



Report Title: **A Report on NI59 – Initial Assessments Completed in 7 days**

Report of **Peter Lewis, Director of Children and Young People's Service**

Signed

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Peter Lewis", with a horizontal line underneath.

Contact Officer : **Mark Gurrey, Assistant Director, Performance**

Wards(s) affected: **ALL**

Report for: **Non Key Decision**

**1. Purpose of the report**

This report sets out some background details on NI59 performance issues.

**2. Recommendations**

That the Overview & Scrutiny Committee note and consider the report.

**3. Reason for recommendation(s)**

**4. Other options considered**

N/A

**5. Chief Financial Officer Comments**

N/A

**6. Head of Legal Services Comments**

N/A

**7. Head of Procurement Comments**

N/A

<b>8. Equalities &amp; Community Cohesion Comments</b> N/A
<b>9. Consultation</b> N/A
<b>10. Service Financial Comments</b> There are no specific financial issues arising from this report.
<b>11. Use of appendices / Tables and photographs</b>
<b>12. Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985</b>

## Background

13. In order to look in more detail at performance in this area, some contextual background will be helpful. Everything that comes into the service is judged as a 'contact'. All of these contacts are viewed by a manager. The majority (see figures below) do not require any further action. Where it is judged the contact does require more attention and properly meets the stated thresholds, then they are accepted as referrals. Once accepted as a referral, work can either be quickly completed or, where it is clear more substantial intervention is required, then either an initial assessment (IA) is commissioned or it will move immediately to a Section 47 child protection investigation. Equally, there are times when an IA is initiated and it becomes clear that concerns are greater than first assessed and the case moves to a S47. It is important to remember that the pathway through the system is not always linear and children's journeys will mirror their needs - it is partly because of the individualised nature of each child's circumstances that a straightforward numerical analysis cannot reveal the whole picture.
14. For the 6 month period July-December 2009:
- |                                      |                               |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Numbers of Contacts:                 | 6,873                         |
| Numbers of Referrals:                | 1,812 (conversion rate = 26%) |
| Number of IAs:                       | 1,018 (approx)                |
| Conversion Rate of Referrals to IAs: | 56%                           |
15. Once it has been decided that an IA is required, the expectation is that it is completed in 7 working days. The original thinking behind this indicator was to ensure that children referred to social care have an early assessment of their needs, to ensure that the service they need delivered in a timely manner and most importantly to ensure that no children are left unprotected.

16. Our performance against this indicator has been subject to considerable scrutiny, both by this Committee and elsewhere (not least by operational managers) since the JAR (now Safeguarding) Action Plan. Current performance against this indicator is as follows:
- 26.1% ytd as at end of January 2010
  - Target 53%
  - National Average 72% (2008-09)
  - Statistical neighbours 77% (2008-09)
17. The 2008-09 figures above should be treated with some caution as the national increase in workload on social care services may well have had a negative impact on these figures.
18. NI 59 has become something of a proxy measure for the functioning of the whole service and this report seeks to put that KPI in a broader context and offer a more comprehensive summary of service performance.
19. The Head of Service and all operational managers are provided with a case by case breakdown of ALL cases in their service every week and so each child can be and is tracked quite easily. Those cases which do not have an allocated social worker are subject to regular scrutiny by the Head of Service and other managers to ensure their needs are not being lost and that they are being constantly prioritised against all new incoming work. FR managers meet three times a week with colleagues from health and Police and they plan for the response to the most concerning cases and those that come back as re-referrals.
20. There are three key areas that need further exploration to properly assess our current performance and before any broader conclusions can be drawn about the service as a whole.
21. **Firstly**, this is by definition a process indicator; it can only measure timeliness and cannot report on the quality of the intervention. Since March 2009, there has been a considerable focus on improving the quality of intervention with children and encouraging staff to generate better assessments even if they exceeded the time limit. This re-focussing has been welcomed by staff and evidence is growing that the quality of assessments are improving as a consequence.
22. The Lead Member has commissioned an independent monthly audit of both IAs and Core Assessments since March 2009 and those audits have shown a steady improvement in the quality of work completed. This audit does not lend itself to detailed statistical reporting save to say that in the November audit cases were audited against the relevant practice Standards and it was found that 79% of the initials and 69% of cores met or nearly met our declared Practice Standards. The summary of the November audits concluded that for initials “on the whole the standards are being met..... Most were sound assessments with evidence and analysis of risk ensuring appropriate outcomes and follow up measures.”
23. The case file audit programme carried out by all senior managers (including the Director) demonstrates that the risk assessments/Section 47s showed an improvement in judgements of good from 27% in October to 49% in November and

