

CREATING OPPORTUNITIES & TACKLING INEQUALITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE	Agenda Item No. 8
11 NOVEMBER 2013	Public Report

Report of the Executive Director of Children's Services

Contact Officer(s) – Sue Westcott
Contact Details - 863606

CHILDREN'S SERVICES IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update the committee on the Improvement programme since the last committee meeting in September 2013.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 To note the progress made with continued improvement.

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 Single Delivery Plan
 - The Ofsted Action Plan 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.

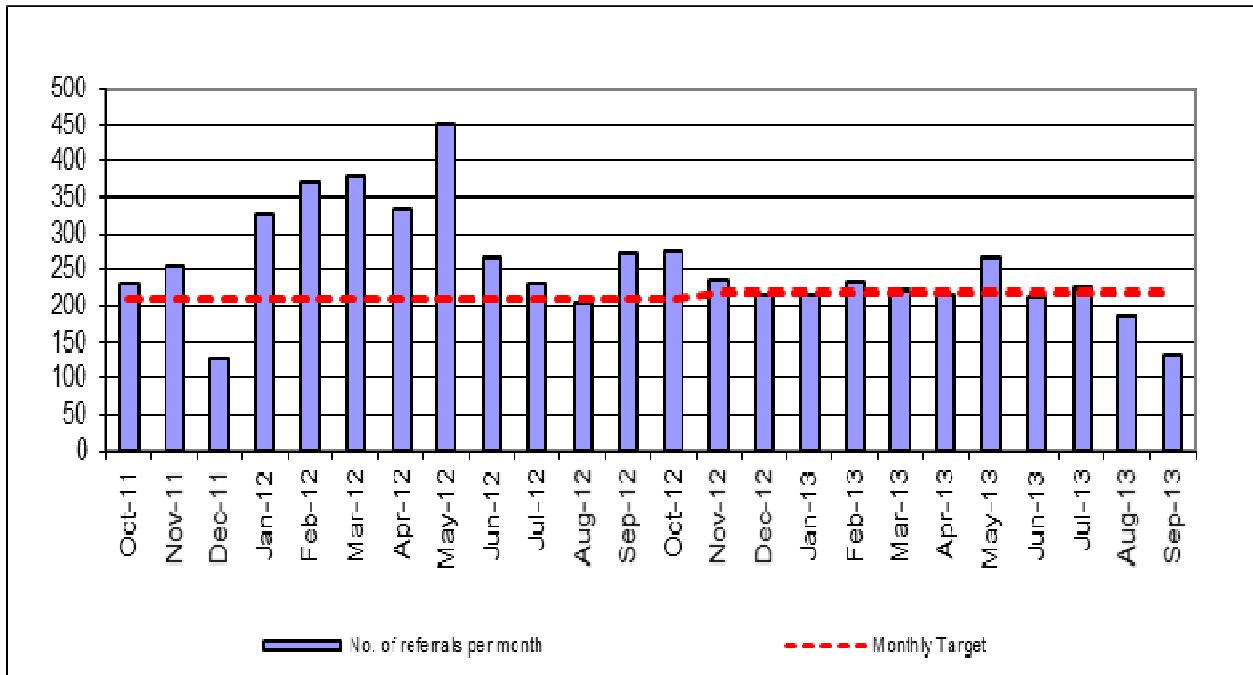
5. KEY ISSUES

5.1 Highlights

- Decrease in number of referrals
- Re-referrals dropped
- Decrease in number of initial assessments
- Increase in number of initial assessments completed in timescale
- Decrease in CAFs – although within target
- Decrease in Child Protection Plans
- Staffing
- Early Intervention and Prevention

