

CREATING OPPORTUNITIES & TACKLING INEQUALITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE	Agenda Item No. 8
10 SEPTEMBER 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 has continued in the referral and assessment service. Our year to date figures in July show we have completed 98% of initial assessments within 10 days and 88% 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. The Referral and Assessment Service are continuing to close and transfer work in a timely manner.
- Referrals and initial assessments have continued to be generated at or around our statistical neighbour average and we have seen a gradual reduction in volumes of core assessments. This is explained in more detail below.
- The “Assurance” audits have now all been completed. In total 954 cases were graded of which 392 (41.1%) were adequate, 413 (43.3%) remedial and 149 (15.6%) inadequate. We are now in the process of ensuring action plans are on the system

and have been completed.

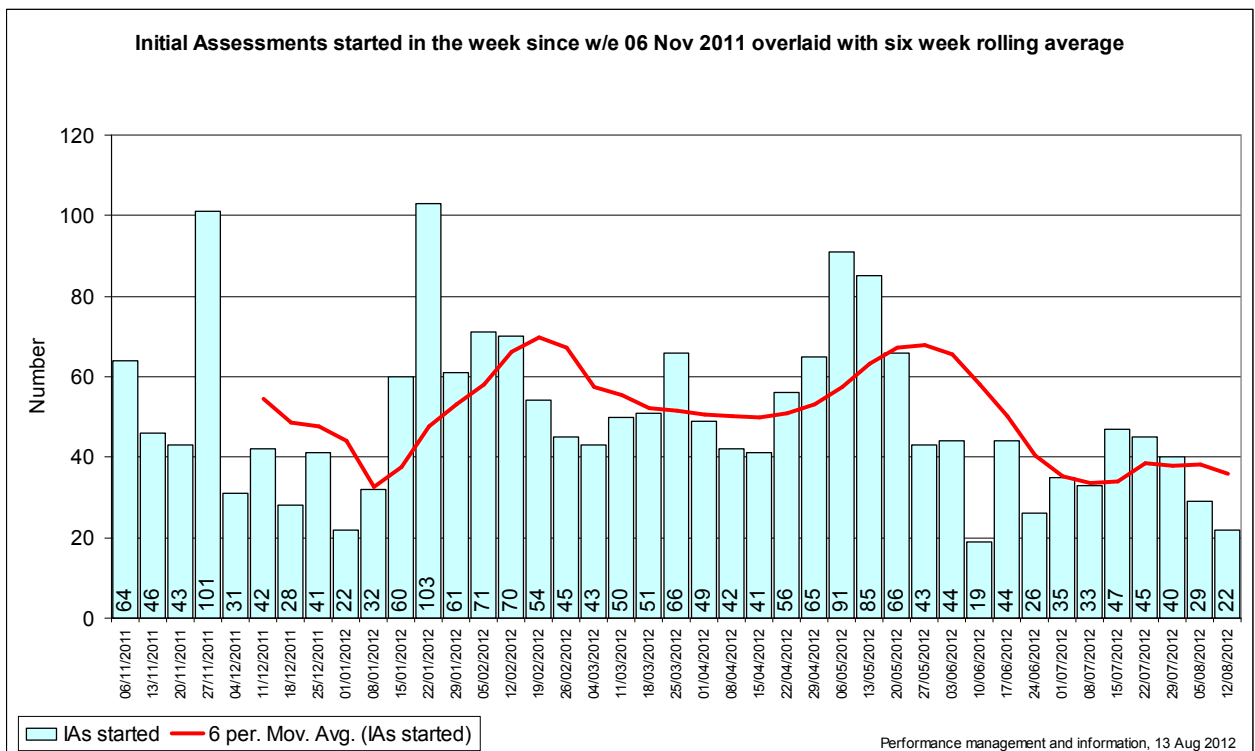
- We have now moved into a position of being slightly over-established with qualified social workers. This reflects the overlap of new staff with exiting agency staff.
- We have introduced a new weekly report management information tool focussed on the work of the Family Support Teams and the LAC service. This is supported by highlight reports written by Team Managers and presented at a weekly meeting chaired by the Assistant Director. This is already having a marked effect in engaging front-line managers in the improvement programme while identifying where support and attention is required.

