



Report for:	Overview and Scrutiny Committee	Item number	
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Title:	First Response performance –timeliness of completion of Initial and Core Assessments
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Report authorised by :	Libby Blake Director, Children and Young People's Service <i>Libby Blake</i>
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Lead Officer:	Sylvia Chew – Head of Service First Response
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Ward(s) affected: all	Report for Non Key Decision:
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1. Describe the issue under consideration

First Response performance on the completion of Initial and Core Assessments. The timeliness of the completion of Initial and Core assessments is measured by National indicator 59 and 60. The current target times are 10 days and 35 days respectively.

2. Recommendations

Members to receive this report and note the attached action plan.

3. Other options considered

4. Background information

- 5.1 The First Response Service provides the first point of contact into children's social care for professionals and the public. The service receives between 550 -630 contacts per month. These relate to a variety of issues including information from the police that a child or young person has come to their notice, requests for information and concerns



from schools, health professionals and the public that a child may be a risk of harm.

These contacts are screened by a multi agency team of social workers, police and health professionals. Where necessary the family and other involved professionals will be contacted as part of this screening process. All contacts are ranked against agreed thresholds.

1/3 of contacts reach the 'threshold' for social work assessment.(see appendix a, thresholds of need and intervention) If this is not the case then advice or information is given and follow up work will be provided by universal services such as health visitors, schools and Children Centres.

Social work assessments can be short – Initial assessments with a timescale of 10 days – or longer – Core Assessments with a timescale of 35 days.

In both cases all children in the family and the home must be seen and reported on as part of the assessment.

5.2 In exceptional circumstances, for instance if the family are living elsewhere and another authority is working with them, the assessment is not signed off as completed until both these criterion have been met, the information has been written up on the agreed format and the analysis and the assessment has been agreed by a manager. This is a quality assured as well as a timeliness measured process. The term 'completion in timescale' therefore relates to completion of the whole task and not a failure to have met with the child and their family. The Safeguarding and Looked after Ofsted inspection in January 2011 and the more recent October 2011 unannounced Ofsted inspection of Contact, Referral and Assessment arrangements has commented on the improved quality of assessments. The continual improvement in quality has also been ratified by the external auditor who reports to elected members on the Children's Safeguarding Policy and Practice Advisory Committee

5.3 Assessments comprise 40% Of the cases open in the service. In addition to assessments First Response Social workers undertake a number of tasks;

- Every four weeks they act as the duty team, dealing with referrals and responding to emergencies. This will include liaison with police, health and schools, joint investigative visits with police for children assessed as being at risk of harm, working with paediatricians and families to ensure children have medical examinations if required, working with police around assessment and investigation including video interview where required.
- Working with families where ongoing short to medium term work is required. This includes parenting support and advice, linking families with other agencies such as benefits, housing and children's centres,



presenting matters to the CAF panel where family support or other services are required, convening initial team around the child meetings. Work with these families can last for up to 5 months.

- Completion of assessments for the courts in Private Law Proceedings where directed to do so. These are lengthy pieces of work and can last up to a year or more.
- Work with families where the children require a child protection plan. This will include direct work with families and the multi agency team, presentation of the matters to conference and working with the child protection plan until transfer to the Safeguarding and Support Service.
- Work with families where children cannot safely remain at home with their parents and making emergency applications to court. This includes work with children and families around the concerns, assessing the ability of parents to change, assessing the viability of extended family members who may be potential substitute carers, meeting with legal team colleagues to develop a plan of action, preparation of court documents and care plans, attendance at court, working with foster carers around the needs of children, including visiting the child in placement, working with the Looked After Children Health team to ensure children health needs are met including attending the LAC medical, ensuring the child has a Personal Education Plan and work with schools around this, attending the Looked After Child review, setting up and supervising contact between the child and their parents/ significant family. Our overall Performance rating is based on the ability of the service to complete the full range of work both within timescales and to the agreed quality standard.

5.4 Whilst Haringey had reported a high 'completion' rate in previous years, the 2008 Joint Area Review found that the quality of these assessments was not sufficient to ensure that children were safeguarded.

An Improvement Plan was submitted in February 2009, and a follow up Action Plan was submitted to Ofsted and the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) in March 2009. This three year plan was designed to ensure that Haringey's services for children and young people are among the best by December 2011.

The subsequent inspection of progress was carried out by Ofsted in June 2009, demonstrating that whilst some improvements had been made, there was limited progress overall in addressing the weaknesses identified in the November 2008 joint area review. The July 2009 report from Ofsted identified 11 recommendations for improvement, all of which were built into the Safeguarding Plan for addressing before the end of December 2009.



