

CREATING OPPORTUNITIES & TACKLING INEQUALITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE	Agenda Item No. 9
12 NOVEMBER 2012	Public Report

Report of the Executive Director of Children's Services

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CHILDREN'S SERVICES IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME

1. PURPOSE

1.1 The purpose of this report is to update the Committee on the Improvement programme.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 To note the progress made on the core strategy.

3. LINKS TO THE SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY

3.1 The Sustainable Community Strategy identifies "Improving Health" and "Supporting Vulnerable People" as priorities. Improvement in Children's Social Care is key to the delivery of these priorities.

4. BACKGROUND

4.1 Following an Ofsted Inspection in August 2011, the Council has engaged in a programme to secure rapid improvement. This improvement will be driven by three key elements:

- The Children's Services Improvement Programme
- The Core Strategy which focuses effort on what we must prioritise
- The leadership of Members and officers in delivering the required changes

4.2 The Council's progress is closely monitored both internally and externally by this Committee, the Scrutiny Task and Finish Group and the External Improvement Board.

5. KEY ISSUES

5.1 Highlights

- Strong performance continues on timeliness in the referral and assessment service. Our year to date figures in September show we have completed 97.6% of initial assessments within 10 days and 88.8% of core assessments within 35 days. There are few outstanding assessments and those completed out of timescale only miss the due date by a few days.
- After a peak of referrals at the start of the new term, work volumes appear to have stabilised again. Referrals and initial assessments have continued to be generated at or around our statistical neighbour average; the volumes of core assessments continue to be higher than similar authorities.
- We have now got 73 permanent social workers in the front-line teams – a remarkable shift from 49 only six months ago. We continue to run slightly over-establishment with agency staff to provide an overlap for new staff to be appropriately inducted. We have been very impressed by the calibre of the new arrivals and I was also delighted to receive reports that the latest cohort has been well inducted on arrival.

- Members interviewed for the post of Executive Director of Children’s Services last month and unanimously appointed Sue Westcott. Sue 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.

5.2 Eastern Region Peer Safeguarding Health Check

At the end of October we invited colleagues from the region into Peterborough for three days to do a review of our arrangements to safeguard children. The team comprised two Assistant Directors and a Director of Children’s Services. The team acted as a “critical friend”, gave an independent view of our progress to date and offered suggestions for the future. They interviewed staff and managers, held focus groups with partners and audited 40 case files. Individual meetings were held with the Leader, the Lead Member and also with the Chairs of this Committee and the Corporate Parenting Panel. The review team also directly observed practice. This review will also help us in our preparations for our next Ofsted Inspection. I was hugely impressed by the rigour of the review team and the professionalism with which our staff responded to this challenge.

The Review team highlighted the following strengths within Peterborough:

- Vision and drive to improve
- Effective leadership and prioritisation
- Member engagement
- Evident improvement in key areas
- Early help offer developing quickly
- Significant improvement in contact, referral and assessment
- Evidence of general improvement in social work practice
- Engagement with CAF MASG and PASP
- Re-vitalised partnerships
- More open culture

The team audited 40 cases and found no cases where children were not adequately safeguarded. They also had a very rigorous look at the Referral and Assessment teams and were hugely impressed by the organisation and timeliness of the service and their management of thresholds.

