

Service Director's Report: Children and Safeguarding

To: Children and Young People Committee

Meeting Date: 1st December 2020

From: Executive Director People and Communities

Electoral division(s): All

Forward Plan ref: n/a

Key decision: No

Outcome: A summary of key performance information for children's services covering the last 12 months, and actions taken to maintain and/or improve performance.

That Committee Members have a good oversight of key performance indicators in relation to the safeguarding of vulnerable children, and the progress of children and young people in care.

Recommendation: The Committee is recommended to:

- a) Note the key performance information and actions being taken to continue to improve outcomes in children's services, and;
- b) Note the continuing work by all in children's services, including our foster carers, to support children, young people and families through the continuing pandemic.

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1. Background

- 1.1. The report begins by summarising key performance information in children's services as of the end of October 2020.

- 1.2. The report concludes by summarising proposed arrangements for utilising support being provided by central Government through the recently announced Winter Fund.

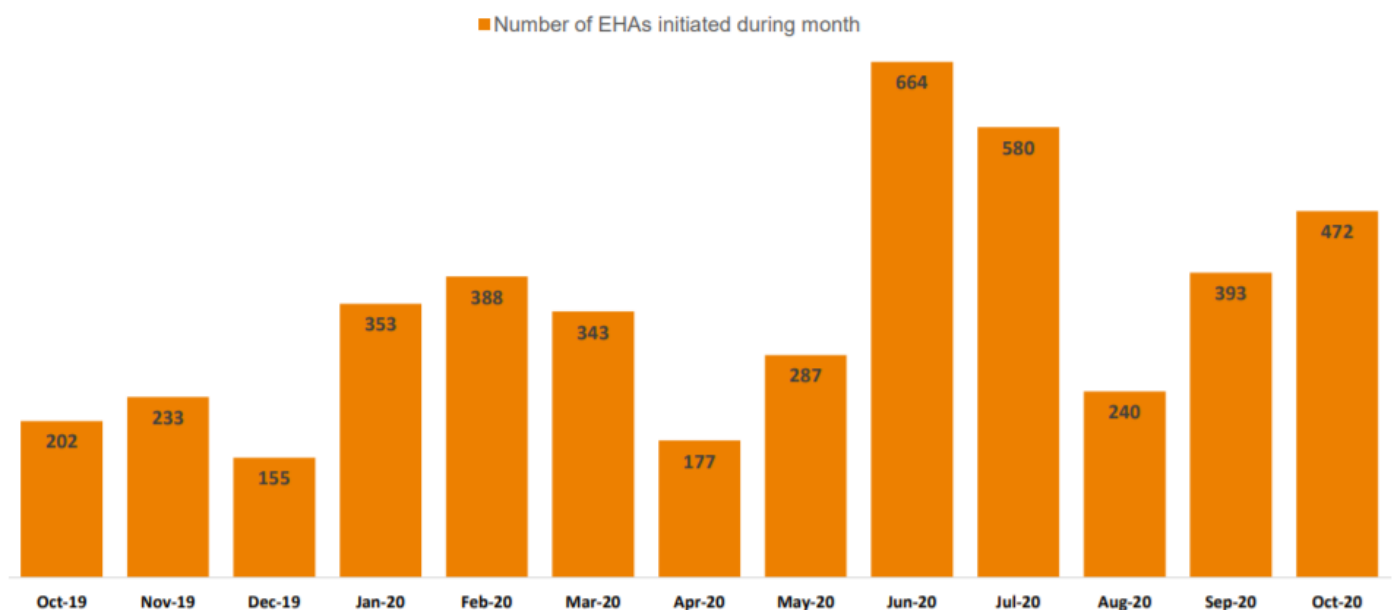
2. Main Issues

Summary of key performance information

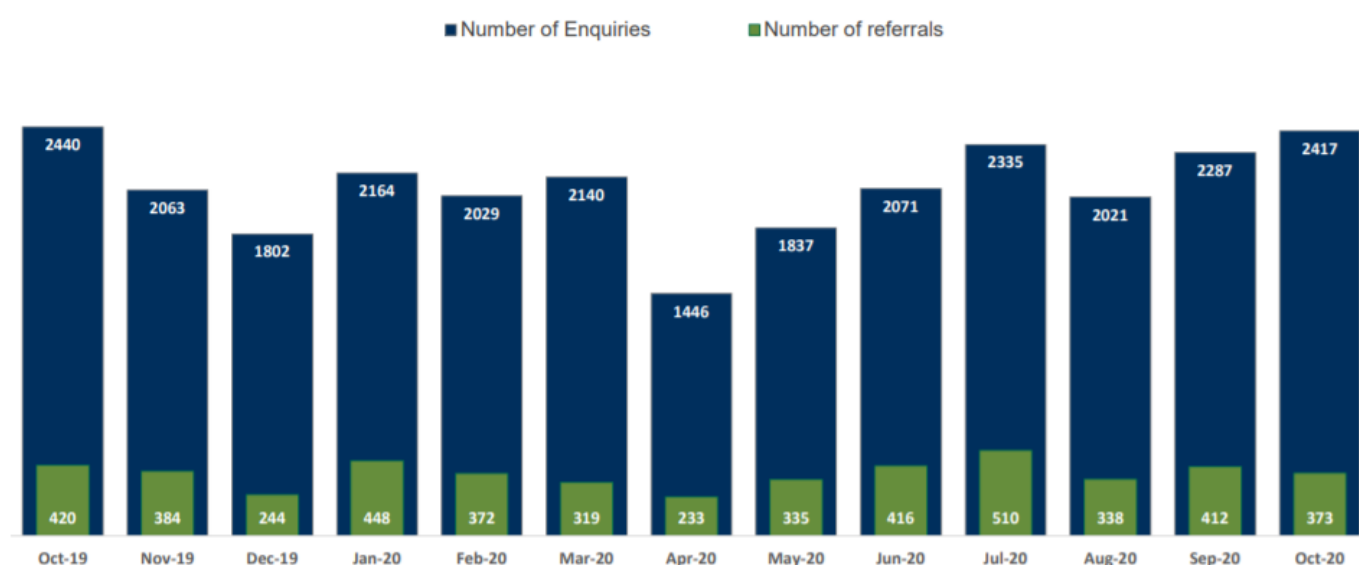
