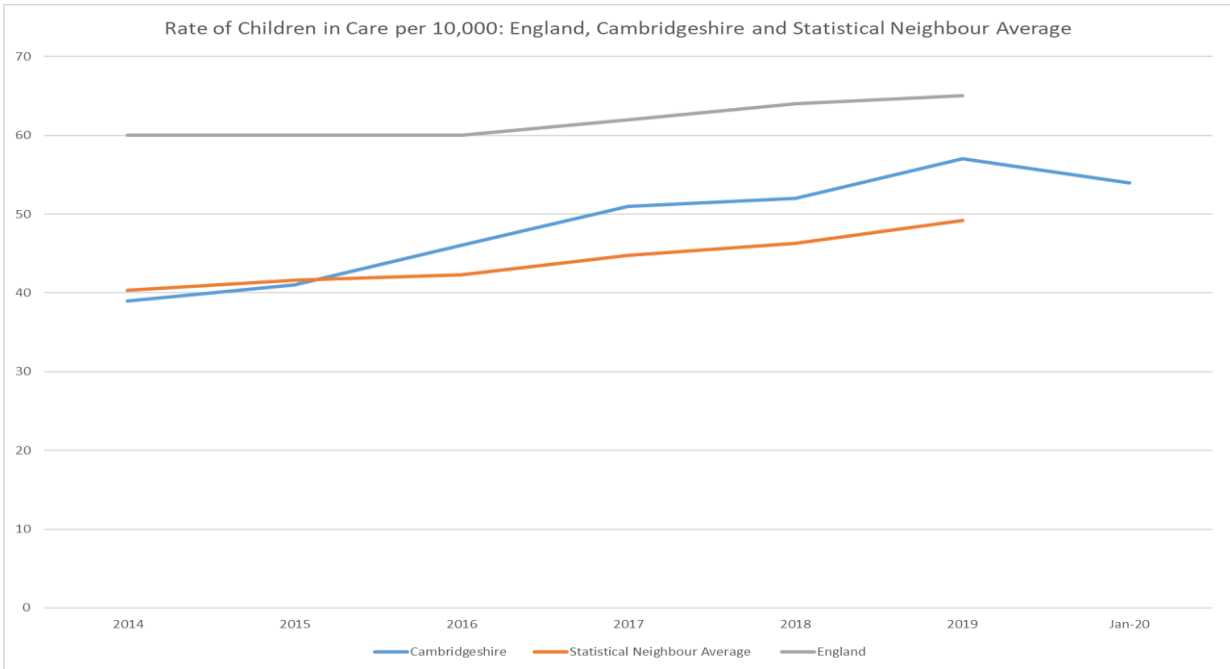


2.28. Comparison figures for the numbers in care for the country as a whole as of March 2019 were published in December. These show a continuation of the national trend for increasing numbers of children and young people in care:

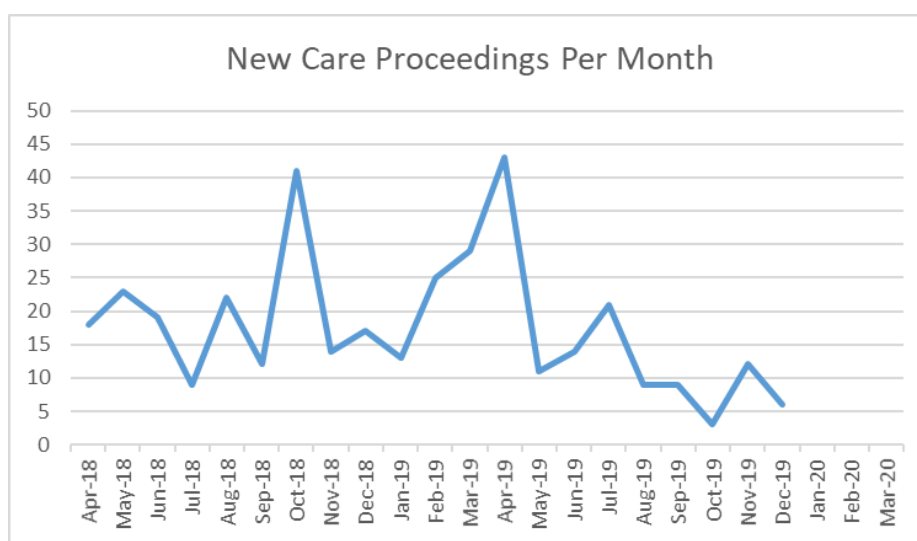


2.29.