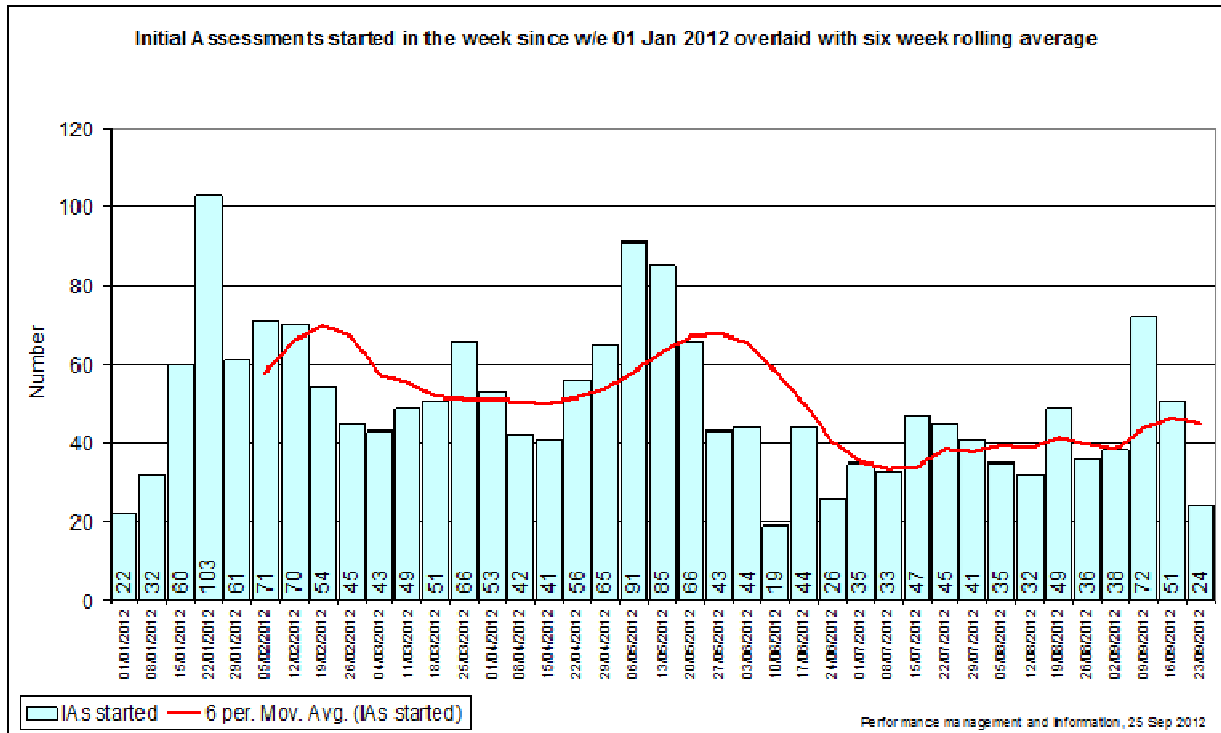
The team identified the following areas for further development:

- Embedding quality as well as compliance
- Recruiting a secure middle management tier
- Strengthening child protection plans around the expectations on the parent
- Evidencing the impact of interventions
- Consistency and frequency of supervision
- Purposeful children in need plans
- Developing the role of the LSCB

I am very pleased that the review team have confirmed our own view of progress. We know that we have achieved an immense amount but we also know there is still much to do. We remain determined to ensure that we continue to strive for the best possible service for children and these recommendations will help us focus on the next phase of the improvement programme.