5.2 Challenges:

- The reduction in children with a plan has been scrutinised by the Assistant Director and the primary factor appears to be premature de-planning without clear evidence of a demonstrable change in the risk factors. The Child Protection Chairs have been working on a consensus model of decision making, but we have taken immediate steps to address this and will be amending the multi-agency procedures to reflect a clearer recognition of the accountability for this crucial decision.

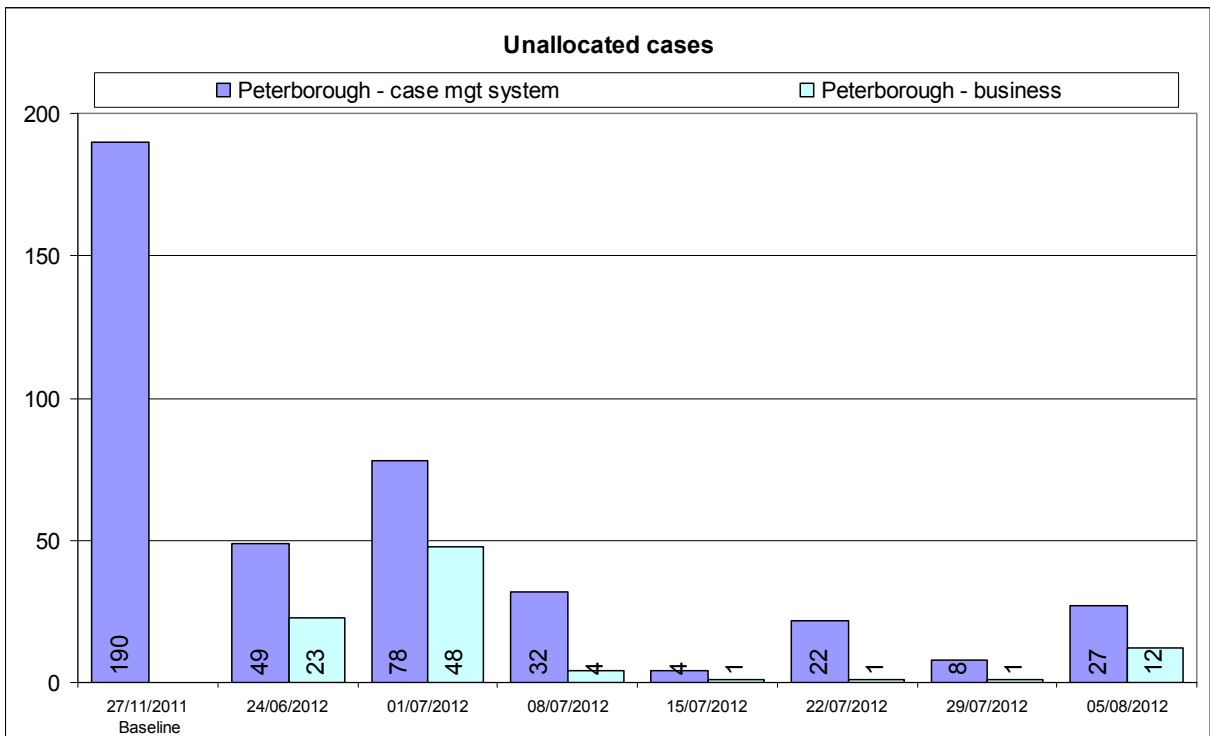
Assessment Activity

As highlighted above we have reduced the volume of new initial assessments. This has been consistently maintained for the last twelve weeks and is beginning to settle at around the rate for similar authorities. We will need to review this after the school holidays.