- 2.1. There have been some continuing challenges in maintaining service performance as the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic continues. The further lockdown from 5th November 2020 will undoubtedly have a further impact, the extent of which will at least in part depend on the availability of our workforce to continue to meet demand.
- 2.2. At the time of preparing this report, there had been very limited impact from issues such as staff needing to self-isolate in Cambridgeshire. This was beginning to have an impact in Peterborough, however, with a number of our front-line staff in that authority being told they must self-isolate as a result of track and trace. Time will tell whether similar issues start to arise across the County.
- 2.3. We are aiming to maintain as many of our services operational as possible during the current lockdown period, but we will need to review and re-prioritise should there be significant impact on workforce availability.
- 2.4. The data in this report is for the 12 months to the end of October 2020. For some performance indicators, the changeover of reporting systems earlier this year means that some data from earlier months is not available.

Referrals, assessments and Family Safeguarding

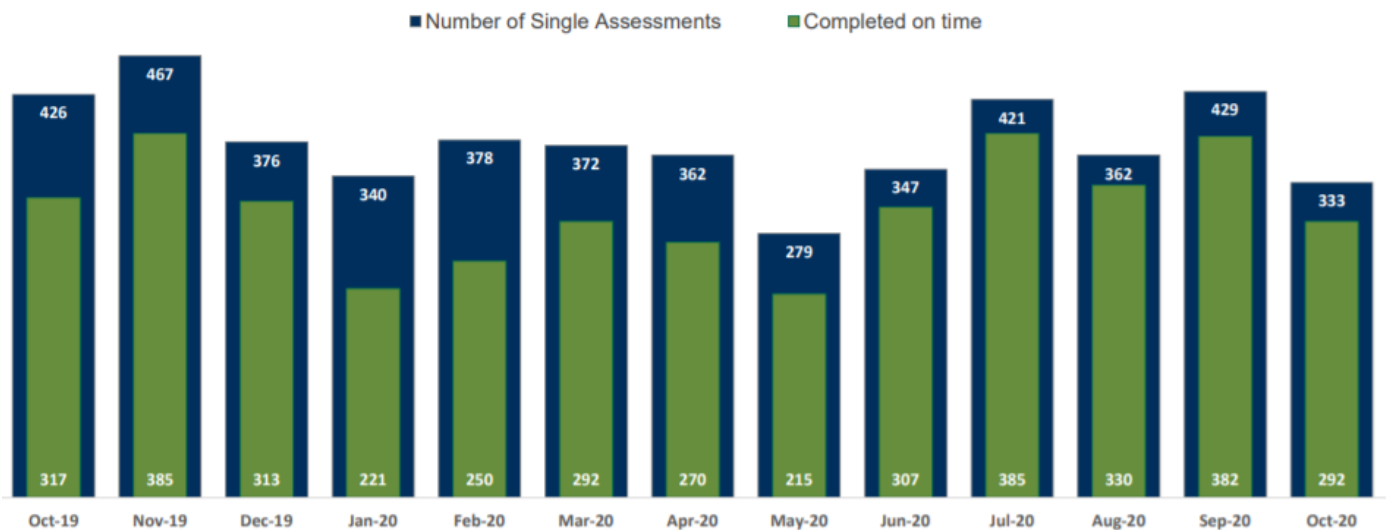
- 2.5. The chart below shows the number of early help assessments initiated month by month. These assessments are commenced where it appears that the child or young person may have a range of additional needs that require some coordinated support, perhaps from a school, health services and the council's directly provided early help service:



