

CABINET	AGENDA ITEM No. 9
5 NOVEMBER 2012	PUBLIC REPORT

Cabinet Member(s) responsible:	Councillor Sheila Scott, Cabinet Member for Children's Services	
Contact Officer(s):	Malcolm Newsam, Interim Director of Children's Services	Tel: 01733 863606

IMPROVING CHILDREN'S SERVICES UPDATE

R E C O M M E N D A T I O N S	
FROM : Interim Director of Children's Services	Deadline date : N/A
1. That Cabinet notes the improvement activity and progress within Children's Services	

1. ORIGIN OF REPORT

This report is the fourth quarterly update on progress in implementing the actions and recommendations arising from the Ofsted Inspection.

2. PURPOSE AND REASON FOR REPORT

- 2.1 The purpose of this report is to update Cabinet with details of improvement actions undertaken since the July Cabinet meeting in response to the findings of the Ofsted Inspection of Safeguarding carried out in August 2011.
- 2.2 This report is for Cabinet to consider under its Terms of Reference No. 3.2.3. To take a leading role in promoting the economic, environmental and social well-being of the area.

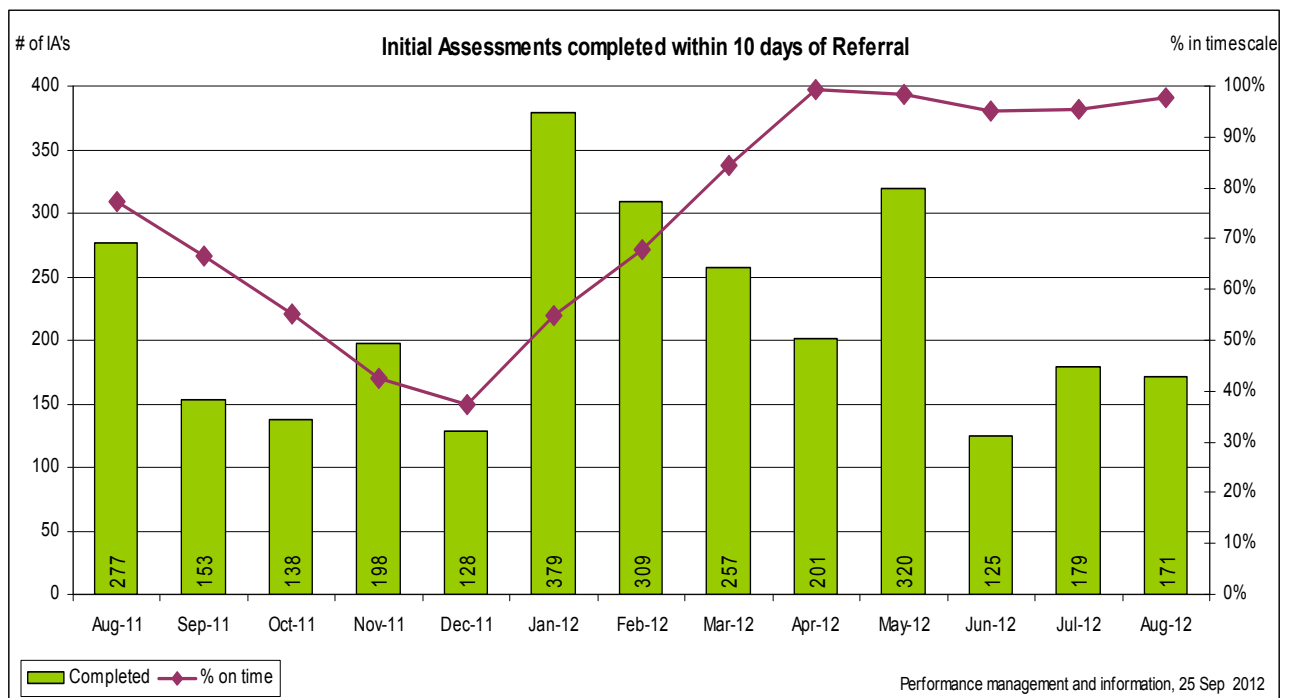
3. TIMESCALE

Is this a Major Policy Item/Statutory Plan?	NO
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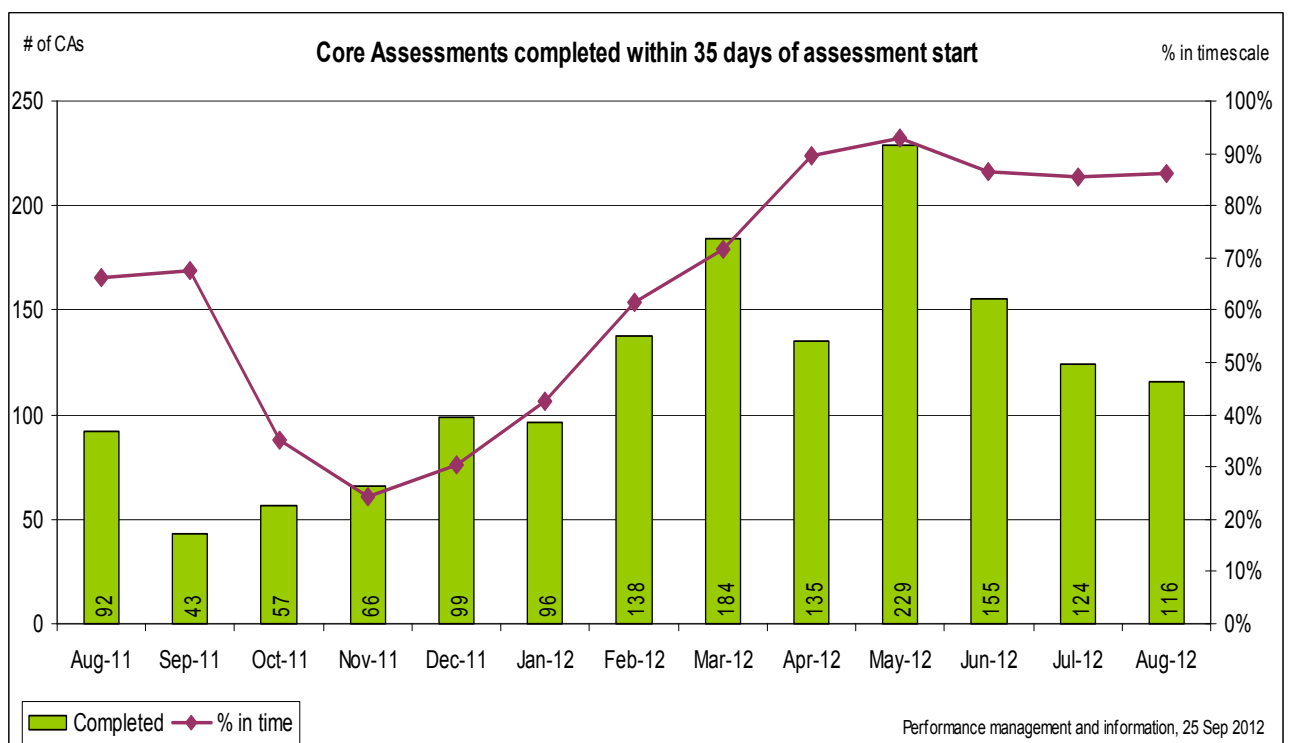
4. PROGRESS REPORT

- 4.1 This report provides the Cabinet with an overview summary of the Council's performance since the last quarterly report to Cabinet in July 2012.
- 4.2 At the July meeting of Cabinet the Phase Two of the Improvement Programme was launched.
- 4.3 **Progress on Phase Two**

We have continued to ensure that families are assessed quickly. Our year to date figures in September show we have completed 97.6% of initial assessments within 10 days.

