

		AGENDA ITEM 4
		CYP/16/10
Committee:	Children and Young People Policy and Scrutiny Committee	
Date:	13 May 2010	
<u>Executive Director's update on Council's Improvement Plan</u>		
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Introduction

On 3 December 2009, the Interim Executive Director presented the progress and key challenges for improving Children's Social Care to the Children and Young People Policy and Scrutiny Committee. This report provides the Committee with an update on the Council's Improvement Plan and a summary of recent progress against the core priorities identified by the Executive Director and the Essex Children's Services Improvement Board.

Improvement Plan

The Council now has a robust Improvement Plan (appendix A) which was approved at the end of March 2010 by the Minister of State for Children, Young People and Families. The Improvement Plan is focused on the immediate actions that need to be undertaken to accelerate, in a sustained manner, the activities that will both provide the foundation for improvement and embed changes in practice and outcomes.

This plan demonstrates the emphasis on remodelling our approach to improvement through the six pillars which provide the framework in which staff at all levels recognise their role in improvement. The six pillars are as follows:

1. Confident leadership
2. An organisation fit for purpose
3. Effective partnerships making the difference
4. High quality front-line practice
5. Measuring what counts
6. Becoming an employer of choice

The Children's Services Improvement Board meets monthly and monitors the progress against the Improvement Plan. It was agreed at the first meeting of the Board in January that its initial core priorities leading up to March 2010 would be to:

- Reduce unallocated cases
- Closing down incomplete initial assessments
- Closing down incomplete core assessments

Unallocated Cases

In December 2009 it was reported to the Minister that the Council had 1,548 cases which had been unallocated for longer than four weeks (out of a total of 1850). On 22 April, this number had been reduced to 62. The Council has 351 cases unallocated for less than four weeks and these are cases in progress, in the main either transferring between teams or between workers.

The following table analyses the numbers of cases and the length of time they have been unallocated.

	Unallocated for 1 month or less	Unallocated for 1 to 2 months	Unallocated for 2 to 3 months	Unallocated for three months or more	Inaccuracies due to involvement end dates	Grand Total
Cases	351	48	14	4	14	431
	Unallocated for less than 1 Week	Unallocated for 1 to 2 Weeks	Unallocated for 2 to 3 Weeks	Unallocated for 3 to 4 Weeks	Inaccuracies due to involvement end dates	Grand Total
<1 Month	213	33	53	52	0	351

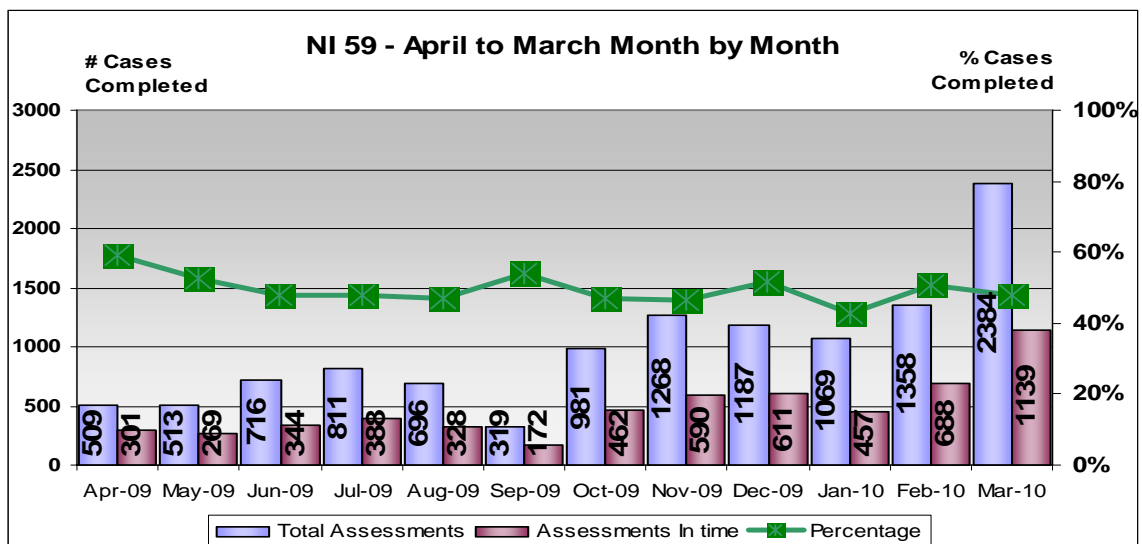
It is important for Members to note that all cases unallocated for over four weeks are now reviewed on a weekly basis by senior managers to ensure they are within a managed process and that arrangements around the safety of those children are secure.

Improving Performance on Assessments

Strong progress has been made in the completion of assessments. In March our frontline teams achieved our strongest performance of the year on both initial assessments and core assessments completed.