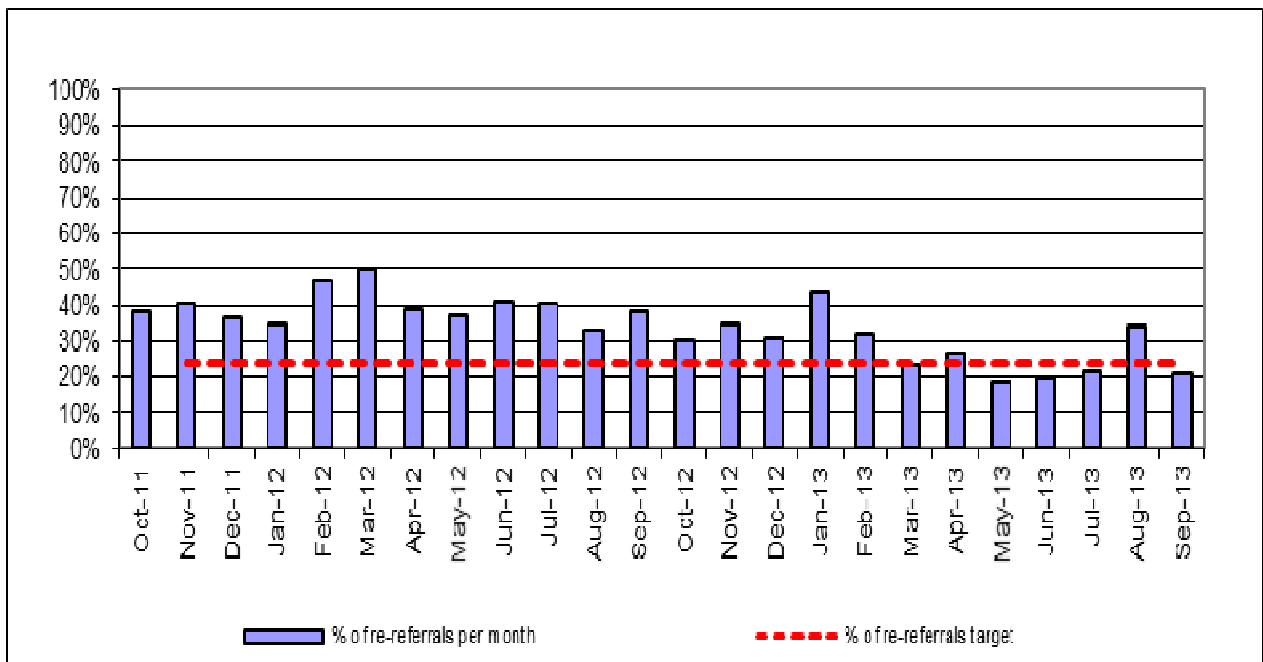
5.2 Referrals

The number of referrals has decreased in September down to 133 which is considerably lower than the same time last year which was 271. The number of contacts did increase slightly in September but were less than were received in July. The rolling 12 month rate remains low and within the target range for the 4th consecutive month. The decrease in the number of referrals is due to improved scrutiny of contacts within R&A teams at the start of September and by the First Response Team in the latter part of the month. The number of contacts and referrals by their very nature fluctuate considerably over time but the downward trend was an expected consequence of changes made over the past six months.



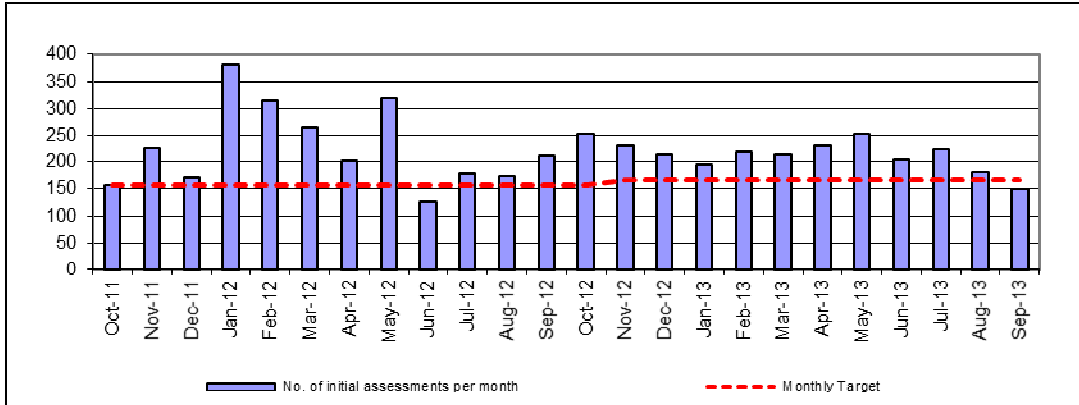
5.3 Re-referrals

Following a rise in August 2013, the percentage of re-referrals at year to date has dropped again in September 2013 to 23.3%. This percentage is still below target and compares very well with neighbouring authorities.