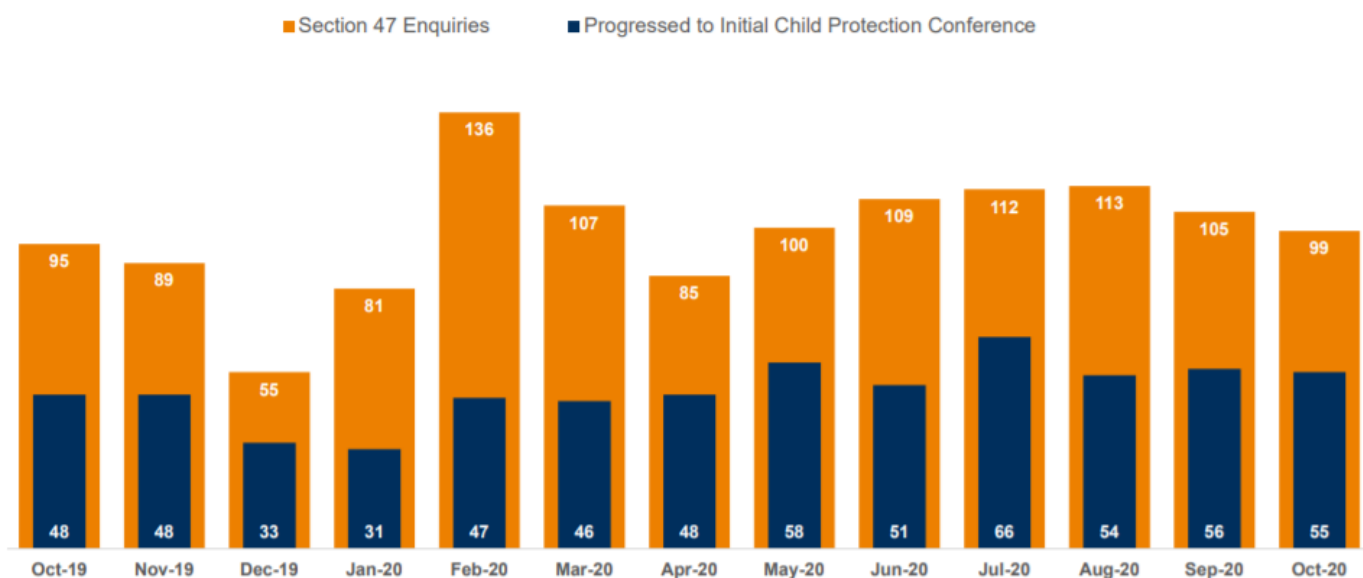
- 2.6. The number of assessments being initiated in October was significantly higher than the same period last year. This may indicate an increased in the level of need, or may indicate the better identification of children and young people who might benefit from an early help assessment.
- 2.7. Not all early help assessments result in additional services being provided; they may conclude that a combination of actions by family, school and a young person are sufficient to address any issues.
- 2.8. We are monitoring this performance indication closely, since it is reasonable to expect to see an increased demand for early help services as a result of the pandemic and lockdown. We will be in a better position to assess the extent to which demand is increasing over the next two months.
- 2.9. The following chart provides information about referrals into Children's Social Care:



- 2.10. As can be seen from the above, while there has been a small increase in the number of enquiries, numbers of children opened as referrals into the service have reduced slightly compared with September and are broadly in line with the position 12 months ago.
- 2.11. Where it is considered after further limited enquiries that children referred may be in need or in need of protection under the Children Act 1989, an assessment must be completed within 45 working days. The chart below shows the number of assessments completed month by month, and the number completed within that timeframe. Performance in October was that 86% of assessments were completed within the required timescale.