70% in December. Conversely, judgements of inadequate fell from 38% to 23% and 20%. The domain that measures 'key assessment episodes' rose in judgements of good from 31% to 36% and then 43% - inadequate judgements fell from 39% to 32% (in both November and December).

24. There is therefore growing evidence that the quality of assessments is improving. The recent Ofsted inspection focussed considerably more on the quality of work being produced rather than the timeliness and a verbal update on their findings will be presented to OSC.
25. A further audit has been carried out on a number of cases where the IAs were completed out of timescale to specifically judge whether the delay in any sense left children at risk. Of the 20 cases looked at in one case only was it clear that a more timely response was required. Other cases demonstrated either some very thorough social work input far beyond that required for an IA which necessarily took it over time or some appropriate prioritisation of other more pressing child protection work.
26. **Secondly**, a judgement about this aspect of the service needs to be taken in the round with reference to other data. A 'simple' focus on NI59 to the exclusion of other data and information can not provide a very detailed or indeed accurate picture of the service as a whole.
27. There is a need to understand something about activity and demand levels firstly. In 2008-09, Haringey reported receiving 2,815 referrals and completed 1250 Initial Assessments. Figures in paragraph 14 above indicate that those figures this year will be around 4,000 and over 2,000 respectively.
28. At any one time in First Response, there will approximately 150 Section 47 investigations in train. These are by definition the most pressing ones on the service and their progress is subject to considerable daily management attention. These cases will always assume greater priority than those allocated for IA which in the main will be concerning children in need as opposed to children in need of protection. There is no PI attached to their completion.
29. This increase in demand combined with the identification of incomplete work earlier in the year led has meant that some children have had to wait to be allocated to a social worker and as a consequence the timetable for their IAs was overrun before the work started. The level of outstanding assessments waiting allocation to a social worker has steadily reduced from over 200 earlier in the year to the current position of less than 20.
30. It is also important to gather some sense about the complexity of work before the service. An audit conducted on a week chosen at random at the end of 2009 identified the following amongst the cases being worked with:
  - child disclosing she had been hit with a belt by her father, mother and aunt
  - child who had fallen out of a window
  - hot liquid being spilt onto a baby during a domestic violence incident
  - 14 year old disclosing sexual activity by her father, including touching her breasts

- 6 year old with an eating problem, who has told her mother that she intends to stab her 11 year old brother
  - 2 siblings under 11, showing sexualised behaviour, clearly underfed, whose weights were dropping, believed to be fed bread and water as punishment
  - 15 year old admitted to hospital after overdosing on 20 tablets, whose mother on returning home to find her had done nothing, leaving the girl herself to call an ambulance
31. These and other similar cases are complex requiring a detailed and comprehensive assessment and response – completing them in 7 days will often not fit with the best interests of the child.
32. **Thirdly**, the other two points notwithstanding, there is evidence that performance in this area is improving. We have examined all initial assessments that began and finished in the same month for both December and January and when performance is isolated in this way we are able to demonstrate outcomes of 83% and 86% respectively. What continues to bring down the data is the number of cases that have been in the system for a longer period and that are completed beyond the 7 days as set out in para 26 above.
33. Finally, it is worth noting that Government are consulting on extending this indicator to 10 working days and this has been welcomed by the sector. Clearly it remains a process indicator and there is no proposals forthcoming about quality indicators but this does represent a more reasonable timescale to make an initial response to children's needs.