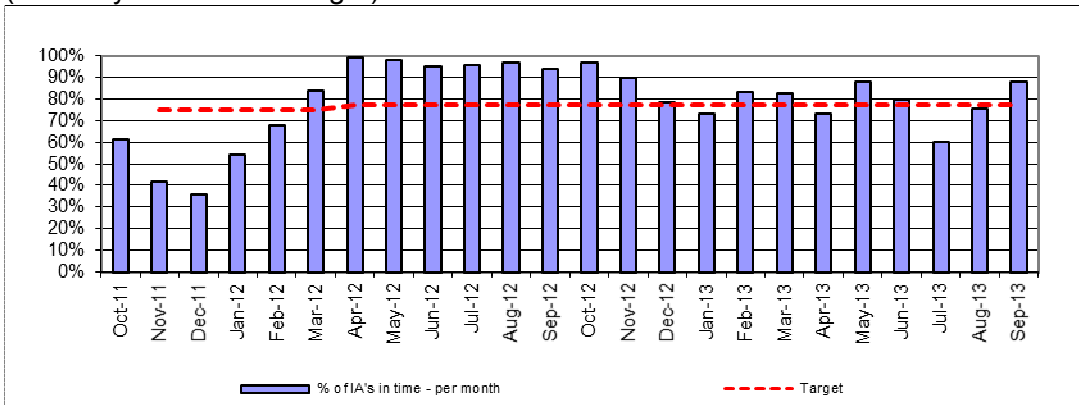
5.4 Initial Assessments per 10,000

September data shows a decrease in the number of Initial Assessments completed down to 151 from 211 this time last year. The rolling 12 month rate at 570.0 is still above the target by 26.3%. This is directly related to the reduction in the percentage of contacts becoming referrals and a consequence of more robust screening of contacts. That we are above our target, and that a proportion of assessments result in no further action for Social Care specialist teams, indicates that there is still more work to do here.



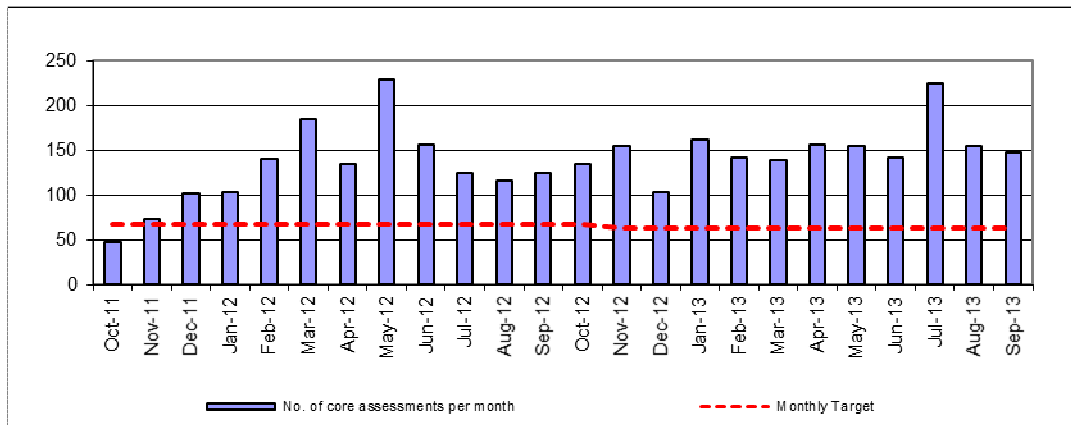
5.5 Initial Assessments in Timescale

There has been an increase in the number of Initial Assessments completed in timescale to 88.1% in the month from a low of 60.4% in July 2013, whilst some of the reconfiguring work was taking place. This number will take the year to end figure to 77.2% and almost back to target (currently 0.4% below target).