young  
own by



- 2.30. The January figure in the chart is equivalent to the 739 figure as of 4<sup>th</sup> February referenced above. This is clearly good progress but we expect to see this trend continue, particularly as the Family Safeguarding model becomes embedded during 2020/21.
- 2.31. Were we looking after the same number of children as the average rate of children in care of our statistical neighbours, we would have around 670 children and young people in care. By way of further comparison, however, Hertfordshire is one of our closest statistical neighbours and has the lowest rate of children in care among our comparator group of 34 per 10,000 [equivalent to a child in care population in Cambridgeshire of around 560 children and young people].
- 2.32. Hertfordshire developed the Family Safeguarding model, and in the medium to longer term, our aspiration is for the Cambridgeshire rate to move close to the Hertfordshire one. This will take time, however, not least because some children and young people among our care population now will remain in care for a number of years.
- 2.33. Part of our strategy for ensuring that fewer children and young people come into the care system in the first place is to increase use of the Public Law Outline and to reduce the numbers of children who are part of care proceedings. The chart below identifies a very significant increase in the number of care proceedings initiated around the beginning of the current financial year, but a steep reduction since then:



- 2.34. The continued reduction in use of proceedings will help to reduce budget pressures in relation to legal costs, which have been an issue in the 2019/20 financial year.
- 2.35. **Ofsted Focused Visit: Children in Care and Care Leavers**
- 2.36. On 4<sup>th</sup> February 2020 we received notification by Ofsted that a focused visit relating to children in care would be taking place. Focused visits are a feature of the current Ofsted inspection framework. They involve a week when inspectors are off site, studying key performance information and conducting some telephone interviews, with two days on site the following week. Ofsted inspectors were on-site in Cambridgeshire on 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> February 2020.
- 2.37. The report [in the form of a brief letter] is published on 5<sup>th</sup> March and it is not appropriate for too much information about the feedback during the inspection process to enter the public

domain before then. Verbal feedback during the visit did however confirm that inspectors could see clear evidence of progress since the last inspection in January 2019, and that those areas where they see a continuing need for development and improvement reassuringly coincided with our own assessment of the strengths and areas of development for the service.

- 2.38. There is no judgement following a focused visit. Letters from Ofsted will generally identify areas of strengths as well as areas where inspectors believe that further development is required.

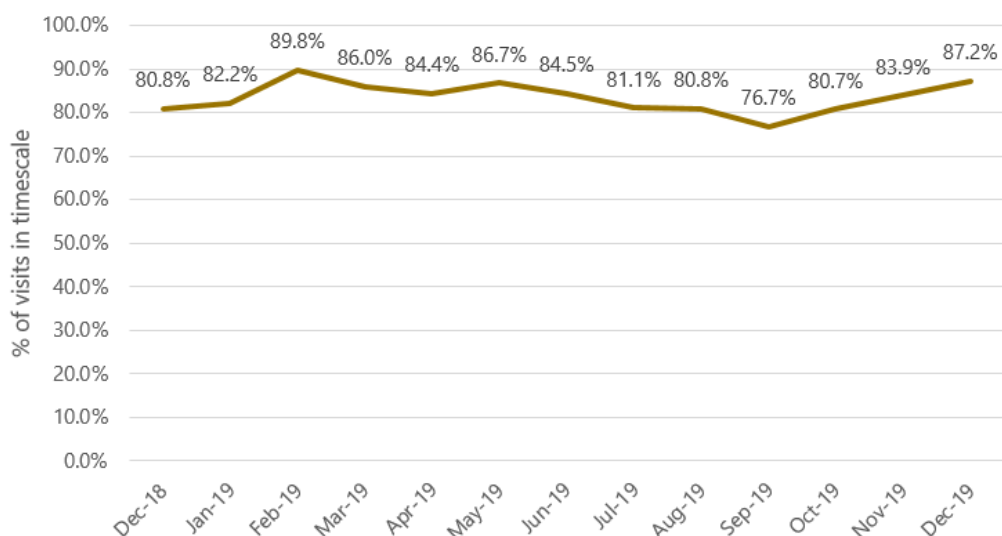
### **Implementation of Family Safeguarding**