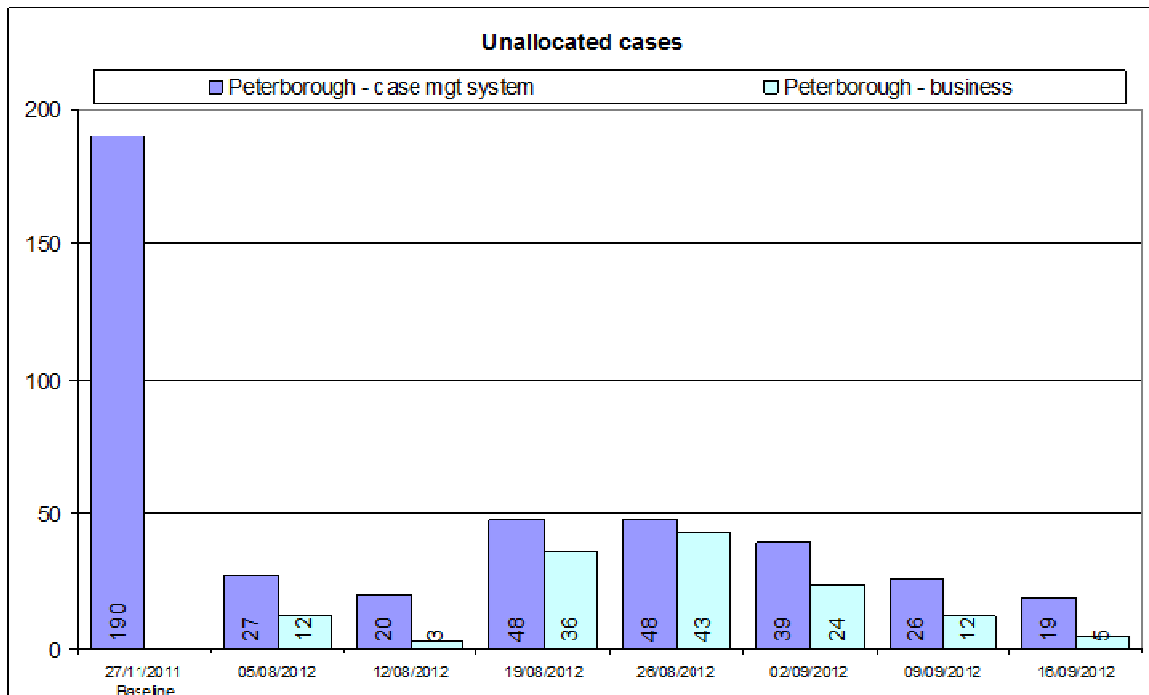
5.3 Assessment Activity

As highlighted above, volumes of initial assessments appear to be stabilising since the return of the schools from their holidays.