5.6 Core Assessments

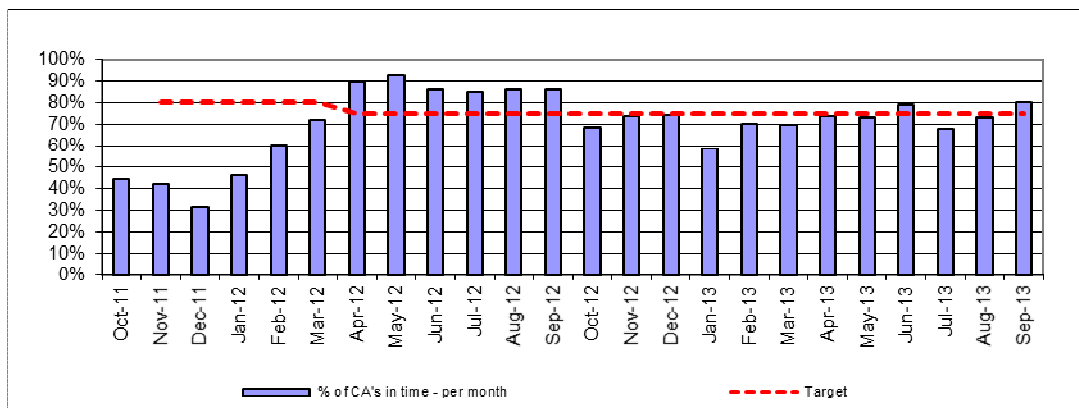
148 core assessments were completed in September which continues to be high and above target, which currently stands at 396 per 10,000 of the child population, which is 129% above the target. This is high compared to national and statistical neighbours. It is partly attributable to other authorities undertaking their complex assessment work under the initial assessment process. It is preferable to have too many rather than too few cores, although we are currently developing a single assessment tool which could reduce this number.



Core Assessments in Timescale

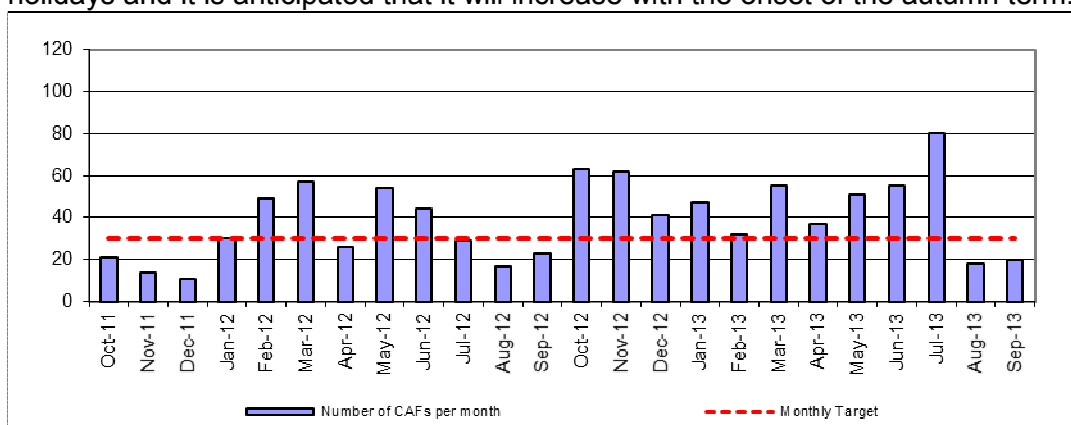
5.7

September data shows an increase in cores completed in timescale at 80.4% in the month. The year to date figure is at 74.3% which is moving closer to our target of 75.1%. The figure had dropped in July owing to the reconfiguration of the team and movement of staff across teams.