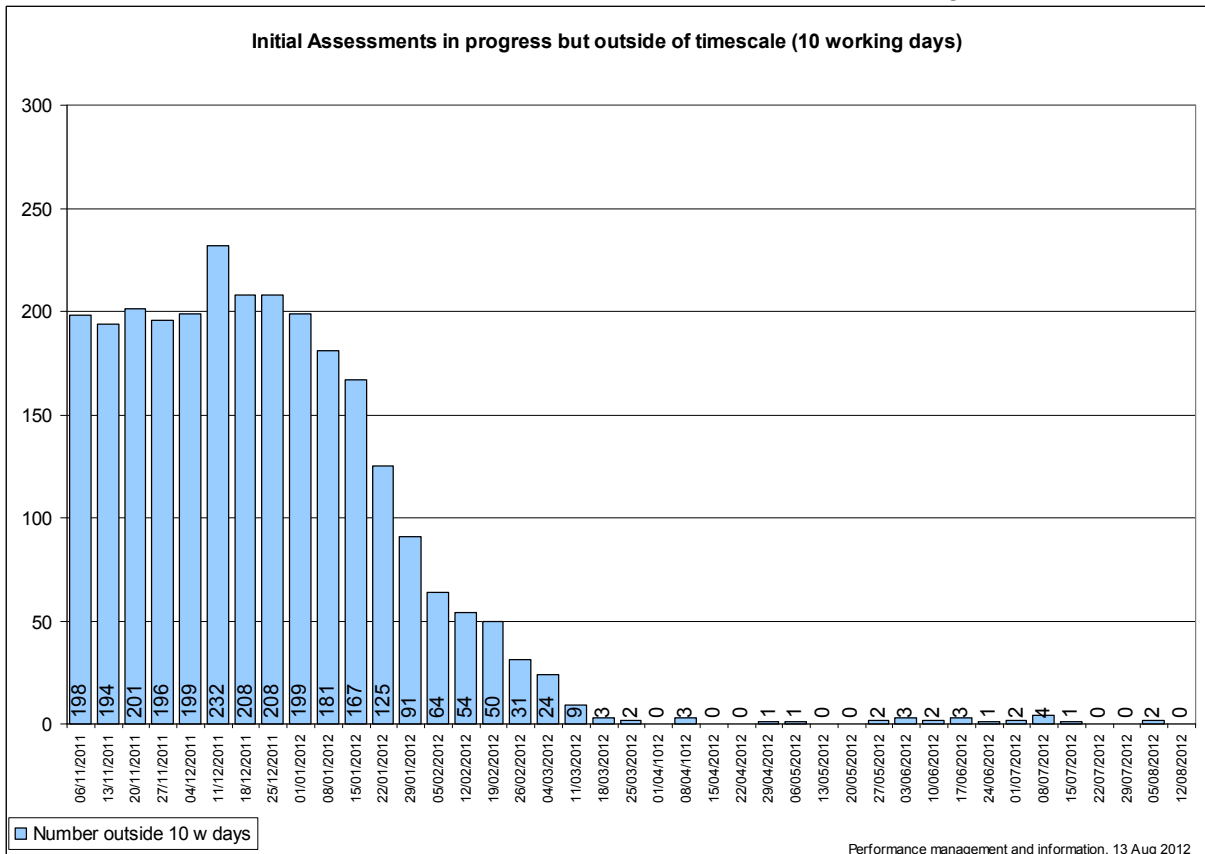
Unallocated Cases

Unallocated cases remain at a minimal level and none are unallocated for more than 28 days.