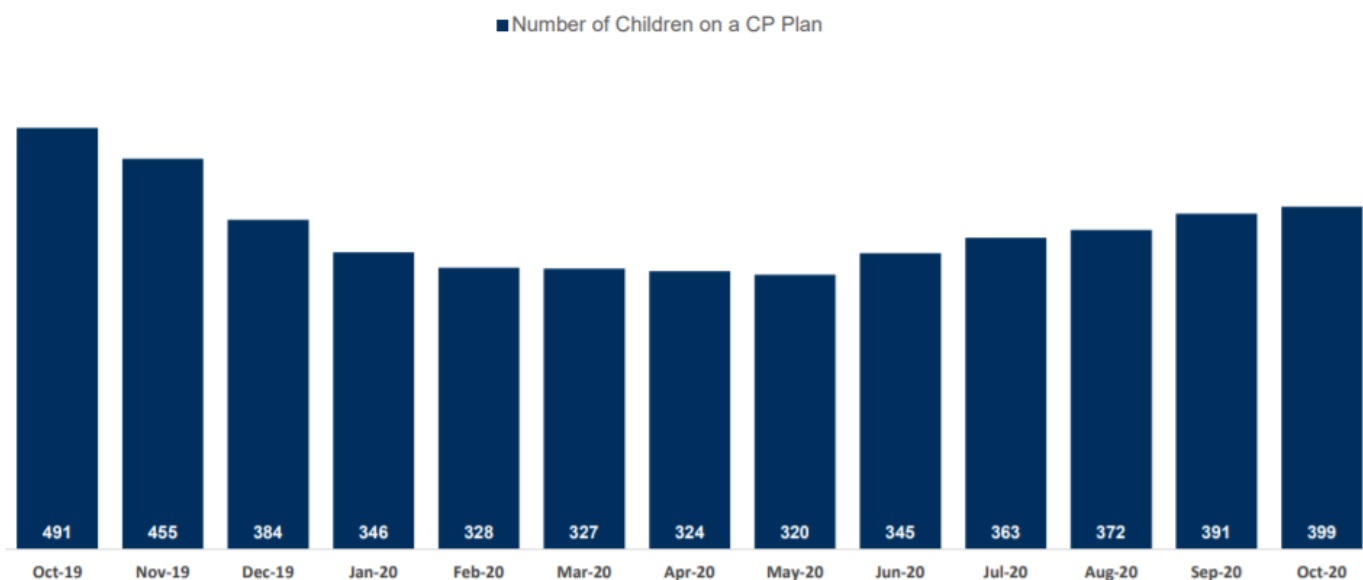


- 2.12. This is good performance compared with our statistical neighbours [81%] and England averages [83%] and is an improvement on last financial year when the proportion of assessments completed on time was 81%.
- 2.13. While it is still early days, taking all the information about referrals and assessments taking place in children's social care does appear to be confirming our view that there would not be a surge of safeguarding referrals following the pandemic. As noted in the last report to Committee, however, we have seen an increase in the complexity of need within the families being referred into children's social care. This is in line with our thinking that while we might not see big increases in the number of referrals, we would be likely to see increased complexity of need.
- 2.14. The chart below shows the number of child protection enquires taking place under s.47 of the Children Act 1989 and the proportion of these that progress to an initial child protection conference. Child protection enquiries should only be undertaken where there are reasonable grounds to believe that a child or young person is at imminent risk of significant harm. The outcome of the enquiry will either be that the situation can be managed under child in need processes, or that the concerns are substantiated and a child protection plan is needed. In a small number of situations, immediate action might also be taken to protect the child, through police powers of protection or through the issuing of court proceedings:



2.15. The chart indicates that 99 children were the subject of a child protection enquiry in October, with 55 progressing to a child protection conference. Child protection enquiries are stressful for families and very intrusive. For this reason, we do not want to put too many families through the process where the outcome is that a conference is not required. Our current performance is that 54% of enquiries progress to conference, which compares with an average of 41% among our statistical neighbours and 38% in England as a whole.

