

Committee: Children and Young People Policy & Scrutiny Committee

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**PROGRESS AGAINST LOCAL AREA AGREEMENT AND CORPORATE
PLAN PERFORMANCE SCORECARDS (QUARTER 1 2009) – RED
INDICATOR REFERRALS**

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Introduction

The Schools, Children and Families Directorate within Essex County Council is currently subject to a Statutory Improvement Notice from the Department for Children Schools and Families. As part of this process, a jointly agreed Improvement Notice Action Plan and Improvement Notice Performance Targets were set. NI59, NI60, and NI64 all have targets set within the improvement notice, and progress against these is reported to the DCSF on a monthly basis.

This report provides an overview of key programmes of activity already taking place or planned for the near future that have a direct impact on the performance indicators that have been referred to the Children and Young People Policy and Scrutiny Committee. A more detailed analysis is provided below, alongside each indicator.

Recruitment: The factor which has the single biggest impact on performance within children's social care is the number of social workers within Essex. Shortages of experienced social work staff in the County are well documented – in particular, a dedicated Task and Finish Group led by Councillor Eddie Johnson reported back to the CYP Policy and Scrutiny Committee in December 2008. As part of the Directorate's recruitment and retention plan, a number of activities are underway to improve capacity:

- Overseas recruitment of experienced staff from Australia and America
- The use of agency staff (such as Remedy) to tackle specific issues such as backlogs of cases

- The commissioning of additional capacity for a six-month period from Serco - contract commenced in September 2009


Integrated Children's System (ICS) – the rollout of this modern, technological platform began at the end of September and provides significant advantages over the previous IT system, SWIFT. These advantages include: a workflow-based system that ensures compliance to established standards and procedures; improved management information and the resolution of many data quality issues; and enabling managers to identify and intervene in blockages, issues and performance issues quickly.

Initial Response Team (IRT) – the redesign of our “front door” processes is being rolled out in parallel with ICS, and also began at the end of September. This structural change sees the establishment of a dedicated team to provide consistent application of thresholds across the county that will pass work through to dedicated assessment teams dealing with initial assessments. Longer term Family support teams will deal with the children subject to a child protection plan and children in need cases. This model will be county-wide by February 2010.


Multi-Agency Allocation Groups (MAAG) – The rollout of this process also began at the end of September, and provides strengthened partnership working between agencies and helping prevent escalation to Children's Social Care and provide an exit route for children and families to universal and targeted services.

As can be seen, all of the above initiatives went through a planning and development phase throughout the first quarter of the year, and therefore had not been established in time to have an impact on Quarter 1 results. It is anticipated that the benefits of these initiatives will be reflected in improved performance results from October 2009.

NI59 – Percentage of initial assessments for children’s social care carried out within 7 working days of referral

2008/09 Result	2009/10 Target	Quarter 1 / August 09 Actual	September 09 Actual	October 09 Actual	Direction of Travel	Year End Forecast
75%	80%	50.8%	50.6%	49.8%		

NI60 – Percentage of core assessments for children’s social care carried out within 35 days of referral

2008/09 Result	2009/10 Target	Quarter 1 / August 09 Actual	September 09 Actual	October 09 Actual	Direction of Travel	Year End Forecast
81%	80%	65.4%	62.6%	64.5%		

In August 2009 it became apparent that a reporting error meant that data for NI 59 was incorrect. The effect of this – and of proactive data cleansing of the underlying systems – has been to reduce the REPORTED performance for NI59 from 85% in July 2009 to 50.8% in August. This dramatic change has led to the indicator being referred to the Policy and Scrutiny Committee.

A full retrospective review of the reports back to the beginning of April 2009 has been undertaken, with the figures re-reported for NI59. The 2008/09 outturn reports for both NI59 and NI60 have been re-checked and have been confirmed as correct.

An independent internal audit of data quality and reporting in SCF was conducted in September, and the data services team with SCF has been centralised to become part of the Corporate Performance, Planning and Improvement Directorate to ensure robust controls, quality assurance, and accountability are in place.

The data and reporting issues should not distract from the issue that our current performance on completion of initial assessments within timescale is at 49.8%. For comparative purposes, our statistical neighbours achieve an average of 71.1% (based on 2008/09 outturn) against this indicator.