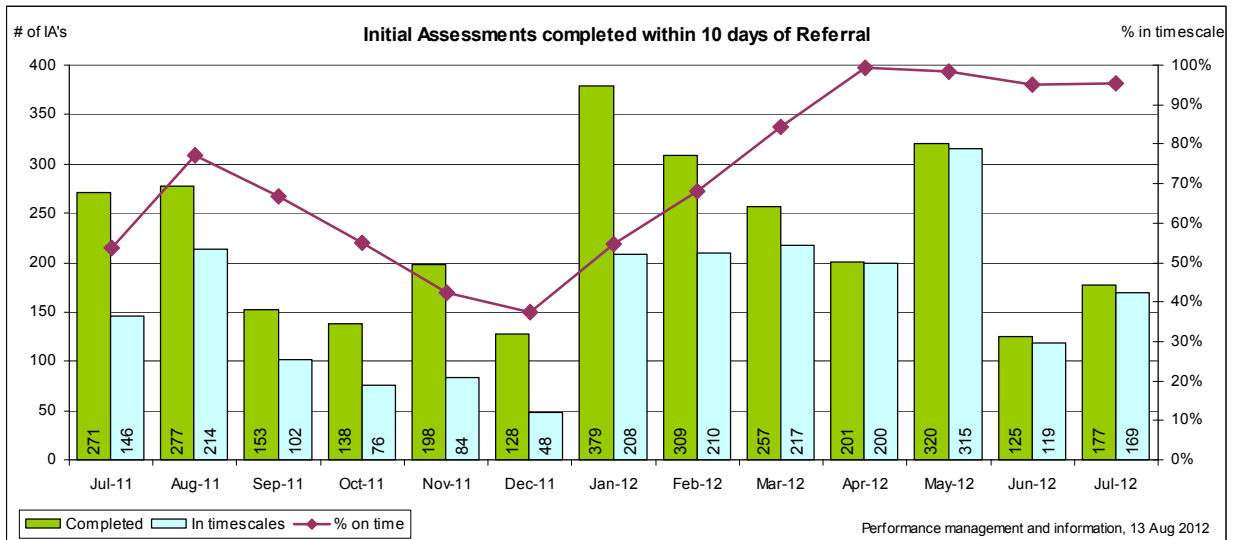


Initial Assessments

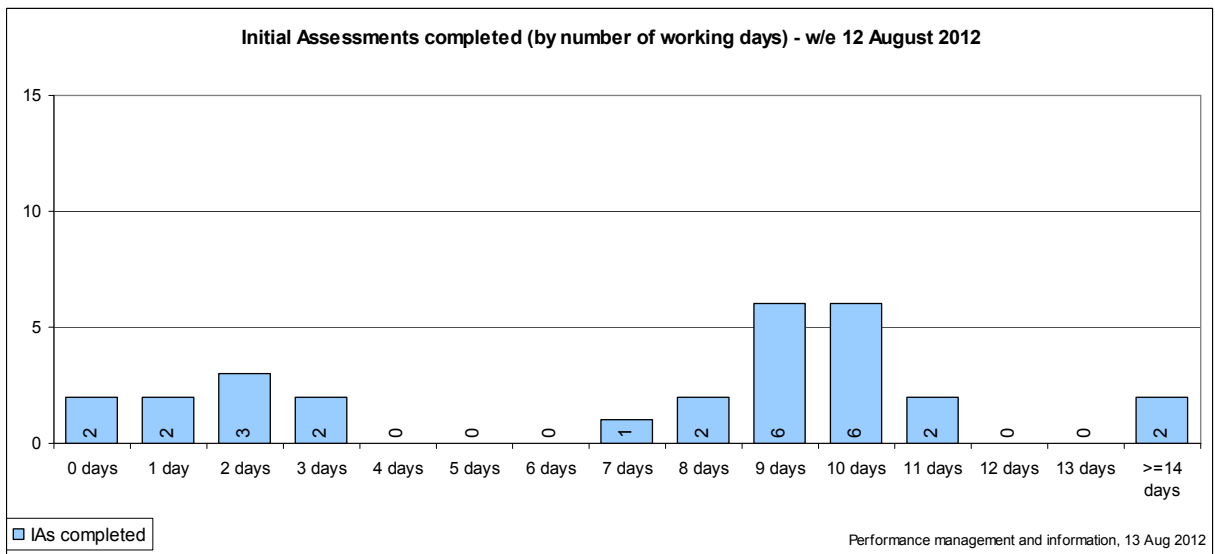
Performance on Initial Assessments out of timescale remains outstanding.



Timeliness of assessments remains extremely strong averaging above 90% all year.