2.16. The chart below shows the number of children subject to a child protection plan over the last 12 months:



2.17. While still considerably lower than the position a year ago, we have continued to see a small month on month increase in numbers subject to child protection plans. Expressed as a rate per 10,000 population aged 0-19, our current rate is 29.2, which is below the average of our statistical neighbours at 36 per 10,000.

2.18. This indicator also needs to be viewed in the context of the number of children being managed in pre-proceedings and who are subject to proceedings, which have reduced significantly

over the last few months in line with expectations as we adopt the Family Safeguarding model.

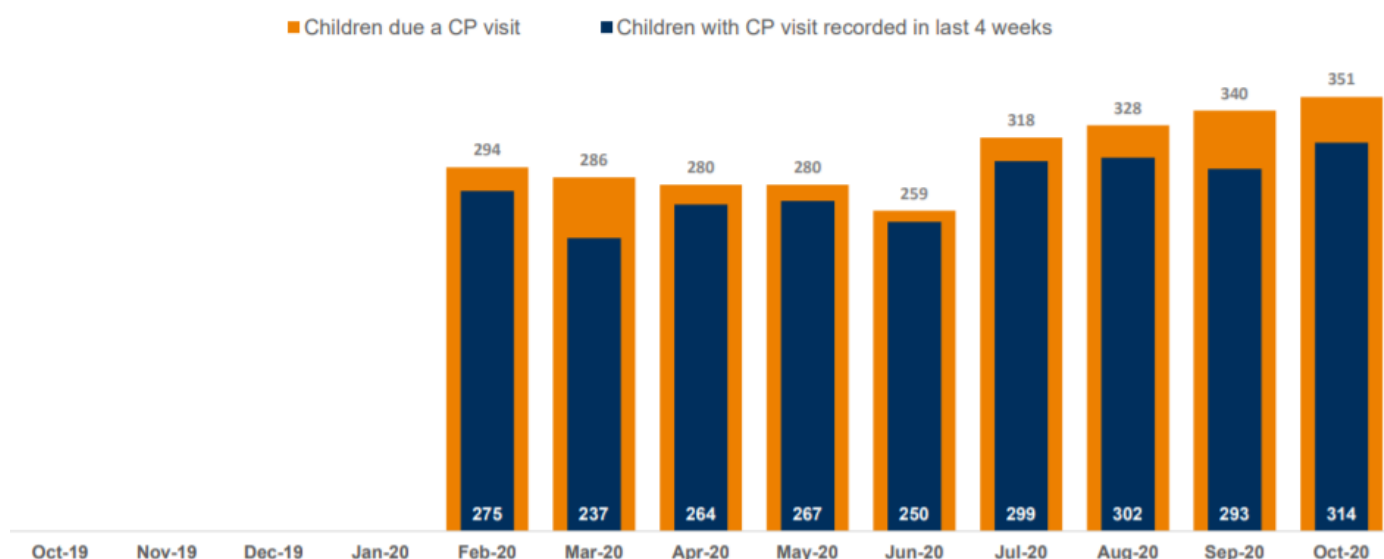
- 2.19. This reduction is now being picked up in nationally available data of the rate of care proceedings per 10,000 population of children and young people aged 0-18 and as summarised below:

Statistical Neighbours

		2017	2018	2019	2020
919	Hertfordshire	6.50	6.00	5.30	5.20
869	West Berkshire	10.80	10.00	9.10	6.10
850	Hampshire	8.00	9.10	9.30	7.20
873	Cambridgeshire	12.00	11.10	10.30	8.00
865	Wiltshire	7.60	6.90	7.50	8.50
803	South Gloucestershire	7.10	7.20	8.50	9.20
931	Oxfordshire	11.10	9.40	11.00	10.10
800	Bath and North East Somerset	7.40	8.20	11.40	10.20
885	Worcestershire	12.90	11.80	10.20	10.80
938	West Sussex	9.40	9.50	8.50	11.00
916	Gloucestershire	9.50	8.00	11.30	11.20
	Statistical Neighbours	9.03	8.61	9.21	8.95
985	East of England	-	-	-	-
970	England	12.30	11.90	11.30	10.80

- 2.20. This indicates that at the year ending March 31st 2020, applications for care proceedings in Cambridgeshire had fallen to just below the average of our statistical neighbours. Hertfordshire, the authority with the lowest rate of proceedings, was the authority that developed Family Safeguarding and has had the approach in place the longest.