- 2.39. The Department for Education (DfE) has confirmed that Cambridgeshire County Council will receive up to £2.49M in 2019/20 and given in principle agreement to fund £1.6M for 2020/21, subject to us providing evidence of onward sustainability and spend in line with original estimates. The DfE reserves the right to reclaim funds that have not been used, but has confirmed that they consider that the funding 'year' began in August 2019, when confirmation of funding was provided, as opposed to the beginning of the 2019 financial year, which is helpful.
- 2.40. The DfE has also further agreed that the funding envelope can be moved further back in recognition that most adult practitioners associated with the model will not be in post before March/April 2020.
- 2.41. Recruitment to the adult practitioner roles is progressing in most areas. There are however complications in respect of the probation officer roles. These are related to the Government decision to transfer a number of probation service activities back from the Community Rehabilitation Companies to the National Probation Service. The local Community Rehabilitation Company cannot take on additional members of staff given that this would mean making a commitment than would then be for the probation service to pick up. The probation service, meanwhile, is not able to recruit new roles during a period when other staff are transferring into the service under TUPE.
- 2.42. At the time of writing this report, negotiations were continuing and it will hopefully be possible to provide an update to Members at Committee.
- 2.43. Family Safeguarding was formally launched on 10<sup>th</sup> February 2020. Guest speakers included Isabelle Trowler, Chief Social Worker for children and families, and the event was positive and well-attended.

### **Corporate Parenting and Fostering Services**

- 2.44. The new corporate parenting service was established as part of the Change for Children programme in 2018/19, and is now becoming established. The picture in relation to ensuring that children in care do not experience unnecessary changes in social workers is an increasingly positive one. Compliance in relation to visiting of children in care is also improving, as shown below:

### Percentage of CIC Visits completed by team



- 2.45. While it is positive to see an improving trend over recent months, I expect this to be consistently above 95%, meaning that there is still some way to go. There have been some staffing pressures over recent months, and a number of our children are placed some distance away, which has made making swifter progress challenging.
- 2.46. The service has been focusing on improving quality of permanency planning for children in care, including identifying children and young people who have been in care for an extended period, but for whom a return home is likely to be appropriate.
- 2.47. In addition, the service has been focusing on our response to young adults who were previously looked after as unaccompanied asylum seeking young people. One area has been to ensure that this group of young people moves to benefit sustainable accommodation at age 18. Another is to review our process when young adults have been determined by immigration authorities to have no right to remain and to have exhausted all their rights.
- 2.48. Significant activity has been taking place within the fostering service. A rolling fostering campaign has been successful in generating a significant number of enquiries, many of which have been converted into applications to become Cambridgeshire foster carers. It is expected that there will be a net gain of around 30 fostering households by the end of the current financial year.
- 2.49. Recruiting and retaining in-house fostering households is an important element of our strategy for our children in care services. The cost of placements with in-house foster carers are much lower than those with Independent Fostering Agencies, even when the cost of operating the service is included. This is not just about money, however. We need more in-house foster carers because they are local to Cambridgeshire and mean that more of our children can be placed close to their home communities, schools, family and peer groups. Maintaining these areas of continuity is very important to children, and helps to explain why there are fewer unplanned endings of placements when children are placed with our own carers. We also know our carers better, meaning we can better match children needing

placements with our foster families. This also helps to avoid unplanned placement endings.

- 2.50. Our recent history of significantly higher numbers of children and young people in care has however meant that we have more children and young people placed outside of Cambridgeshire than we would like. The national as well as local increase in numbers of children in care has resulted in a shortage of fostering placements locally, meaning that we have had no option to place children further away.
- 2.51. The increased recruitment of in-house fostering households has yet to have an impact on this position. In part, this is related to the fact that fewer children and young people are coming into care than was previously the case. It is also the case that because we are making better use of the Public Law Outlie, there are fewer younger children coming into care. The majority of our own foster carers generally prefer to provide care for younger children.
- 2.52. These factors have led to us asking Essex County Council to review and challenge our fostering service, to help us to make sure that we are doing the right things in terms of supporting our carers and enabling them to feel confident about providing care to a changing cohort of children.

### **Early Help Services**

- 2.53. Our early help services play a very important role in supporting children and their families who would be vulnerable to poor outcomes without additional support. Our services need to be considered within a much broader system of support for children and their families, where our partners – statutory and voluntary – play an important part in providing support to children and young people of all ages and at every level in the system.
- 2.54. Following the support by this committee and a contribution of funding from key partner agencies, we have commissioned work by the consultancy group ISOS to look at the way in which early help services as provided by all agencies operate across the county. This review will also help us to assess whether the balance of funding and resources between the more and less affluent areas of Cambridgeshire is right. Demographic indication would suggest that there is relative over provision in areas of affluence compared with the more deprived areas of the County.
- 2.55. This work is expected to conclude by summer 2020 and a report summarising findings and making recommendations as to how to proceed will be presented to this Committee in the autumn.
- 2.56. Alongside aligning our early help services with the think communities' agenda, we will also be reviewing our early help offer and approach with an aim of reversing this trend. This may mean that we will need to look again at how we support key partners including schools to meet a greater proportion of needs at an early help level and avoid making onward referrals to other services.

### **Implementation of LiquidLogic**

- 2.57. I am very pleased to be able to confirm that LiquidLogic went live on 20<sup>th</sup> January 2020 in line with the revised target date.
- 2.58. There have been a few teething issues, but these have been minimal and far fewer than

expected.