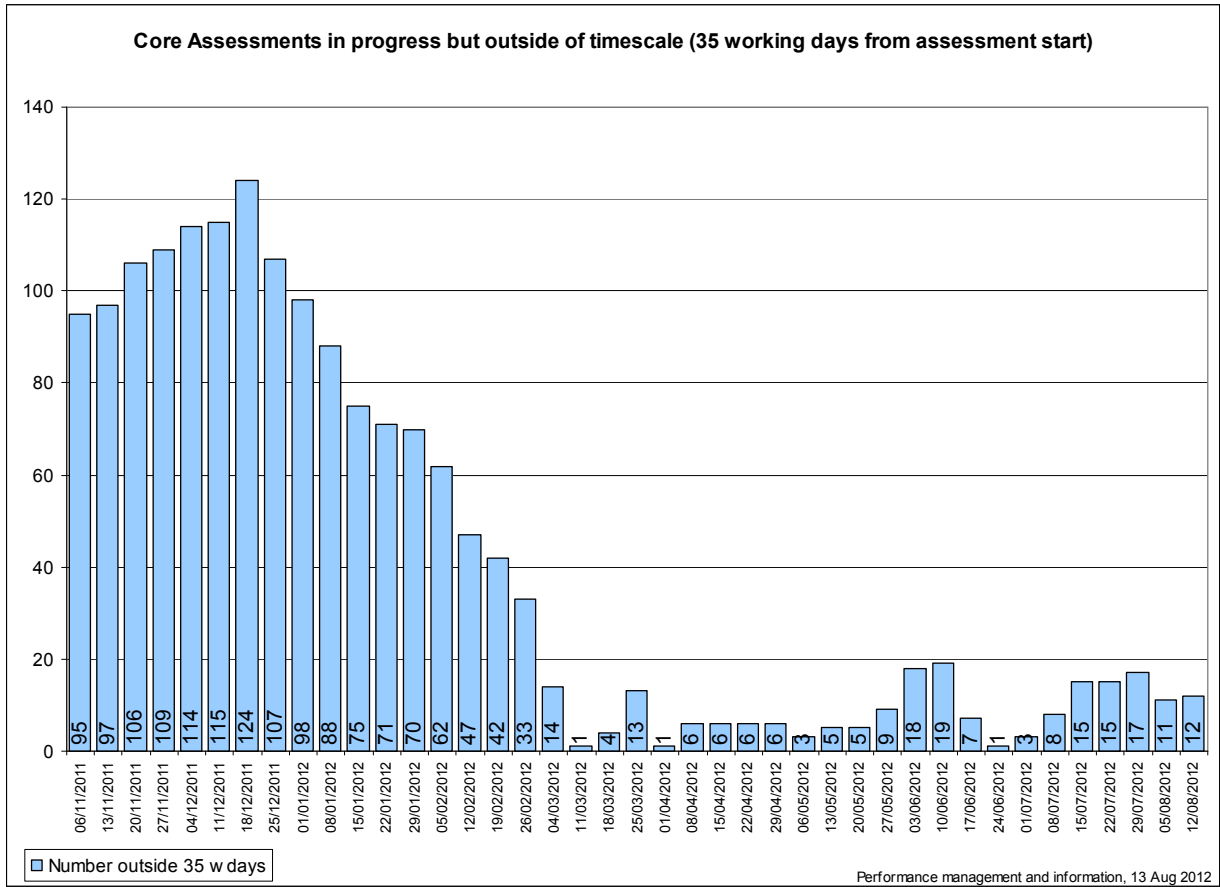


Liquid Logic allows us to report on the spread of completion dates for initial assessments. This demonstrates a mature spread of completion times.