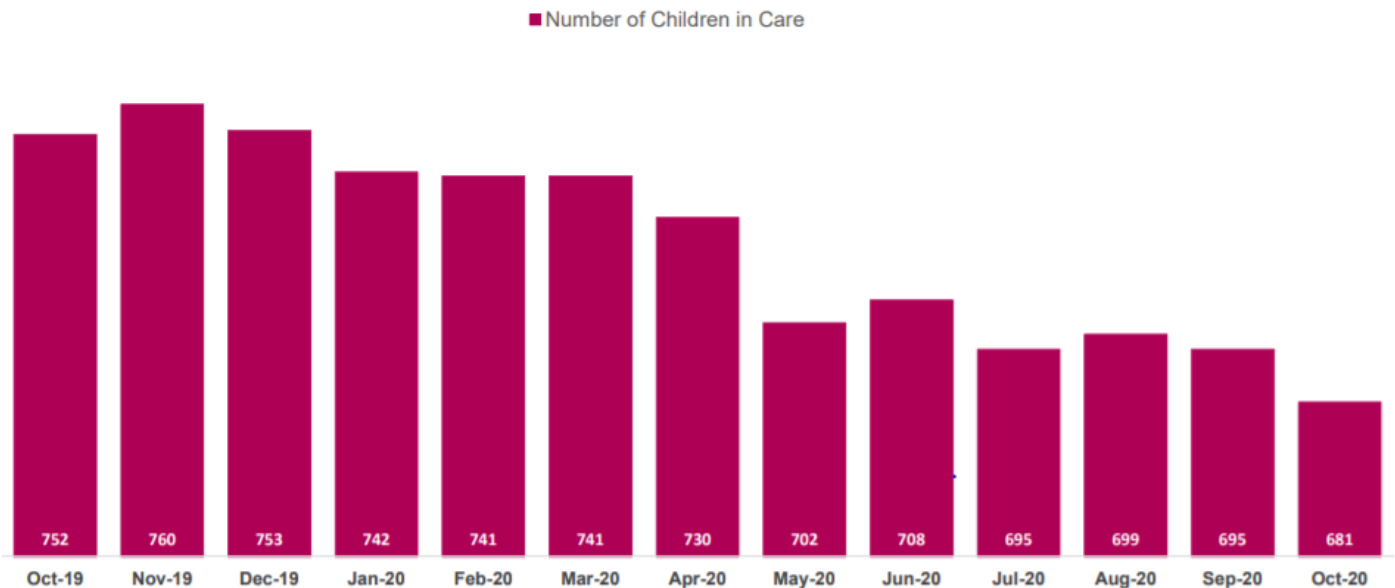
- 2.21. The next chart shows the proportion of visits to children subject to a child protection plan and who have been visited in accordance with the required timescales:



- 2.22. While October performance, at 90% of visits within timescales, is an improvement on last month, this is a little disappointing and we should expect to see visits at 95% or above, in line with performance earlier in the year. Managers across the service are reviewing performance to ensure that this improves.