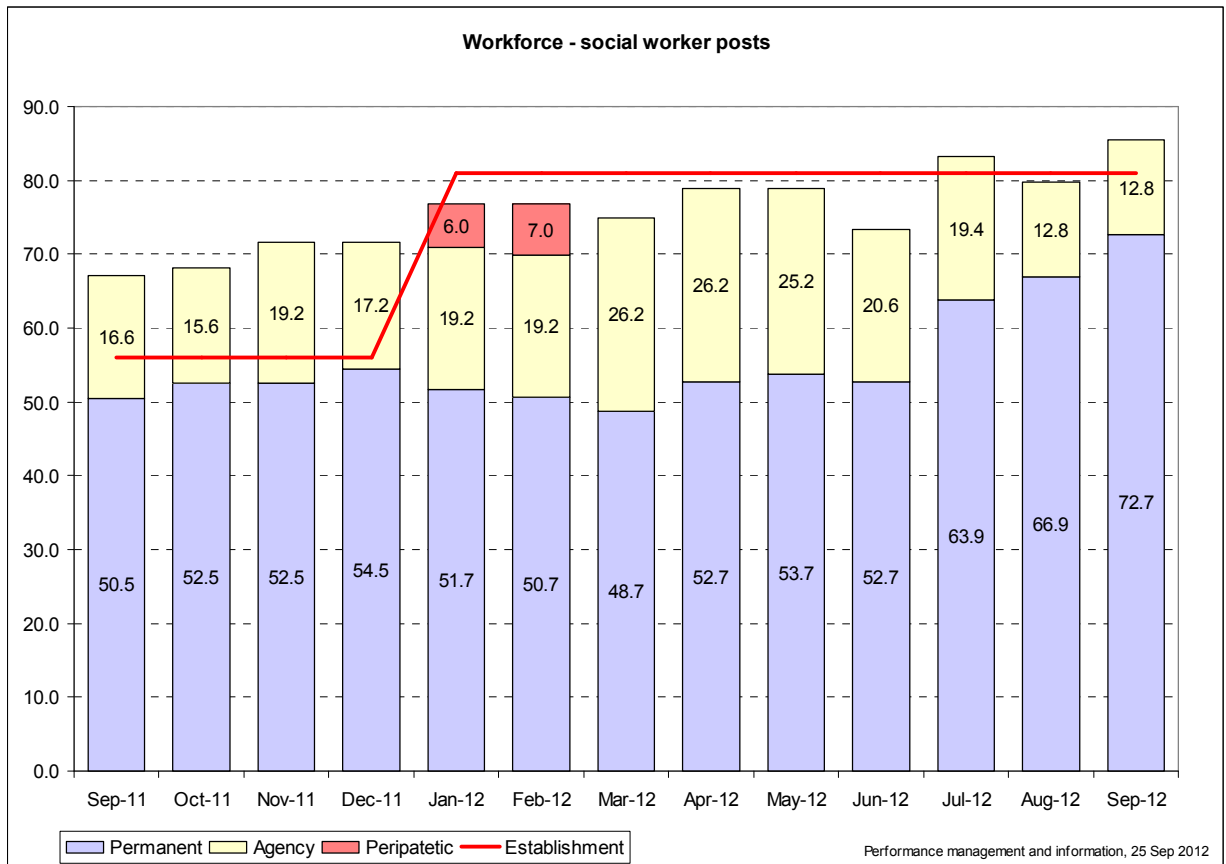


4.4 Similarly good performance has been maintained for completion of core assessments with 88.8% completed within 35 days. There are few outstanding assessments and those completed out of timescale only miss the due date by a few days.



4.5 Since June, we have seen a significant reduction in volumes of referrals and initial assessments. This has also been reflected in significantly greater numbers of children progressing to a Common Assessment (the CAF) and encouraging signs of a multi-agency commitment to this process. This has been assisted by the remodelling of the CAF form down to four pages. In September we also introduced the Multi-agency Allocation Groups. These groups made up of key professionals across the localities, co-ordinate the early offer of help to children and families who need preventive support. The initial feedback has been immensely positive from partners.