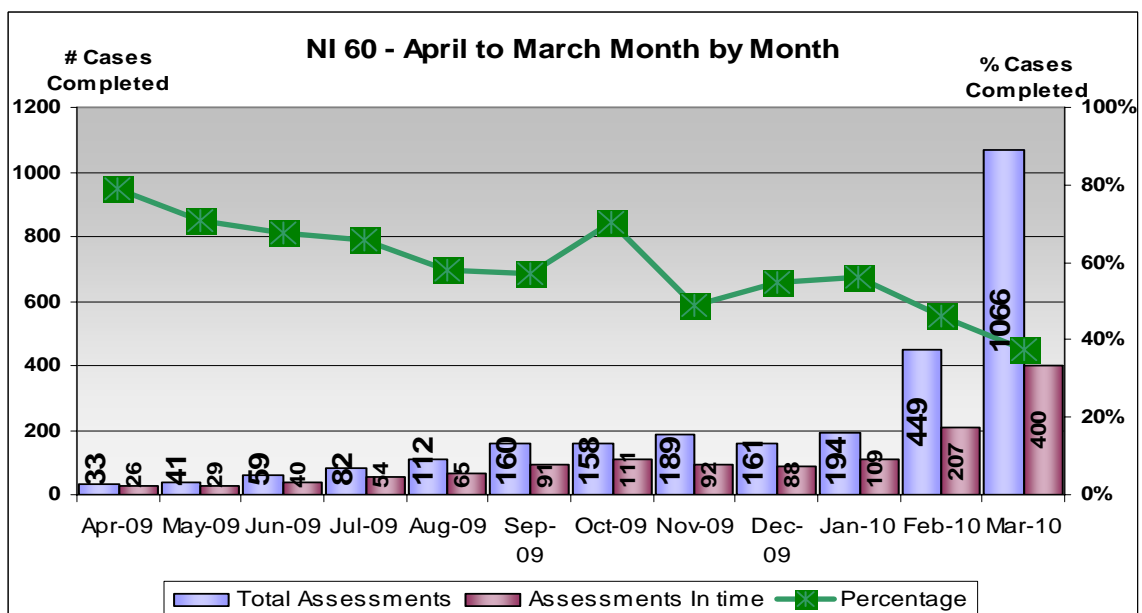
In March 2,384 initial assessments were completed of which 1139 were completed on time. This is extraordinary productivity and signals the quite exceptional commitment from social workers and front-line managers to clearing up the final tail of the unallocated backlog.

The following graph shows clearly how performance in the completion of initial assessments has improved over the last six months.



This productivity needs to be viewed in the context that the new Improvement Notice requires an average of 650 initial assessments a month. This will place us in the middle of our statistical neighbours' performance.

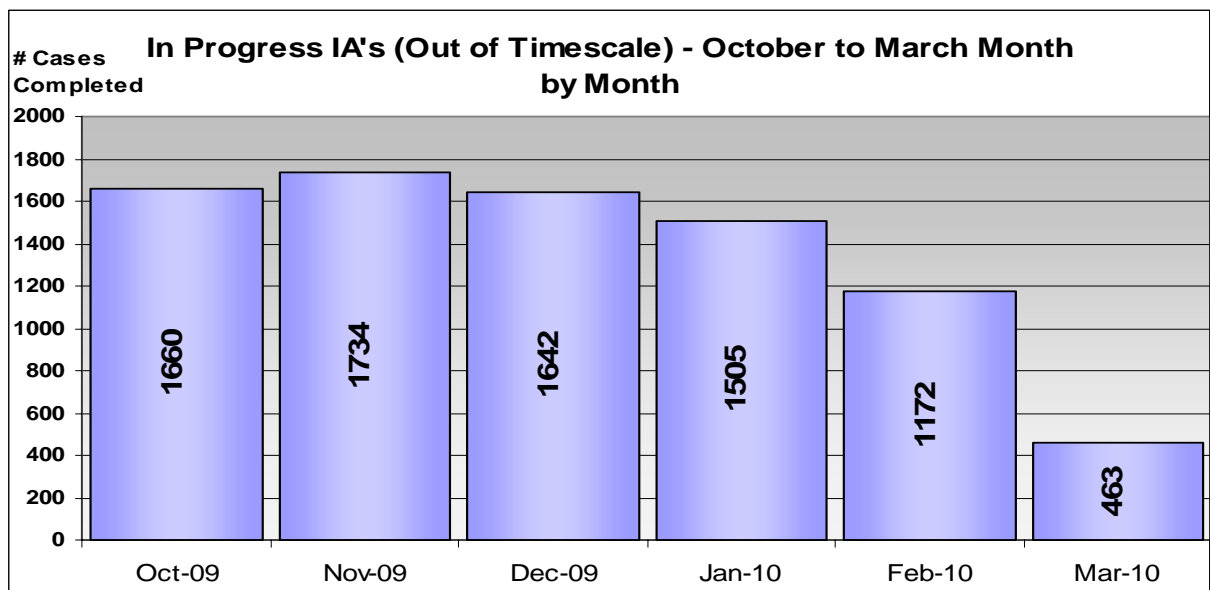
Similarly impressive progress has been made on completing core assessments. 1066 were completed in March of which 400 were completed on time. This is a significant improvement in performance in comparison to the first six months of 09/10. The new Improvement Notice requires an average of 250 core assessments a month.