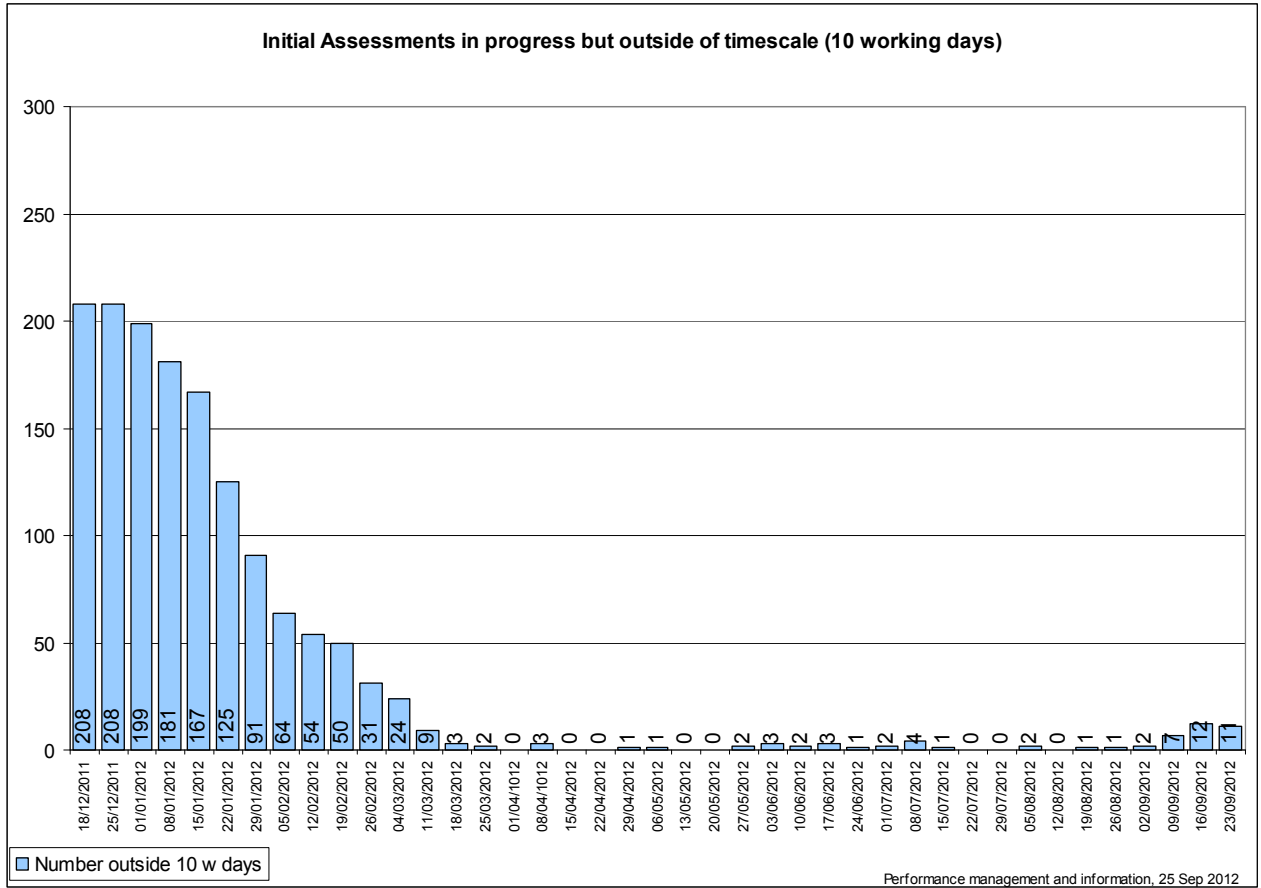
5.4 Unallocated Cases

Unallocated cases remain at a minimal level.