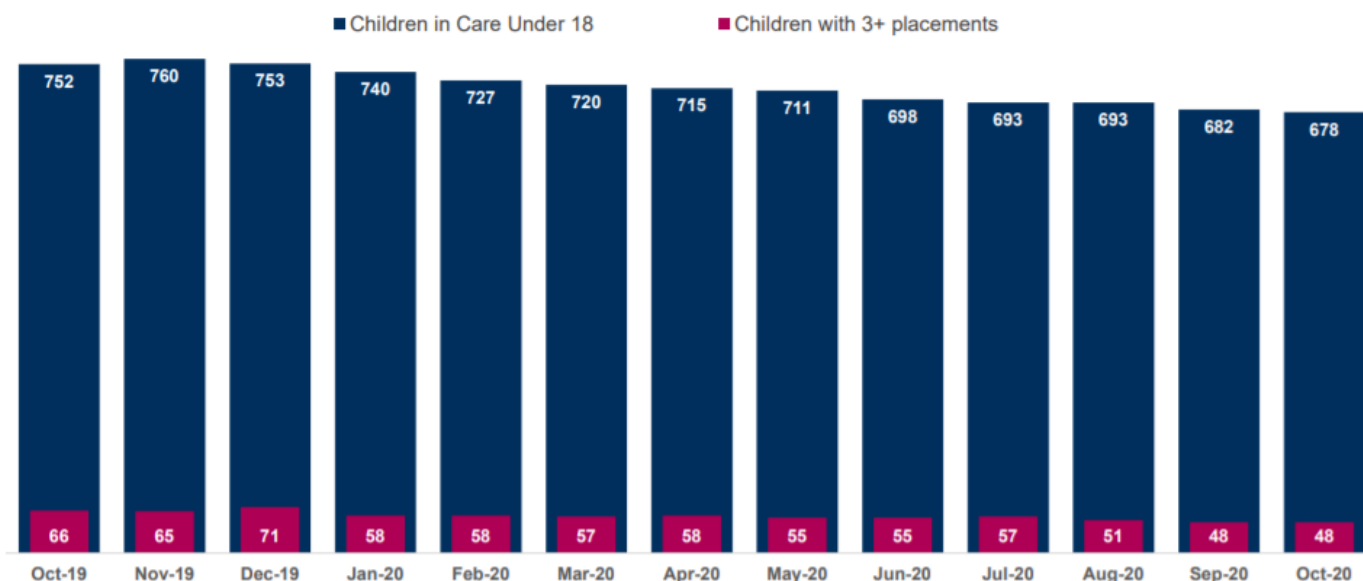
Children in Care

- 2.23. The chart below shows the number of children and young people in care, and the continuing reduction in overall numbers that we have been seeing for a little over 12 months now:



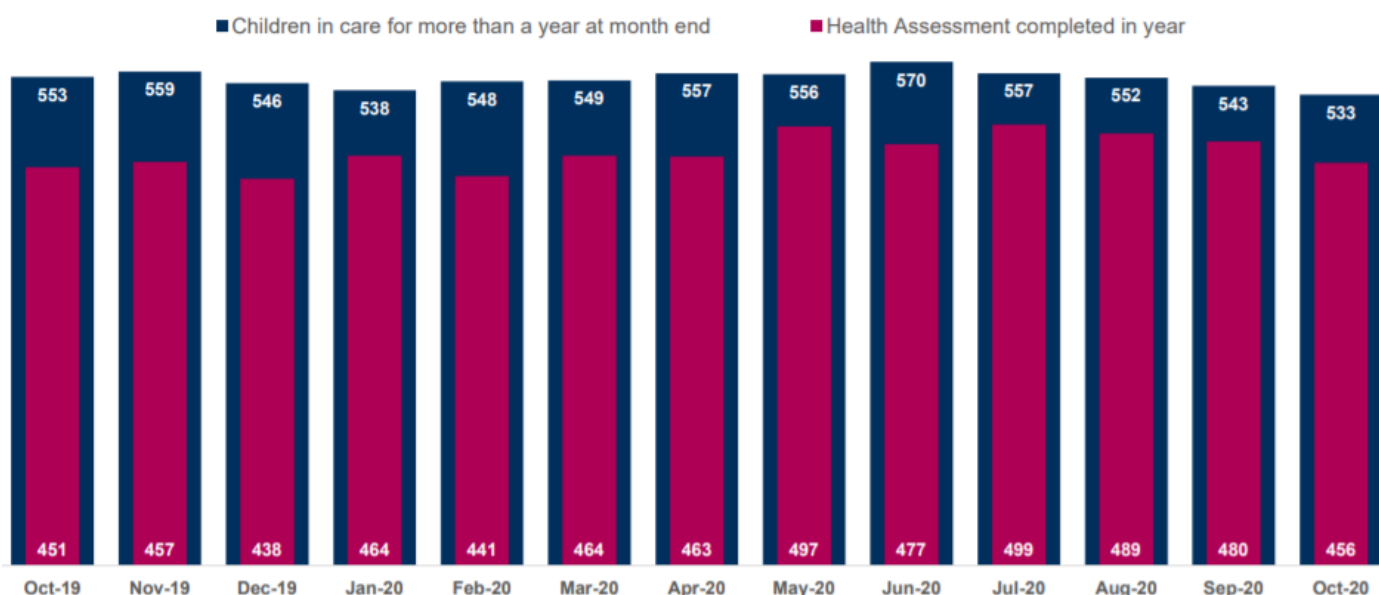
- 2.24. The 681 children in care as of the end of October equates to a rate of 50 per 10,000 – almost exactly in line with the average rate of our statistical neighbours. Our target remains to continue to bring overall numbers down to between 600 and 620 as we continue to embed the Family Safeguarding approach.
- 2.25. The potential impact of Covid-19 does result in some risks in this area, although I think it is more likely that our overall numbers will continue to come down, but within the overall population of children and young people in care, we may see a small increase in the number of older young people with particularly complex needs. This in turn would mean that placement costs might be higher than might otherwise be expected. A foster placement for a younger child with an experienced in-house foster carer is likely to be within the £200 - £250 per week range; a specialist placement for a young person with complex needs at risk of child sexual or criminal exploitation is more likely to cost around £5,000 per week.
- 2.26. The performance reporting system is currently unable to report accurately on visiting to children and young people in care. The reason for this has been identified and is related to children in different types of placements having different required minimum visiting frequency. Children in long term placements must be visited at least once every 3 months, while children who have been in care for less time must be visited at least every 6 weeks [and more often if they have recently moved into a placement]. The system is reporting all visits that happen less often than once every 6 weeks as being overdue.
- 2.27. Local performance monitoring is indicating that between 90 and 95% of visits to children in care are taking place within the required timeframe. Until the system error can be addressed, however, it is not possible to confirm this through the central reporting system.