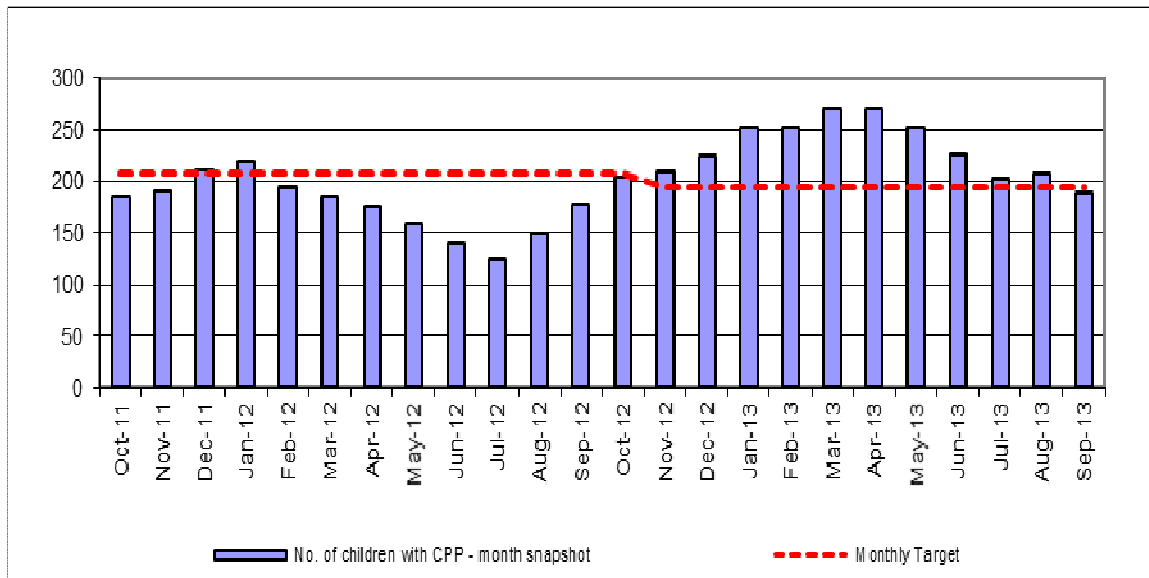
5.8 CAFs

20 CAFs were completed during September. This low figure is expected following the summer holidays and it is anticipated that it will increase with the onset of the autumn term.