- 2.59. Practitioners and managers are very positive about the change. Managers will be able to access much better information about team and individual performance than they have been able to do previously. Practitioners will need to spend less time laboriously cutting and pasting basic details of a child from one form to another, since these are now pre-populated.
- 2.60. For such a complex system upgrade, this project has been very well managed, and will play an important role in helping to support the continued improvements in children's services.

### **Concluding Remarks**

- 2.61. It is positive to be able to report that the improvements that were really becoming evident in my last service director report to this committee in September 2019 are continuing to become established.
- 2.62. Caseloads and numbers of children in care are coming down, resulting on fewer pressures on the system overall. More social workers are able to spend more time with children and families as a result.
- 2.63. Compliance in most areas is improving, and managers are becoming increasingly established in their roles.
- 2.64. That said, there remains much to do to ensure consistency of quality, applications of thresholds, thoroughness and timeliness of assessments and ensuring that planning for children is SMART. While supervision frequency has improved, the quality of this remains variable across the service.
- 2.65. Further progress is also needed in some specific areas including in relation to the completion of initial health assessments.
- 2.66. LiquidLogic will result in an increase in the ability of managers to have oversight of work taking place. It will also support social workers by meaning that they spend more productive time recording work with children and families. This is because they need to spend much less time copying and pasting basic demographic information into every contact and form they complete compared with the previous system.
- 2.67. Overall, despite the need to continue to improve consistency of practice and management oversight, the service is now in a much stronger position to be able to deliver consistently good outcomes for children and young people in due course.

## **3. ALIGNMENT WITH CORPORATE PRIORITIES**

### **3.1 A good quality of life for everyone**

The following bullet points set out details of implications identified by officers:

- Supporting vulnerable children and young people to achieve the best possible outcomes has longer term benefits for them as well as to the wider population. Where children are enabled to remain safely with their families or provided with good quality care, they are most likely to develop resilience and be more likely

to remain in good physical, mental and emotional health, make better quality relationships and contribute more to the community.

### **3.2 Thriving places to live**

The following bullet points set out details of implications identified by officers:

- Promoting the best outcomes for children and young people means that they are most likely to make a positive economic and social contribution into adulthood.

### **3.3 The best start in life for Cambridgeshire's children**

The following bullet points set out details of implications identified by officers:

- A children's service that is effective overall will ensure that vulnerable children and young people are supported to achieve good outcomes, including by enabling families to provide permanent, safe and loving homes to their children wherever possible;
- Where children and young people are identified as being at risk of harm, children's services take action in order to ensure that these risks are minimised;
- As corporate parents, we share responsibility for ensuring that our children and young people in care and young people leaving care are able to access the best possible support in order to achieve good long term outcomes.

### **3.4 Net zero carbon emissions for Cambridgeshire by 2050**

There are no significant implications within this Priority

## **4. SIGNIFICANT IMPLICATIONS**

### **4.1 Resource Implications**

*There are no significant implications within this category.*

### **4.2 Procurement/Contractual/Council Contract Procedure Rules Implications**

*There are no significant implications within this category.*

### **4.3 Statutory, Legal and Risk Implications**

*There are no significant implications within this category.*

### **4.4 Equality and Diversity Implications**

*There are no significant implications within this category*

#### 4.5 **Engagement and Communications Implications**

*There are no significant implications within this category*

#### 4.6 **Localism and Local Member Involvement**

*There are no significant implications within this category.*

#### 4.7 **Public Health Implications**

*There are no significant implications within this category.*

<b>Implications</b>	<b>Officer Clearance</b>
<b>Have the resource implications been cleared by Finance?</b>	Yes Name of Financial Officer: Martin Wade
<b>Have the procurement/contractual/ Council Contract Procedure Rules implications been cleared by Finance?</b>	Yes Name of Financial Officer: N/A Gus De-Silva
<b>Has the impact on statutory, legal and risk implications been cleared by LGSS Law?</b>	Yes or No Name of Legal Officer: Sent but not heard back
<b>Have the equality and diversity implications been cleared by your Service Contact?</b>	Yes Name of Officer: Lou Williams
<b>Have any engagement and communication implications been cleared by Communications?</b>	Yes Name of Officer: Matthew Hall
<b>Have any localism and Local Member involvement issues been cleared by your Service Contact?</b>	Yes Name of Officer: Lou Williams
<b>Have any Public Health implications been cleared by Public Health</b>	Yes Name of Officer: Raj Lakshman

### **SOURCE DOCUMENTS**

<b>Source Documents</b>	<b>Location</b>
None	