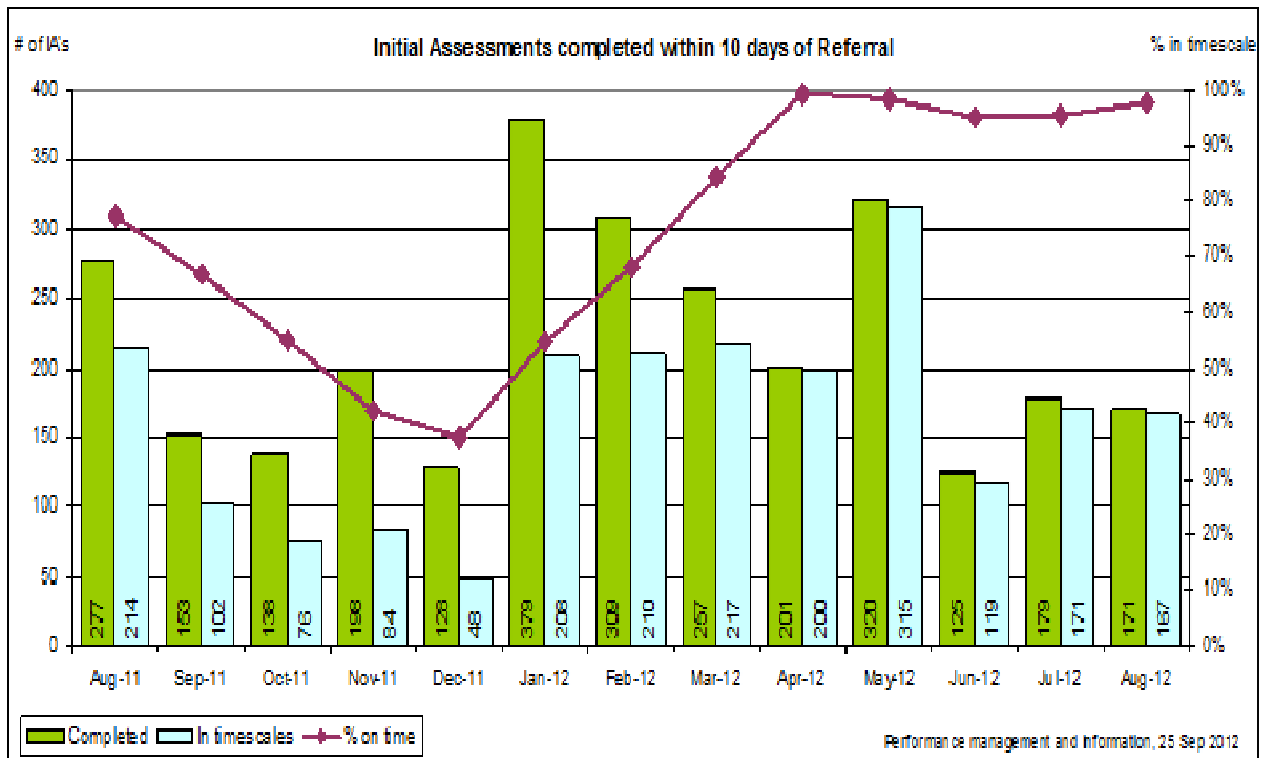


5.5 Initial Assessments

Performance on Initial Assessments out of timescale remains outstanding.