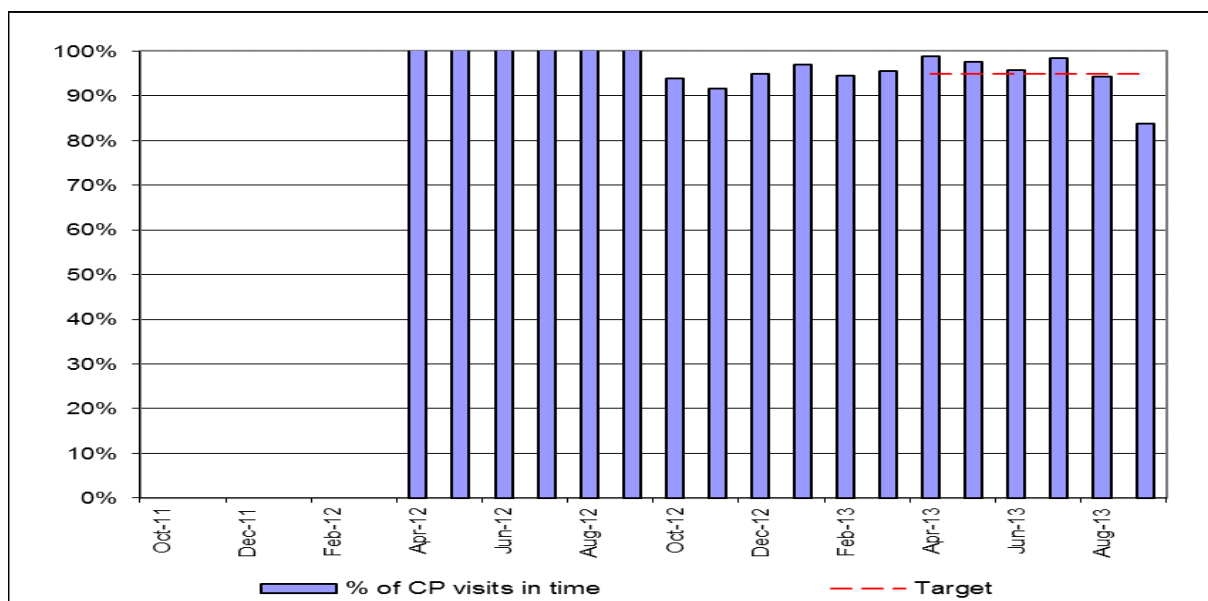
5.9 Child Protection Plans

The number of Child Protection plans has continued to drop and is currently 189 compared to a high of 270 in March and April 2013. This is just below our target which is in line with statistical neighbour performance.



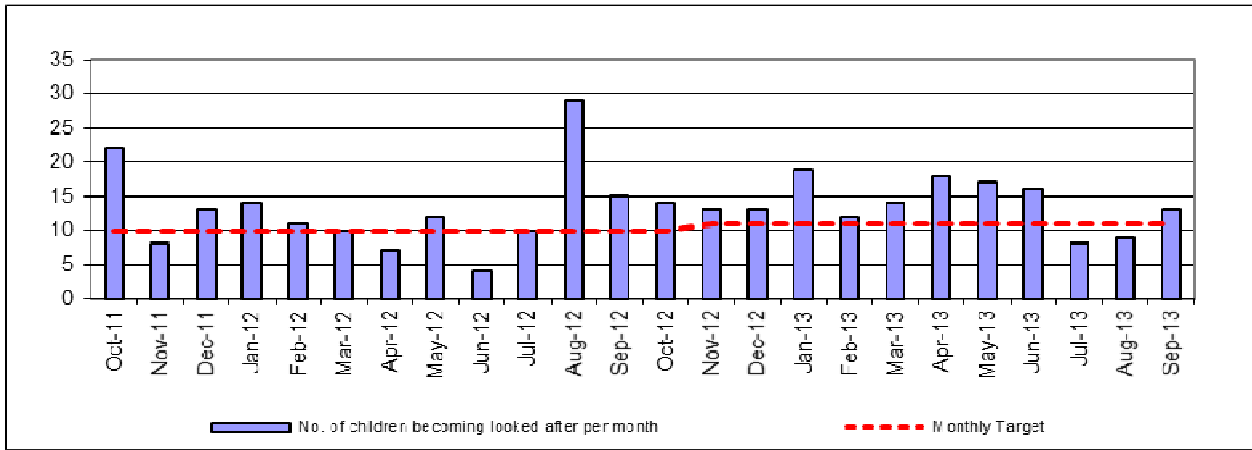
5.10 Child Protection Visits

Child Protection visits at the end of September were showing at 83.8% in time which is considerably lower than the target of 95%. Organisational changes made in September, appear to have been the most significant contributory factor, and increased scrutiny and monitoring has been put in place to address the situation. Team Managers are very clear about the expectations going forward.



5.11 Looked After Children

13 Children came into care in September. This is higher than the previous two months and is slightly higher than the monthly target of 11. The rate at 36.9% is 7.2% over target which equates to 357 looked after children.