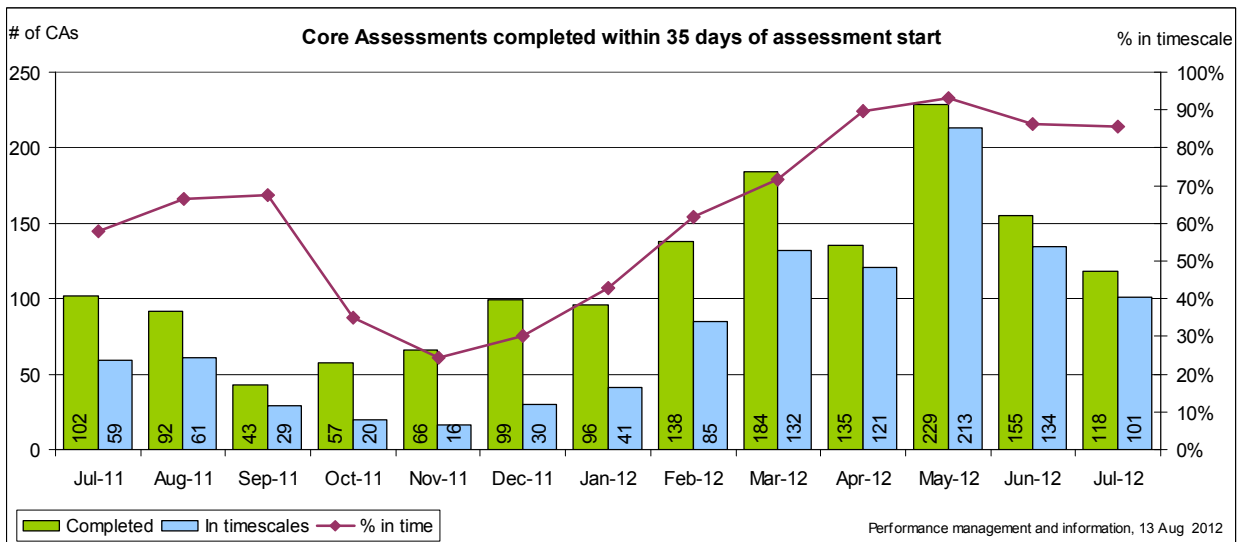


Core Assessments

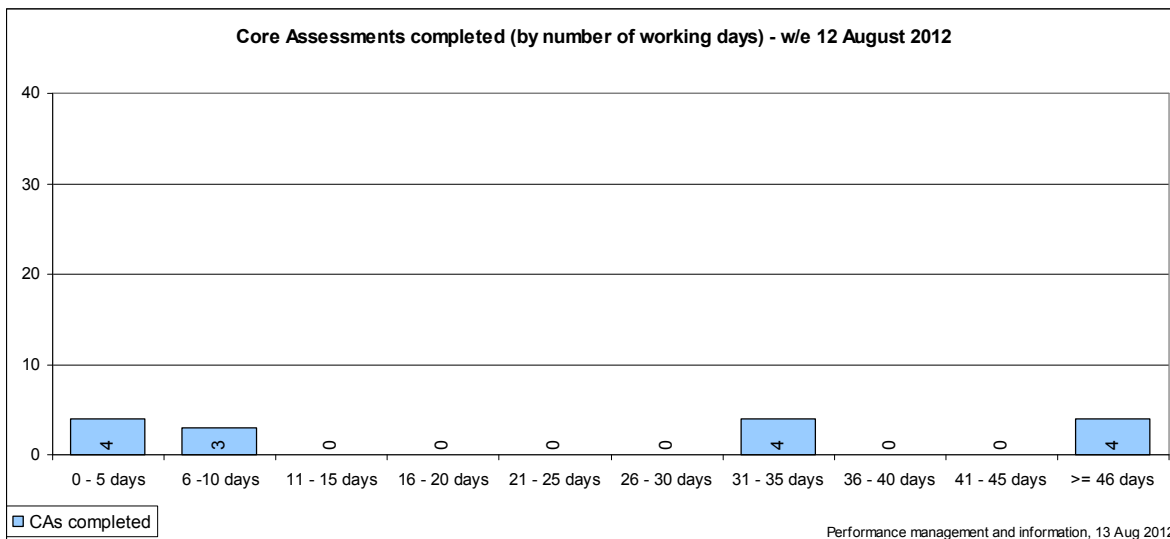
There remain very few core assessments out of timescale. These are almost all in the long-term teams and are usually reassessments.