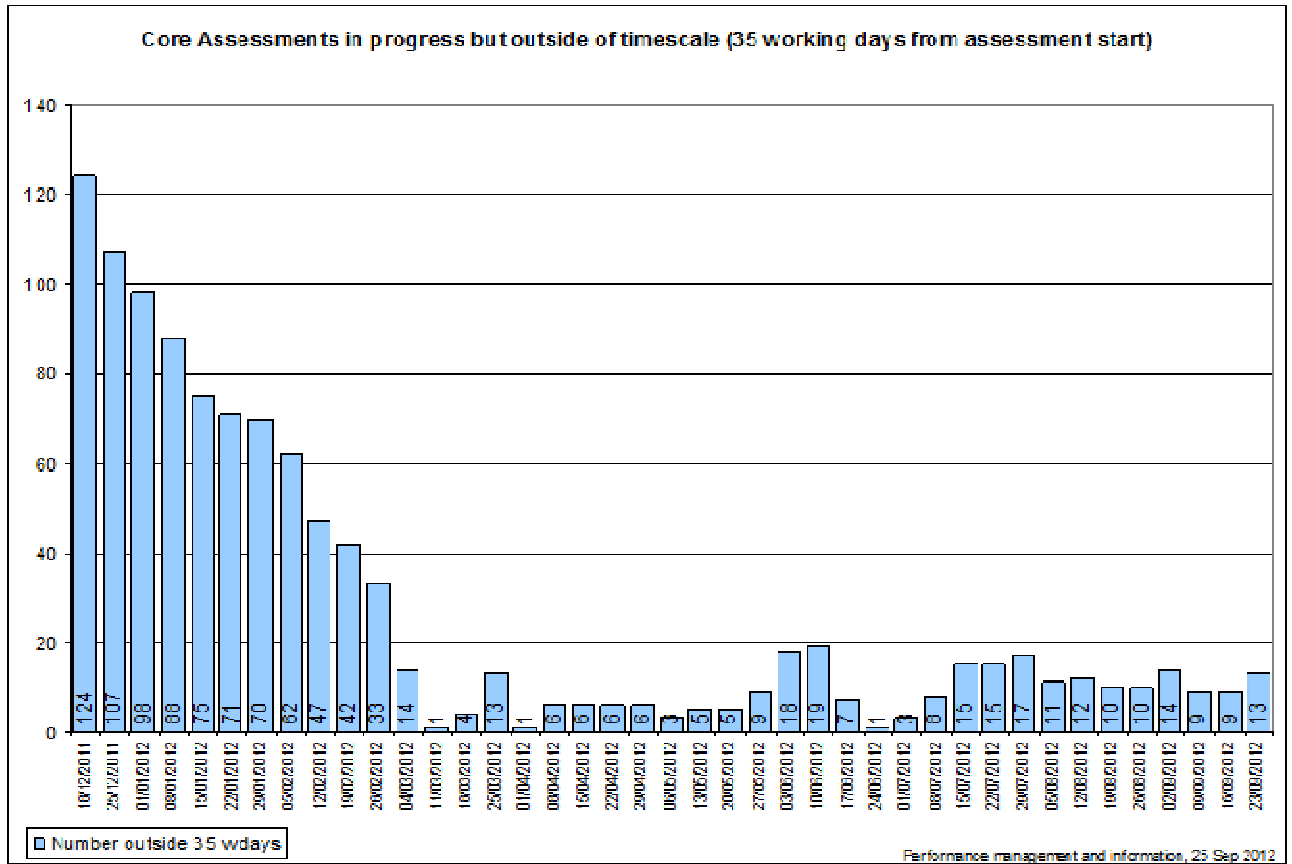


Timeliness of assessments remains extremely strong averaging 98% all year.