4.6 In April we launched our recruitment campaign (Head and Heart). Since the campaign started, 697 application forms have been downloaded from the micro site, with 154 applications being received and we have made 31 social worker appointments. We have been very impressed by the calibre of the new arrivals. We have now got 73 permanent social workers in the front-line teams – a remarkable shift from 49 only six months ago. The social worker vacancy rate as at 27 September 2012 had been reduced to 6.7 (8.3%) against the establishment of 81 social workers. There are 1.6fte in the recruitment pipeline who have been offered a permanent post. These residual vacancies are covered by temporary agency staff. We have been running slightly over-establishment with agency staff to provide an overlap for new staff to be appropriately inducted.



4.7 Following a national recruitment campaign Members interviewed for the post of Executive Director of Children’s Services last month and I am delighted to report that the Employment Committee unanimously appointed Sue Westcott. Ms Westcott has tremendous experience and has played a vital role in assisting the interim director Malcolm Newsam take giant strides forward in making sustained improvements in the service. Ms Westcott will commence her new role in the New Year and we will be putting in place a robust hand-over plan to secure the transition.

4.8 Jane Held, the Independent Chair of the External Improvement Board has completed her second progress report to the Minister, Edward Timpson. Jane Held concludes in her report back to the Minister:

A robust senior management team is in post, and following significant increases in establishment and an exceptional recruitment campaign, new permanent social workers are rapidly coming into post. Quality assurance and performance management systems and arrangements are robust and key areas of practice in terms of referrals and assessments as well as care plans significantly improved. This is aided by a new IT system. In addition a culture of self awareness is growing and the ambition to be excellent is tempered by realism about the need to maintain focus on basic good practice.

I am also pleased to report that the focus of the Council, with its partners, has moved from getting a grip of the service and addressing the basics (phase one of the improvement

process) to ensuring that the change is properly embedded and sustainable in the long term.

The report is attached as an appendix to this document.

- 4.9 In summary we have continued to make good progress. The introduction of a permanent workforce now provides a platform for consistent high quality practice to be embedded across the organisation. To support this, our next recruitment campaign will be focused on attracting high quality permanent managers to the service and the appointment of the permanent Executive Director will assist this. We have made great strides this year to put in place the foundations of an effective service. All the evidence points to the fact that significant progress has been made and all the areas for improvement specified by Ofsted are being addressed. However it would be wrong to be complacent and it is well understood that authorities who have found themselves in this position must accept that securing sustained improvement takes longer than the twelve months that has elapsed since the last inspection. Everyone within the service is, therefore, determined that we continue the same pace of progress and remain absolutely focussed on delivering lasting improvements in Childrens' social care.

5. CONSULTATION

- 5.1 Partner agencies through the Peterborough Safeguarding Children's Board and the External Improvement Board are involved in the improvement activity. Members, led by the Cabinet Member for Children's Services, continue to be actively engaged in challenging and supporting this improvement activity. A Member Task and Finish Group continues to meet regularly to examine the improvement programme and the evidence around for progress. Regular progress reports have also been considered by the Creating Opportunities and Tackling Inequalities Scrutiny Committee.

6. ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES

- 6.1 The improvement activity has been planned to secure the following outcomes laid out in the Children's Services Improvement programme:
- Providing confident leadership across children's services
 - Putting in place effective front-line practice
 - Creating an organisation fit for purpose
 - Strengthening partnerships to make a difference
 - Becoming the employer of choice in the region
 - Robustly managing performance

7. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.1 The Council needs to continue to deliver improvements to safeguard children and in the longer term put in place a sustainable high quality Children's Service in Peterborough.

8. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 8.1 Not applicable

9. IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The cost of the improvement programme can be met from within existing budgets. Resources are available to secure improvement in the immediate and longer term.

9.2 The Secretary of State has the power to issue a statutory notice if he or she deems this is required to secure the necessary improvements within a failing service.

10. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

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

None.

Edward Timpson MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State
Department for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street,
London, SW1P 3BT

8th October 2012

Dear Minister

Re: Peterborough Children's Services Improvement Programme

I am pleased to present to you my second formal report on the work by Peterborough City Council to address the areas of weakness identified in the Ofsted Safeguarding and Looked After Children Inspection of September 2011 and the Notice of Improvement of 5th February 2012.