Our Safeguarding Action Plan set out the priorities, framework and timescales for bringing the quality of social work and safeguarding work up to standard over a 3 year period:

Improving child protection referral and assessment processes

- *Referral pathways integrated with CAF*
- *Capacity identified to ensure that timescales taken for assessment improve*
- *Quality of information and analysis in initial and core assessments is improved to ensure minimum standards are consistently met*
- *Dedicated specialist mental health input for R&A established whilst proposal is developed for multi-agency assessment team*

Performance on timeliness understandably deteriorated during the early period whilst a huge and complex programme of work was undertaken to rebuild the service, the systems, the staff group, the management team and the confidence of key partners and stakeholders. The agreed priority and focus during this period was to ensure the quality of the work improved..

Since then there has been a steady upward trajectory in timeliness with targets of 70% assessments completed in timescale at the end of 2011/12 now projected as achievable and a target for 80% in timescale for 2012/13.

The monthly performance demonstrates a fluctuation in completion rates. A number of issues impact on this, These include: increases in referrals immediately before school holidays(July, December, March) and a seasonal 10% increase in October, attendance at police raids to homes where it is believed trafficked children may be present in conjunction with the Bulgarian and Metropolitan Police (May 2011) as part of Operation Golf and subsequent work with children and /YP taken into our care and assistance as part of the emergency response to Summer Riots (August)

- 5.5 In January 2011 there was a full announced inspection of Safeguarding and Looked After Children's Services which acknowledged the progress that had been made and the report concluded that:

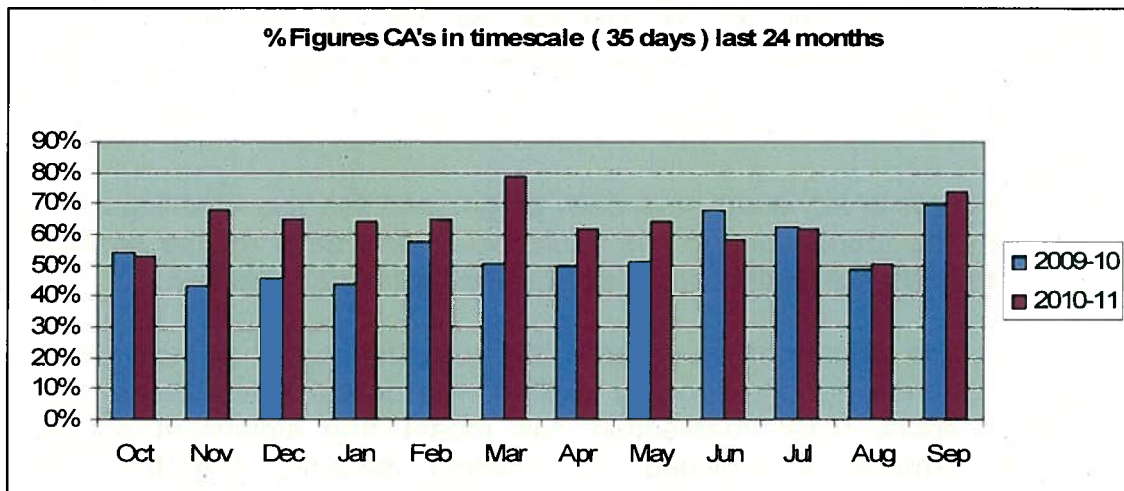
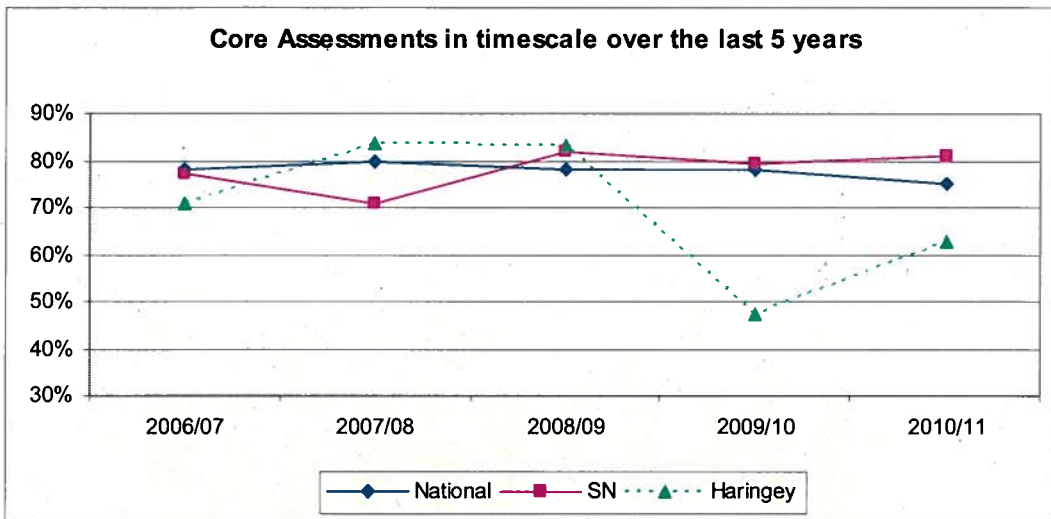
"The arrangements for contact, referral and assessment of children in need or who are at risk of harm are good and the improvements reported after the last unannounced inspection of the service in August 2010 have been sustained"