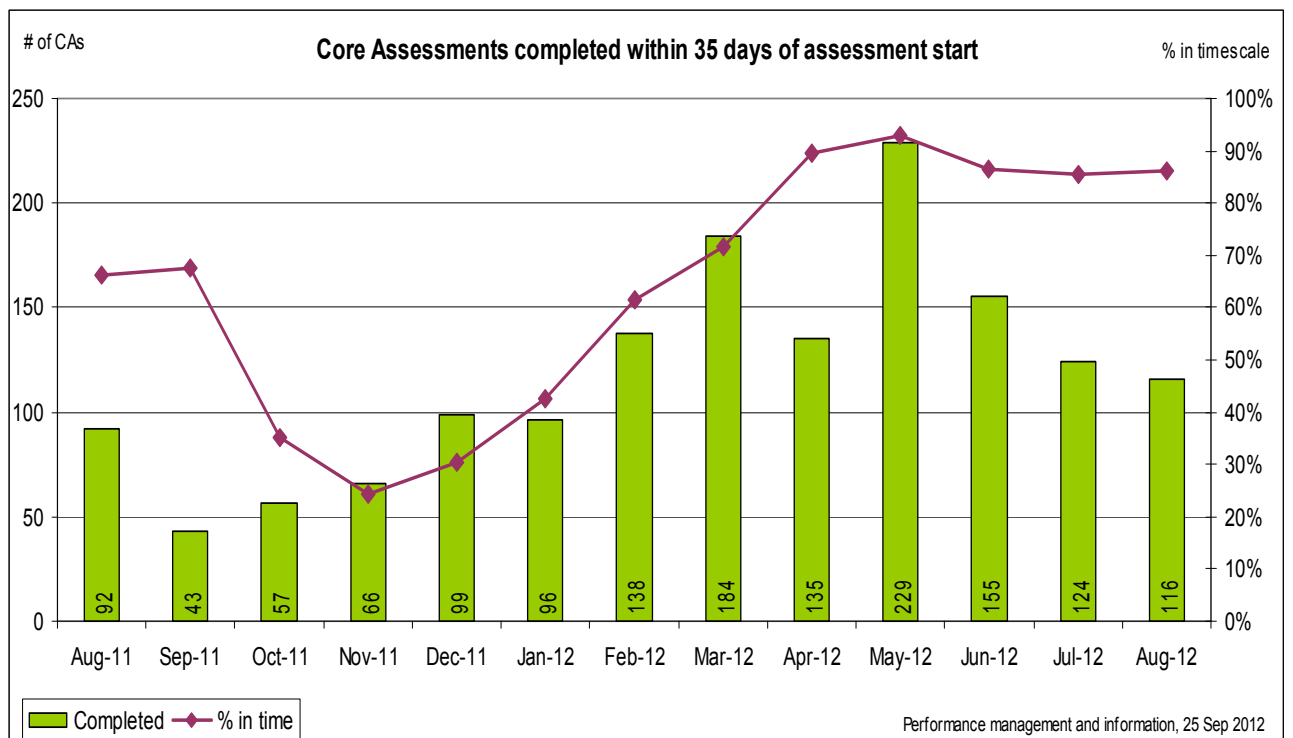


5.6 Core Assessments

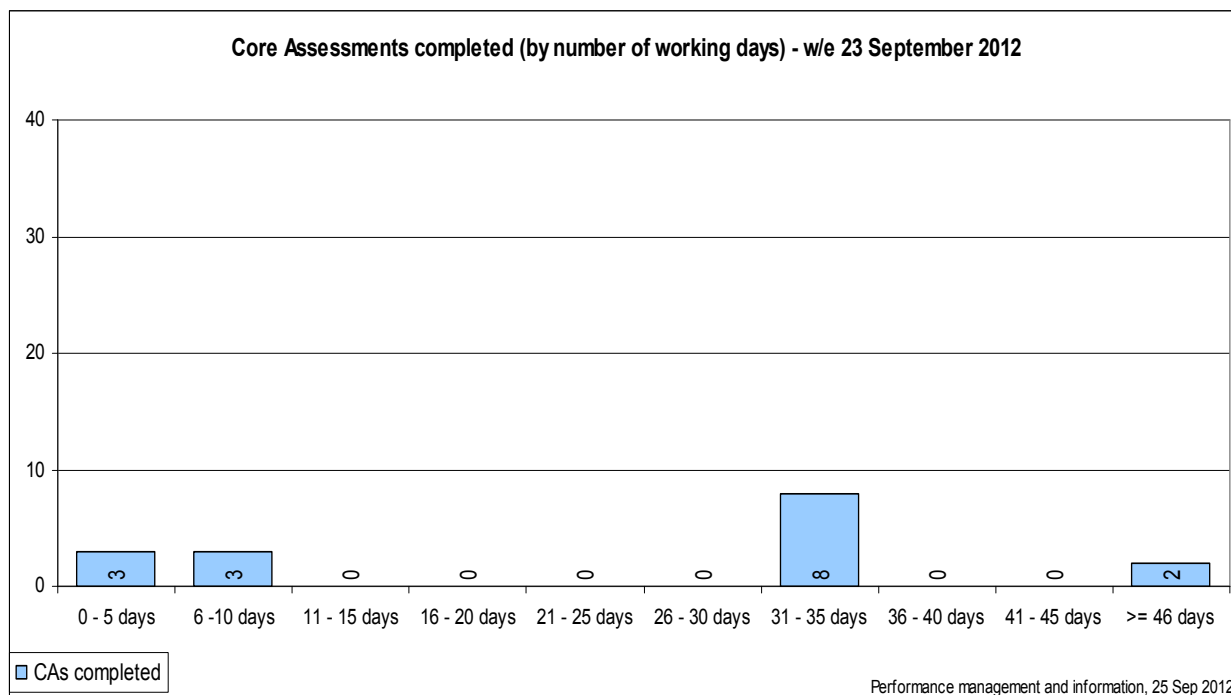
There remain very few core assessments out of timescale. These are almost all in the long-term teams and are usually reassessments.



Timeliness remains very strong as can be seen by the following chart.



The spread of completion dates reflects that the predominant activity is around the 30 to 35 day mark.