However, Essex has seen an increase in volume of 13.5% in the number of initial assessments being completed in 2008/09 compared with the previous year. The

introduction of our Initial Response Team will have a significant impact on the timeliness of completion for both initial and core assessments as the team will provide an initial screening service that will enable the assessment teams to focus on the completion of initial and core assessments. The additional capacity outlined in the introduction will also have an impact on performance against these indicators, as additional social workers within the Assessment and Family Support Teams will provide significant additional capacity to distribute the volume of initial assessments and therefore improve the timeliness of their completion.


Another significant factor impacting our performance on assessments is inconsistent compliance from partner agencies in adopting the Common Assessment framework(CAF). The CAF is a shared assessment tool for use across all services for children and all local areas in England. It aims to help early identification of children with additional needs and promote co-ordinated service provision. Social work teams who receive referrals with no CAF provided, spend time and energy collecting and collating further information, which in turn impacts on their ability to complete the initial assessment within timescale. Significant progress has been made in improving CAF compliance with partner agencies, but work is ongoing – particular in partnership with the Police and domestic violence notifications.

NI89a – Number of schools in special measures

2008/09 Result	2009/10 Target	Quarter 1 / August 09 Actual	September 09 Actual	October 09 Actual	Direction of Travel	Year End Forecast
3	0	2	n/a	n/a	n/a	2

This annual measure reflects the number of schools in special measures at the end of each summer term. Furtherwick Park went into special measures in January and Alderman Blaxill came out of special measures on February 26th so this figure remains at 2. When Bishops Park becomes an Academy with Colbayns in September 2009, the figure (assuming no further schools go into special measures) will be reduced to 1.

NI117 – 16-18 year olds who are not in education, training or employment (NEET)


2008/09 Result	2009/10 Target	Quarter 1 / August 09 Actual	September 09 Actual	October 09 Actual	Direction of Travel	Year End Forecast
6.7%	5.3%	8.2%	9.7%	7.5%		

This indicator varies from month to month within the year and is subject to seasonal variation – for example the rise in September can be largely attributed to the time when young people leave school or college. Tracking year-on-year performance across equivalent months is often a more useful indicator of performance.

On this basis NEET has seen a 1.3% increase in August 2009 compared with August 2008 (from 6.9% to 8.2%). September has also increased by 1.7% from 8.0% in 2008 to 9.7% in 2009. This is likely to be due to the impact of the economic recession and young people either losing their jobs or not being able to access employment due to the reduction in jobs available to them. There are wide district variances across the county ranging from 16.7% in Tendring to 3.7% in Epping. The Eastern region has increased its NEET figures by 3.3% as a whole.

There is a rapid response to this issue including the development of a new employability team to increase the number of jobs for young people, growth in the apprenticeship offer across Essex, a bespoke project aimed at placing 60 looked after children who are NEET onto a pre-apprenticeship programme, and securing flexible provision for 300 young people from the LAA PRG funding.


LI38 – Number of 14-17 year olds in care

2008/09 Result	2009/10 Target	Quarter 1 / August 09 Actual	September 09 Actual	October 09 Actual	Direction of Travel	Year End Forecast
509	408	505	514	509		

This indicator is a local indicator . It is not helpful as it measures the number of young people in our care , where the useful measure would be to consider the number of young people entering the care system of this age group. It reflects the fact that our current cohort of looked after children is aging – rather than reflecting the number of new 14-17 year olds coming into care.

There is also new case law from a Lord Lords judgement making Local Authorities responsible for all homeless 16/17 year olds rather than housing authorities within district councils. The expectations are that these young people will be ‘accommodated’ by the Local authority. It is predicted to have a major impact on the number of young people in the authorities care.

NI64 Percentage of child protection plans lasting 2 years or more

2008/09 Result	2009/10 Target	Quarter 1 / August 09 Actual	September 09 Actual	October 09 Actual	Direction of Travel	Year End Forecast
7.0%	6%	7.4%	6.9%	6.3%		

Although first quarter performance was of concern, September and October show an upward trend toward target and both months saw performance above the 2008/09 outturn result. Plans are in place to review child protection plans at the 13 month stage to ensure that preventative action can be taken in time if the plan is not having the desired outcome .