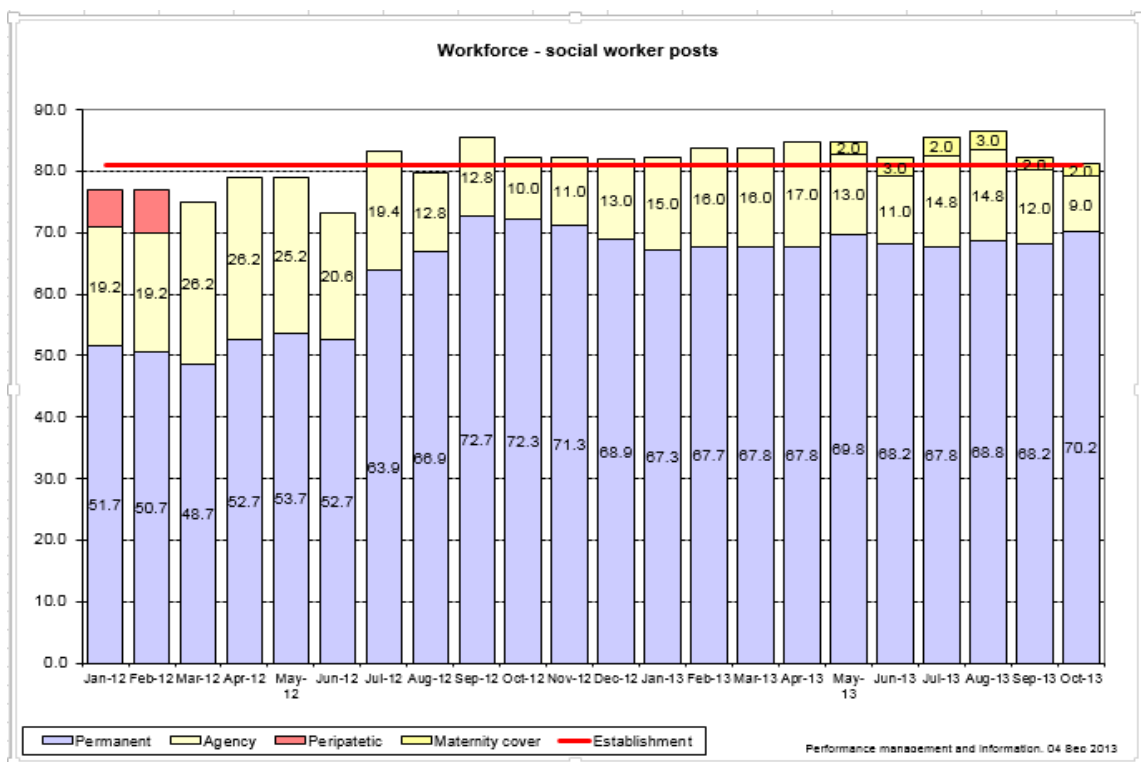
5.12 Re-configuration of the front door

The new First Response Team is now in place which is already having an impact on the way in which contacts and referrals are screened, leading to more consistent and timely threshold decisions.

Our Assessment and Family Support teams are being developed with a single assessment tool to reduce the number of changes of social worker, creating a more seamless service for children and families.

5.13 Staffing

We are experiencing some staffing problems given some staff leaving because of more attractive pay rates in some failing authorities. Although our pay scales are commensurate with neighbouring authorities, other local authorities are offering considerable enhancements to work there. Norfolk are seeking 60 additional staff, Northants have released a further 10 posts and Birmingham are seeking an additional 50-60 social worker posts. We are moving to a further recruitment round and hope to attract more permanent staff, but there is a shortage of experienced staff in a burgeoning market place. Notwithstanding this, our rate of agency staff is 13.6%. The FTE vacancies equates to 10.8.



Adoptions

5.14

There have been 15 adoptions so far this year. At October 2012, the figure was 13 and the total for the year was 18. This demonstrates an increase of 15.4% so far this year.

Changes to ICS forms

5.15

The “standalone”, Contact/Referral, Children in Need and Child Protection forms have been amended, thoroughly tested and reviewed with the Heads of Service. A few anomalies have been found on a couple of the forms and these have been sent back to Liquidlogic to be addressed.

A plan to load them into the live environment and release them for general use will now be put together, although it is not anticipated that there will be any issues as the new forms are much more intuitive than those they are replacing and self-explanatory.

Work continues on the Children Looked After Forms and the Leaving Care Service Pathway Plan.

Quality Assurance update

5.16

Inadequate audits

All cases that are graded inadequate as part of the monthly case file audits are monitored on a regular basis by the Quality Assurance Manager and progress against remedial actions is reported to the Assistant Director of Children’s Social Care and the Head of Quality Assurance & Safeguarding. The Head of Quality Assurance ensures that all inadequate cases are monitored and scrutinised at the weekly departmental improvement meetings. The number of cases that are being graded as inadequate overall are decreasing on a month by month basis. Currently, there are five cases that remain inadequate and require remedial action. The actions on these cases will be completed by 31 October 2013.