This report builds on the interim short report presented to Tim Loughton MP for his visit to Peterborough in June 2007. It also takes account of the full reports to and discussion held with your officials at their 6 month review meeting on the 14th September 2012.

I am pleased to inform you that there has been very rapid and impressive progress since March 2012 in terms of establishing strong, clear, and informed professional and political leadership, firm financial arrangements, and a strong management grip.

Summary

A robust senior management team is in post, and following significant increases in establishment and an exceptional recruitment campaign permanent new permanent social workers are rapidly coming into post. Quality assurance and performance management systems and arrangements are robust and key areas of practice in terms of referrals and assessments as well as care plans significantly improved. This is aided by a new IT system. In addition a culture of self awareness is growing and the ambition to be excellence is tempered by realism about the need to maintain focus on basic good practice.

I am also pleased to report that the focus of the Council, with its partners, has moved from getting a grip of the service and addressing the basics (phase one of the improvement process) to ensuring that the change is properly embedded and sustainable in the long term.

Social Care Practice

The management of contacts, referrals and assessments is now well developed, stable, timely and of a significantly improved quality. The backlogs are resolved and work progresses from contact through to core assessment within timescales. At July 2012 the year to date figures showed 98% of initial assessments were completed within timescales and 88% of core assessments. There has been little fluctuation in this and performance remains good. All staff are informally supervised on an ongoing basis, which is much valued and formal supervision and case auditing is now taking place on a regular, well managed and monitored basis.

A new and impressively thorough Quality Assurance Framework has been introduced and a full caseload audit of 954 cases fully completed. Of these 149 were rated as inadequate. Issues identified from the audits relate to the absence of clear evidence of supervision, care planning, statutory visits and the quality of core assessments. Action plans to immediately address the inadequacies were put in place, monitored and reviewed and 135 of these action plans are completed.

Whilst the programme to date has been very challenging the benefits are beginning to show. Emerging themes reflect the ongoing need to focus on the quality of social work practice. The audits allow for a clear understanding of whole team as well as individual performance which is leading to stronger intervention where weaknesses are greatest.

A rolling programme of audit activity is now in place. A new Quality Assurance Manager has recently come into post and is driving the ongoing use of audits through a comprehensive rolling programme of case audit and the rigorous application of the new Framework.

Senior Managers Team Managers meet weekly with the Assistant Director to review performance and audit information and this is beginning to systematically identify ongoing areas of strength and areas for development which need to be addressed.

A new revised Threshold document has been developed with partners and introduced. This has assisted in consistent decision making at referral although the rate of referrals and contacts is still at the statistical neighbour average. The number of initial assessments done each month is reducing but it is too early to assess whether this is a sustainable trend. The volume of core assessments has reduced as decision making improves.

Engagement with partners on thresholds as well as on early intervention and prevention is steadily improving. There has, after revision of the material to support it, been a very significant increase in the use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) which is now standing at 94.8 per 10,000 (against a local target of 80 per 10,000). The introduction of multiagency fora (The Peterborough Access to Support Panel, or PASP, and the Multi-Agency Support Groups or MASG) is already having an impact on the quality of decision making in relation to Looked After Children (where numbers are reducing) and care planning for children with multiple complex needs and is proving very popular with partners.

Recent work has established that a rapid reduction in children subject to a child protection plan (to 125 cases) was due to premature removals from plans. This was quickly identified, and addressed. The reasons for the drop were that the new model of conferencing introduced recently included a consensus decision making process, coupled with partner agencies all being very positive about early changes. This was quickly remedied so the Conference Chair now holds the power to make the final decision. A number of cases have been put back into the conference system after a review of recent cases. Cases are now standing at 150 which is broadly in line with expectations.

This issue reflects the ongoing need to use performance data and audits to identify issues and deal with them, and the capacity in the system to now do so. The risk is that over time the rigour currently in place is not fully embedded but in my view that risk, whilst present, is lessening with the current leadership team.