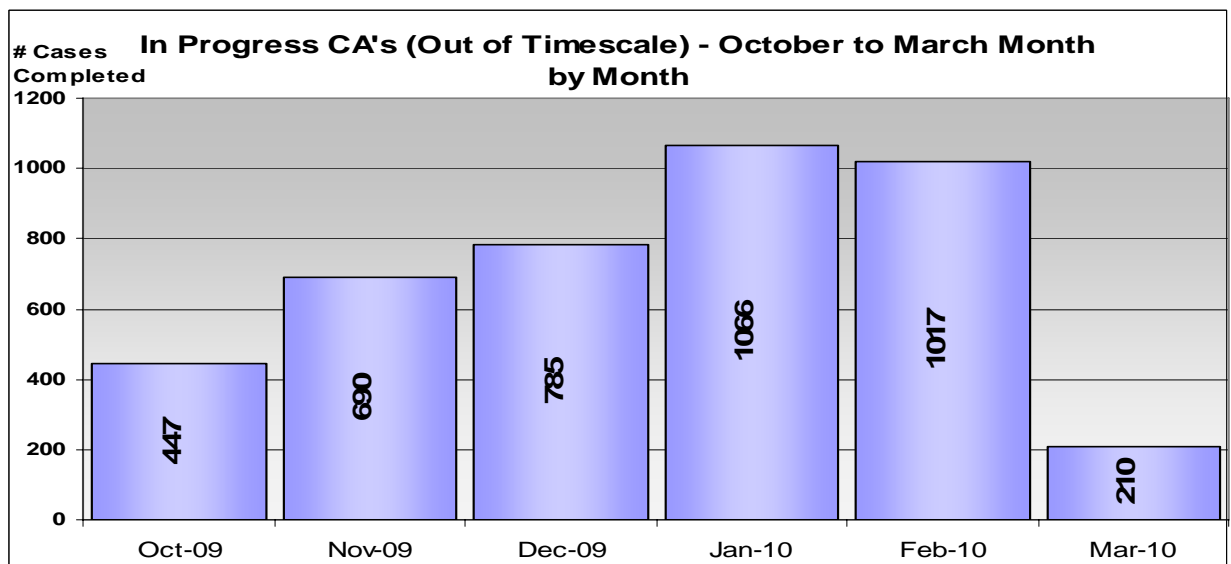
Closing down out of time Assessments

As well as an increase in productivity and frontline capacity, the high volumes of assessments completed have also been driven by the ambition to close off all of the incomplete assessments in the system before the end of the

performance year in March. At its peak in November there were 1734 initial assessments out of timescale. By the end of March this had been successfully reduced to 463.



In December of last year there were 785 core assessments out of timescale. In January this grew to 1066 largely due to the impact of working on the unallocated cases. By the end of March it had reduced to 210 out of timescale



Summary

Officials from DCSF and Government Office East (GO East) have commented that the service is unrecognisable from where it was at the point of the Minister's intervention. The work on clearing up the backlogs has nearly been completed we have now put the service on a more normal footing. This has made the service considerably safer. There is now a clear management grip

and a determination throughout the service to maintain this progress. There is a new found confidence in the service and it is now well placed to begin the task of putting sustainable improvements in place for the long term.

Now that our work on clearing up the backlogs is nearing to a close, the focus on sustainable improvement will shift in the next few months to the following key areas:

- Bedding in the new arrangements for the reception of contacts and referrals. There is a clear need to begin the process of reducing the number of referrals accepted into the service and the numbers of assessments we undertake. Targets will be rolled out for service managers and teams based on the global targets set within the Improvement Notice. Alongside this the refreshed Threshold Criteria will be rolled out across the Children's Trust which will include clearer expectations around the use of the Common Assessment Framework
- Introducing a revised performance framework that measures and assures quality improvement of both practice and supervision
- Developing our vision of Essex as the home of high quality social work and putting in place a sustainable workforce
- Preparing for the future inspection of the service

Appendix A – Schools, Children and Families Improvement Plan