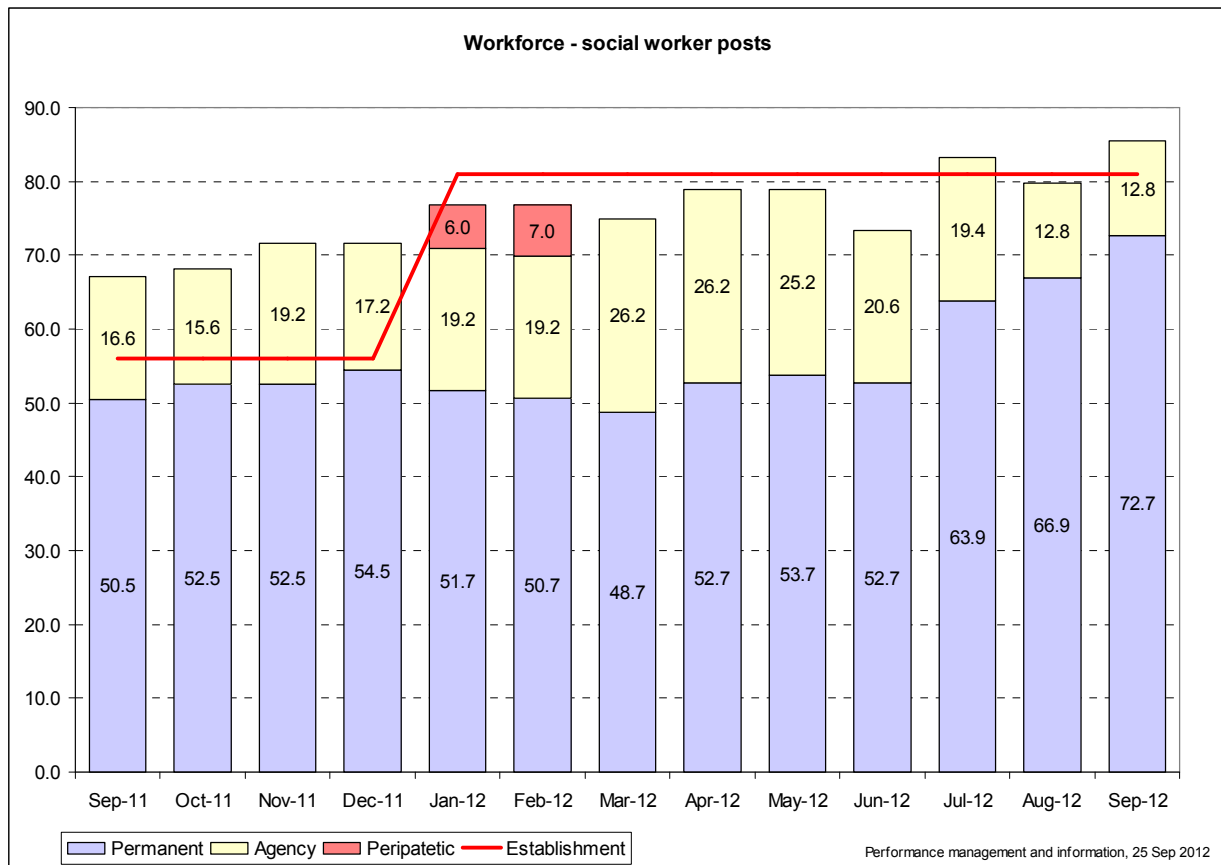
5.7 Workforce

The Head and Heart recruitment campaign continues for Social Workers with the dedicated website and advertising nationally via Google and socialcare.co.uk. The holiday season has impacted on the number of applications, which was not entirely unexpected.

The current social worker vacancy rate as at 27 September 2012 is 6.7fte (8.3%) against the establishment of 81fte. There are 1.6fte in the recruitment pipeline who have been offered a permanent post and one permanent individual due to leave. The use of agency staff has significantly reduced and is currently running at 12.8fte. This has significantly reduced from January 2012 which sat at 25.2 FTE.

We will be attending two careers fairs during the month of November and work has commenced on developing promotional items with the “head and heart” branding, alongside development of an information pack and questionnaire. The questionnaire will be used to gather intelligence regarding what potential candidates find most attractive when applying for another job and also what publications, social media they would consider reviewing in order to assist with this search. This information can then be factored into the recruitment plan going forward. Sanctuary (one of our agency suppliers) has agreed to sponsor the questionnaire by providing a Kindle as a prize to encourage maximum participation.

In addition to the Social Worker campaign, a dedicated recruitment campaign for Team Managers was launched mid-September. This will be based on a passive advertising approach to capture those individuals who are not necessarily actively pursuing a change of job/employer, but may be drawn to apply. A similar monitoring process to that used for the Social Workers has been adopted for this campaign.



5.8 Summary

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. It has also been very encouraging to receive some external validation from the Peer safeguarding Health check of this progress. 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 remains absolutely focussed on delivering lasting improvements in Children's social care.

6. IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 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.
- 6.2 The Secretary of State has the power to issue a statutory notice if he is not satisfied that sufficient progress is being made.

7. CONSULTATION

- 7.1 Partner agencies, parents and children will be involved in the improvement activity.

8. NEXT STEPS

- 8.1 This Committee will continue to receive a regular update on progress and the Task and Finish Group will meet monthly to support the improvement.

9. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

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

- 9.1
- Ofsted Inspection of Safeguarding: Peterborough 6th September 2011
 - Ofsted Unannounced Inspection of contact referral and assessment arrangements 3rd March 2011
 - Ofsted Safeguarding and Looked after Children Inspection: Peterborough 21st May 2010

10. APPENDICES

10.1 None