2.28. The next chart provides an indication of placement stability for children and young people in care, showing the proportion of children in care who have three or more placement moves in the last 12 months:



2.29. Local performance is good in this area, with 7% of children and young people in care experiencing three or more placement moves in the last 12 months. While in general, placement moves should be avoided wherever possible, some will take place for positive reasons – moving to a permanent family for example. National performance in relation to this indicator is that 10% of children experience three or more placement moves, while the average performance of our statistical neighbours is 11%.

2.30. The chart below shows the proportion of children and young people in care for at least 12 months who have had an annual health assessment:



2.31. There has been a slight decline in performance between September and October, from 88% to 86% of health assessments being carried out on time. While this is in line with the statistical neighbour average, and is still better than the last financial year, it is important that we reverse the apparent slight downward trend. It should be noted, however, that there will always be a

proportion of older young people in care who decline their health assessment, and overall performance needs to be seen in that context.

Caseloads and recruitment information

- 2.32. Our target for average caseloads across the service is 15 children per full time equivalent social worker post, and 20 in the leaving care service. The average caseloads for the week ending 6th November [the most recent available at the time this report was being prepared] are summarised in the table below:

Service	Average caseload per FTE
Assessment	14.5
Family Safeguarding	17.0
Adolescent teams	10.0
Corporate Parenting	19.5
Leaving Care	20.5 [but UASC team is 25]

- 2.33. The averages are largely unchanged since the last report but are showing a pressure in the team working with unaccompanied children and young people, and remain higher than I would want to see in the corporate parenting teams. We are working to address both issues, and the decision by Government to meet the full cost of supporting unaccompanied young people provides an opportunity to address higher caseloads.
- 2.34. Caseloads are of course affected by vacancy levels, and we do have some vacancies in both our corporate parenting and family safeguarding parts of the service. We have also seen some real improvements in terms of staff turnover rates and recruitment, however, which will help us to continue to reduce average caseloads.
- 2.35. In 2019/20, the turnover rate for qualified social workers was 12.4%, which means that we now have a lower rate than the national average rate of 16% and a rate of 19% in 2018/19. This reduction in turnover has taken place as caseloads and overall workloads across the system have reduced following the changes implemented towards the end of 2018.
- 2.36. Since March 2020, 32 social workers have been offered and appointed to roles in Cambridgeshire, with 21 having started, a further 5 having start dates and the remaining 6 at the pre-appointment check stage.

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 for people 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 for Cambridgeshire's children. The following bullet points set out details of implications identified by officers:
- A children's services 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
See wording under 3.1 above.

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.

Have the resource implications been cleared by Finance? Yes

Name of Financial Officer: Roger Brett

Have the procurement/contractual/ Council Contract Procedure Rules implications been cleared by the LGSS Head of Procurement? N/A

Name of Officer:

Has the impact on statutory, legal and risk implications been cleared by the Council's N/A

Name of Legal Officer:

Have the equality and diversity implications been cleared by your Service Contact? N/A

Name of Officer:

Have any engagement and communication implications been cleared by Communications? N/A

Name of Officer:

Have any localism and Local Member involvement issues been cleared by your Service Contact? Yes

Name of Officer: Lou Williams

Have any Public Health implications been cleared by Public Health N/A

Name of Officer:

5. Source documents

5.1 None.