Audit activity

In the period from April – September 2013, the Quality Assurance Team have undertaken a total of 19 themed audits. This audit activity has amounted to in excess of 474 cases being reviewed as part of the audit programme.

The most recent audits that have been completed include:

Care/ Pathway Plans

An audit of care/ pathway plans has been undertaken that related to young people within the Looked After Children Team and Children with Disabilities Team. A total of 44 young people (30 cases were held within the LAC Team and 14 cases were held within the Children with Disabilities Team) were reviewed. The audit found that all of the cases had an up to date Care Plan on file, Looked After Reviews were consistently completed on time and all of the looked after children reviewed were visited regularly and within timescale. Whilst all of the cases audited had an up to date Care Plan on file, the quality of the plans varied and the audit found plans were often generic and did not identify the specific needs of some Children/Young People they related to. The learning has been shared with the service area, and practice sessions are being held with practitioners.

Child in Need

A total of 15 cases were reviewed as part of the audit. The audit found that where child in need meetings occurred there was evidence of multi-agency attendance, children and young people were being seen regularly and in accordance with the child in need policy. However, there was little evidence that Child in Need meetings were being held regularly and in accordance with the Child in Need Policy. The audit findings will be shared with senior managers and a learning set will be held with team managers.

Dip sample of Contacts

A bi monthly “dip sample” of 20 Contacts has been undertaken. The purpose of the dip sample is to give assurance to Senior Managers that the threshold for Children’s Social Care intervention is being consistently applied. Auditors found that the threshold had been appropriately applied in all

of the contacts sampled. The findings from the dip sample have been shared with Senior Managers.

Audits in progress/ Summary

There are currently two audits taking place, one that is focussing on Core Groups and another looking at supervision. The findings from this audit will be available for the next scrutiny meeting.

The auditing activity continues to identify areas for development, as well as highlighting good practice. As a result, there is evidence of improvement in the quality of service offered to vulnerable children and their families.

Early Intervention and Prevention

5.17

We have applied for an LGC award based on our innovative approach to delivering effective early help services, including the shortened local assessment process and the development of the Multi-Agency Support Groups. MASGs have now been in place for a year and have supported in excess of 300 families, all of whom have complex needs and are close to being eligible for Children's Social Care services. We have also applied for an LGA award in respect of our very successful Fostering Campaign 'the whole city is talking about fostering'.

Cherry Lodge and The manor had their Ofsted inspections in the last month - both units have received a rating of good in every area with outstanding aspects.

The Department for Education visited Clare Lodge on 7 October and were impressed by the work going on and the future developments for the unit.

The Government's Troubled Families Unit is visiting Peterborough on 22 October. The deputy, Ian Brady, presented at the recent Children and Families Joint Commissioning Board stakeholder event. I am pleased to be able to confirm that we will be claiming that we have successfully 'turned around' a further sixty six families since July, which is in addition to the ten already claimed for; this means improved school attendance and reduction in anti-social behaviour.

The Adolescent Intervention Service (AIS) support vulnerable families where there are parenting issues with teenagers, through running a parenting programme specifically targeted at these families called Escape. The September Escape programme has completed, with 5 parents finishing the programme and an October programme will start after half term. Eight parents have been invited to attend. A programme is being planned for November to be co-facilitated with the Voyager Academy which is currently operating a waiting list.

The 0 -19 Service provides grant aid to the New Ark Adventure Play Ground and City Farm as this provision is seen to be vital in providing targeted support to children and young people. Quarterly monitoring from the New Ark Play Centre reports that over 239 children registered to attend the play centre over the summer holiday programme, specifically the open access play provision.

In terms of children accessing City Farm, 400 children were reported as accessing the provision, including 145 children from play group and toddler groups, 267 from school groups and 12 from the Prince's Trust.

The centre has also received 4 Multi-Agency Support Group (MASG) referrals for the summer period to provide some supported provision to children.

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 quarterly 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
 - Ofsted Local Authority Arrangements for the Protection of Children: inspection report 8 March 2013

10. APPENDICES

10.1 None

This page is intentionally left blank