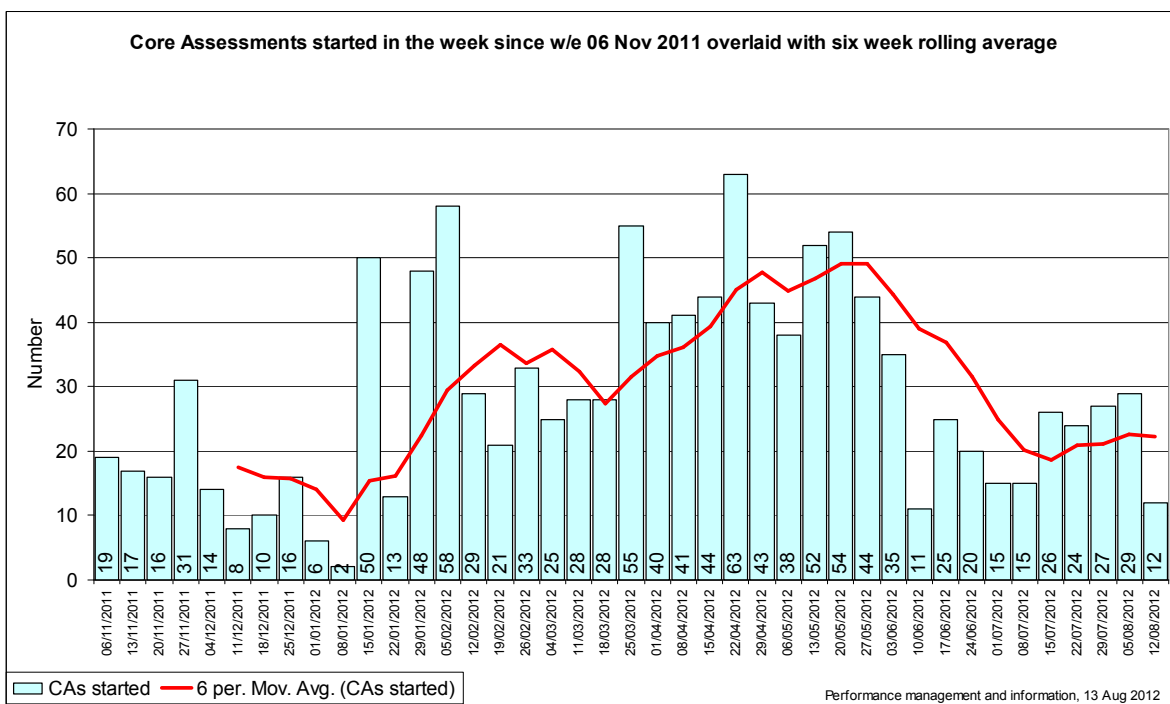
Timeliness remains very strong as can be seen by the following chart.



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



We have been actively working on the threshold for initiating core assessments and the chart below shows the impact that this is having. We are beginning to get towards the average of similar authorities but it is too early to suggest this is a clear trend.