The new IT system is now fully introduced, tested and embedded and has improved quality of practice, social work morale, the provision of reliable performance data, managerial oversight and the ability to QA practice effectively.

Capacity and Capability

The overall approach to workforce has been well managed and thorough. The additional capacity agreed by the Council has resulted in much more manageable workloads which are standing at an average of 17.4 children per caseload. At present the service is over capacity as new permanent staff arrive and are inducted into the service, before Agency Staff leave. Only 12.6% of the staff are Agency staff, which is a significant reduction.

The social work service has been brought together in one location, with team managers and senior managers close by, which has improved practice and morale significantly. A regular Social Work Forum is held with representatives from across social care.

Gradually increasing morale as well as optimism for the future has been reflected in the significant improvement in sickness rates. This stands at 4.3% overall in Children's Services, and 4.5% in

social care. Staff have told me they feel well supervised and managed as well as supported. Retention has also significantly improved and only 4 staff have left since April 2012.

The workforce development plans that are being put in place to support the recruitment strategy have ensured that staff are guaranteed induction, new social workers are given an assessed year of employment and a staff development programme is now in place. Auditing has shown that the induction programme has been variable and this is now being actively addressed. Work is underway to develop a comprehensive continuous professional development programme which will facilitate continued career progression as well as support the quality of managers within the service.

A new strong leadership team is in place. The Council have been appropriately ambitious about the qualities and nature of the person needed to fulfil the permanent DCS role and have appointed Sue Westcott after a very rigorous process.

Challenges still to address

There are however a number of significant challenges that still need addressed.

Embedding the changes made over the last 10 months will require stability and continuity (so the rate of progress will inevitably slow down) and an ongoing commitment to the service at all levels as well as on a multi –agency basis. This will be particularly challenging in the light of the current extensive organisational change for partners, particularly in the NHS, and increased expectations across the public sector to cut expenditure now and in the next three years. The positive political leadership and support provided this year will need to continue despite the pressures on the Council as a whole.

It also needs an ongoing long term focus on high support and high challenge. The Authority is developing a peer health check programme in liaison with colleagues across the Eastern Region which will bring ongoing external validation locally as well as for the Improvement Board and yourself.

In addition the real work of focussing down, and looking deeper and more strongly at quality and consistency of practice will bring new workforce challenges especially for front line managers. Retention and workforce development, especially in terms of career progression, whilst maintaining successful ongoing recruitment is a particular challenge as is improving the quality and competency of front line managers.

Changes to the pattern of provision with an increased range of early help services and reduced numbers of Looked After Children are planned but will take time to achieve and need to be underpinned by consistent robust care planning processes. They need to be accompanied by consistent improvements in partnership working at the front line, particularly in terms of multi-agency assessments through CAF and support to manage the threshold between family support and safeguarding services better. Engagement with children and young people and their families to establish what they feel they need and their views of what they receive still needs to be better developed.

The PSCB also needs to maintain the initial progress it has made in developing a multi-agency data set, and becoming more focussed on the local practice agenda as well as taking a stronger leadership role and working more collaboratively with other partnership bodies in sharing responsibility for improvements in practice.

Risks

Two other challenges are increasingly important and are both potentially risks to ongoing progress. The first is the development of the PSCB to become a robust source of constructive and collaborative challenge, and in effect fulfil the role of the Improvement Board in leading and driving continuous improvement. This is acknowledged by the PSCB but is not yet fully integrated into their approach to the task. Their role as critical friend needs further development.

The second is to ensure a seamless transition from the Interim to a permanent DCS. The Interim Director who has led very strong delivery of change, partially through a relentless focus on performance, quality and management grip, and also the self awareness and insight to recognise the journey ahead as well as what has been achieved, leaves at the end of November. The appointment of Sue Westcott better secures a smooth transition but leaves a vacancy at second tier.

I am of course happy to discuss any of this second report with you

Yours sincerely

Jane Held
Independent Chair
External Improvement Board

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