

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 21ST FEBRUARY 2010
QUESTIONS (AND RESPONSES) BY COUNCILLORS ALLISON AND WINSKILL
IN RELATION TO ITEM 9 - PERFORMANCE ECXEPTIONS

- **we understand that the target time for assessments to be made was reviewed last year from 7 to 10 days: please confirm when and why..** *This has been changed in accordance with statutory guidance – ‘Working Together to Safeguard Children’ which was reviewed and published in March 2010. However, the timescales for implementing this though The Department for Education are slightly behind and we are obliged to continue to report on timescales within 7 days for 2010/11. This is in keeping with most authorities in the UK. The changes in working together offer a realistic timescale in which to gather information from professionals in the child’s care, to meet with the child/ YP and their primary carers in order to assess their needs and record this*
- **the target number of initial assessments being made is 70% - how does this compare to targets used by statistical neighbours?** *Targets are set by looking at a number of factors and not specifically targets of others, these include; outturns and trends in local performance leading up to the point at which targets are set, outturn data from comparator boroughs, national averages, and an evaluation of performance and planned developments in a particular area of work in the year ahead The most recent data for our statistical neighbours is available for the year 2009/10. These show that our statistical neighbour average was 78% in timescale with a National Average of 75.5%. The number of initial assessments completed in 10 working days continues to be below their recorded achievements but has shown a gradual and sustained improvement over the past year. Data for January 2011 evidenced 65.4% in timescale. Whilst the % of assessments completed in timescale, as opposed to the % completed out of timescale is an important indicator ,the number and the quality of the assessments completed is also fundamental to ensuring the needs of Haringey’s children are met and their safety ensured. As a service we have been committed to ensuring that we maintain the quality of our assessments alongside seeking to improve timescales.*
- **you will appreciate the concern that the target allows for 30% of assessments to be completed after ten days:** *All cases are allocated in the same week as the referral is made to CYPs and work commences then. This includes management overview of every case. Delays in completion of the IA relates to the moment when all information has been gathered, the child seen, parents spoken to, other appropriate agencies spoken to, the information has been recorded on the correct format, the information analysed and the assessment has been reviewed by a manager and signed off. In some cases this takes more than 10 days. Whilst the aim is to complete this piece of work in 10 working days some issues may get in the way of this process. We do not agree sign off of assessment until sufficient information has been gathered and we are satisfied that children are safe and their needs met. The majority of the referrals into First Response are from concerned professionals including schools, health professionals and children’s centres. Only 5% are from Haringey residents. As a result we work with a number of children and families who initially do not see the need for, or want, social work involvement in their lives. This is reflected when reviewing the issues which prevent timely completion of initial assessment. Examples include families moving out of the area, families not allowing*

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access to their home and children, pressing child protection investigation and court matters which are prioritised over referrals relating to children in need.

- **Will all assessments be made within 20 - 30 days?** *Not in all cases. Currently 13 Out of 76 initial assessments are over 28 days old. None date from before the middle of December 2010.*

- **How long would it take to complete any monthly group of assessments?** *On the whole work is completed within 6 weeks. Of the six cases where this is not the case, all evidence ongoing work. Examples of other reason for delay are as follows:*

One has required work with three local boroughs and work with 4 partner agencies to ascertain the whereabouts of the family; one has progressed to a core assessment as this relates to an unborn child where the mother has failed to meet with the social worker; one relates to a family who have been out of the UK and recently returned.

- **How are the "priority" assessments identified?** *All contacts from the public and partner agencies are initially screened by a multi agency team consisting of social workers, specialist Health visitor and metropolitan police. These partners are co located at 48 Station Road. This multi agency team is the first in the UK and also benefits from additional support from CAMHS, Education Welfare, The CAF manager, The Integrated Disabled Children's Service and the specialist No recourse to Public Funds Team. This robust process allows 90 % of the 13,000 pa contacts into the service to be managed via universal services and the CAF. The Multi Agency Screening team considers each contact individually in the context of Haringey's Threshold Document. Contacts and referrals about Children and Young People who may be at risk of significant harm, around 11 per week, are passed immediately to the Duty Social Work Team. The team investigate in conjunction with the Police Child Abuse Investigation Team. (CAIT) and partner agencies. For these children the Initial Assessment will be completed in a matter of hours and the assessment will be completed through a Child Protection Core assessment which takes up to 35 days to complete. None of the Initial Assessments relate to children who may be at risk of significant harm. Initial assessments, on average a further 40 per week, are completed for children and Young People who have not met the threshold of Significant harm but who are thought to be children in need. Typically these will be children and Young People with some additional needs and who cannot be supported via the Common Assessment Framework process. The decision making process is audited weekly by the Head of Service and Deputy Heads of Service with a sample of cases (usually 15 – 20%) being audited. In addition there is a clear escalation process in place which results in review of complex work by the head of Service and the Assistant Director Safeguarding.*

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- **How do we reassure residents and partner agencies that our targets are appropriate and that vulnerable children are being identified and assessed in a timely way?** *The Service is seeking to strike a careful balance between improving the timeliness of assessment completion and ensuring that work completed is of a high quality and fully engages children, their families and partner agencies. The screening service offers specialist advice and support to both residents and partner agencies in office hours. The Emergency Duty team offers a similar service out of hours. The completion of an Initial Assessment is a process in which residents and partner agencies are consulted and spoken to. Importantly the service does not hold a waiting list for assessment and so work commences within a week of referral and often within 24 hours. Key to reassuring residents and partner agencies is the same day response offered by the Multi Agency Screening team, the timeliness of initial contact with families and referrers and our ongoing dialogue with them.*
- The use of the Threshold Document as a means of identifying vulnerable children requiring social work assessment has resulted in a consistency of approach. This document is a shared threshold and sign up is from Haringey CYPS, NHS, Metropolitan Police and the LSCB. The document is readily available to both residents and partner agencies and is accessible via the Haringey website.