Workforce

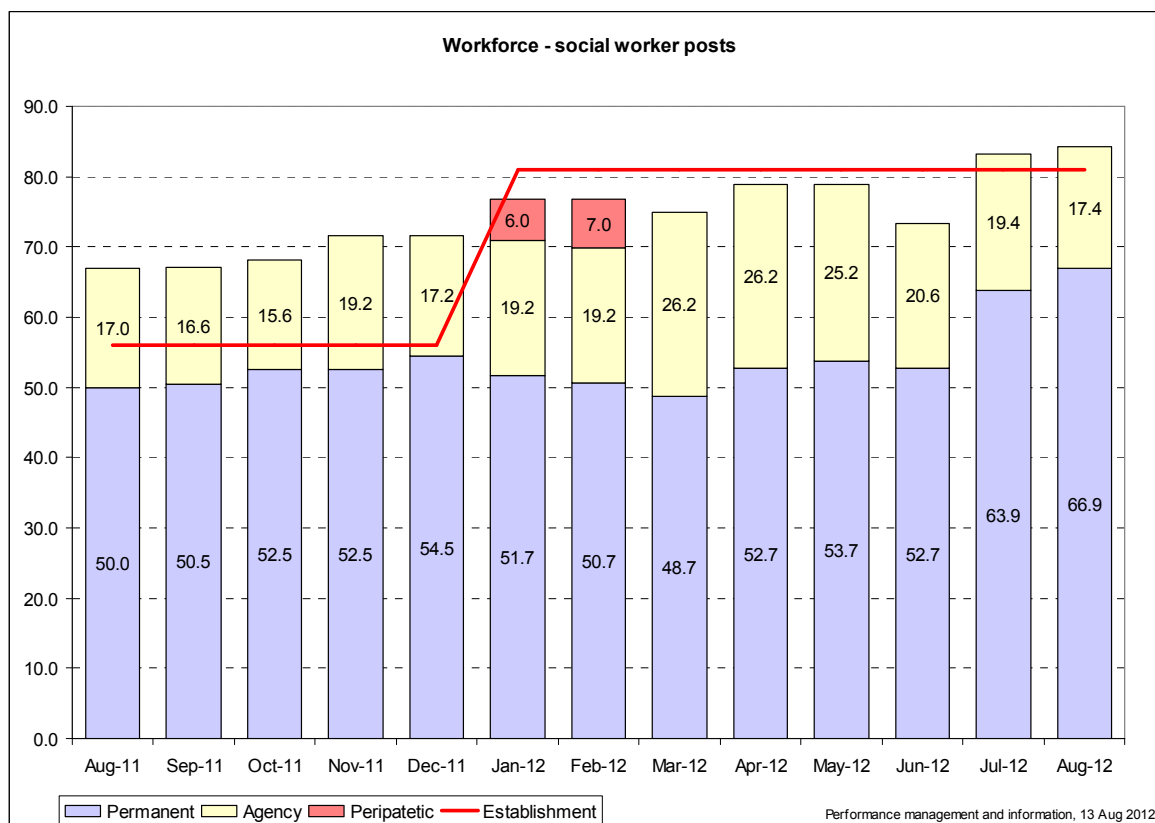
By the middle of August the permanent staff in the core safeguarding and LAC teams had been increased to 70. The Head and Heart recruitment campaign, whilst continuing, has shown a reduction in interest generated during the months of July and August. This is not unusual in any recruitment campaign given the time of year. The social worker vacancy rate currently stands at 14.1fte against the establishment of 81fte. However, taking into account the handover strategy in place between agency workers and incoming permanent Social Workers, the agency FTE is currently showing to be 17.4fte. An additional 7.0fte have been offered and are in the recruitment pipeline waiting to start; 2 scheduled to start in August, 4 in September and 1 in October.

Since the campaign was launched in April 2012, the department has only seen 4 permanent social workers leave which is an average of 1fte per month. An additional worker has transferred to the fostering service and one worker has reduced her hours by half. With the exit interview process implemented, work is in place to ensure that analysis of leavers takes place and informs management of trends to ensure improvements are made as required. Furthermore, an exit strategy plan has been implemented which allows for a short handover period between agency workers leaving and permanent new recruits to ensure stability is maintained. For experienced social workers the period is up to 2 weeks and for newly qualified social workers the period is up to 4 weeks.

We are now developing a medium term recruitment plan which will build into a campaign to recruit experienced social workers three times per year and newly qualified social workers once a year to link in with their studying being completed.

In addition to the recruitment plan, attendance at three recruitment events has been planned for the months of November 2012 and March 2013 (Community Care Children, Families Live 2012 and COMPASS).

Focus also remains on ensuring that Team Manager recruitment continues. Work has continued with Hunterlodge who are working on a passive advertising strategy for this cohort. This is expected to be launched in September in the Guardian, Linked In and also Children and Young People Now.



Summary

This has been a further month of impressive progress with improvement being sustained across the key areas.

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