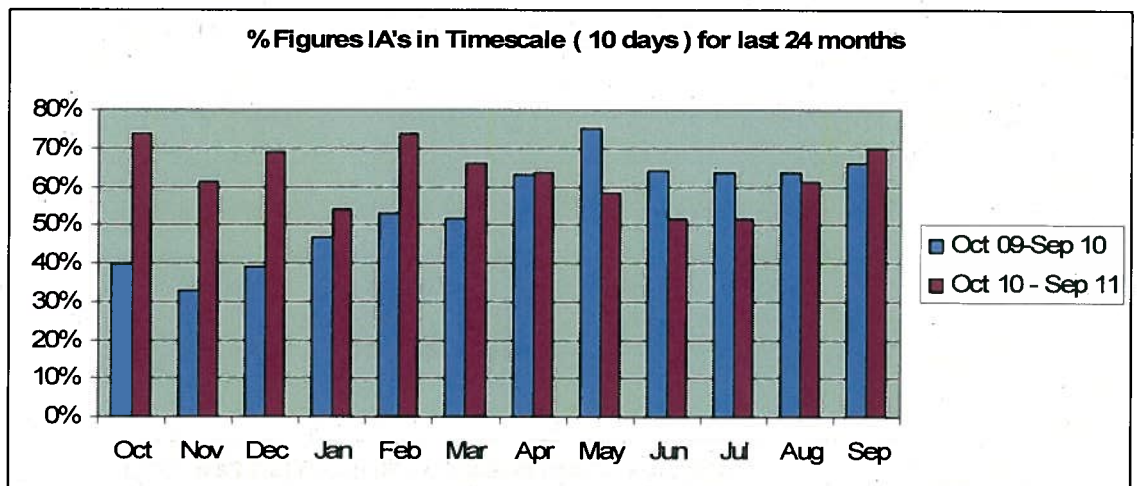
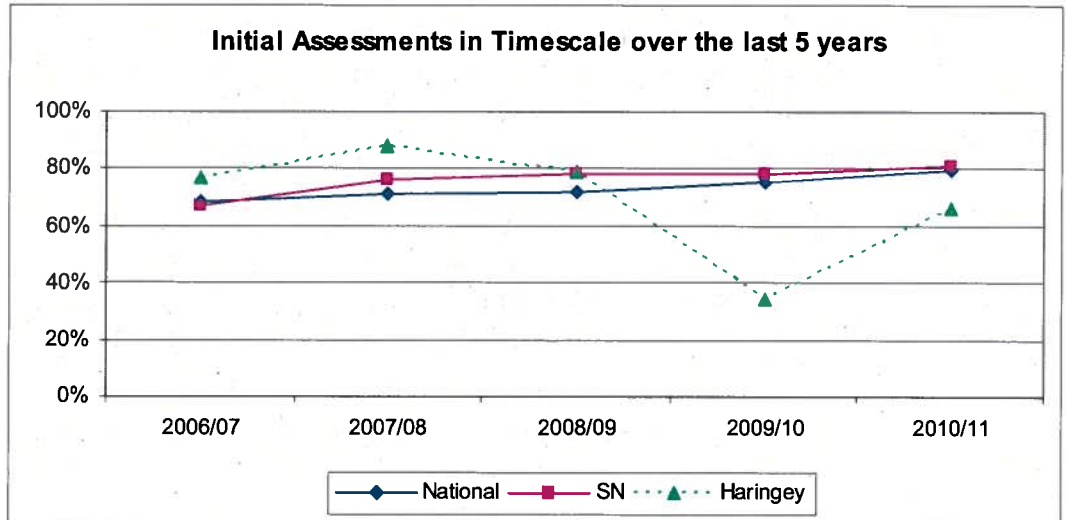
Subsequently the recent unannounced inspection of referral and assessment services in October 2011 commented that:

“Contacts and referrals receive a timely response through a designated multi agency screening team. Decisions are made in line with agreed thresholds and, where these are not met, referrers are appropriately signposted to other agencies or advised to use the common assessment framework.

In cases where significant harm is suspected, child protection enquiries are undertaken promptly following strategy discussions with the police. These result in a clear analysis of risk and, where necessary, appropriate action is undertaken to protect the child or young person.”



5.6



5.7 A range of key areas have been progressed this year enabling us to build on the foundations of the earlier work and drive up the timeliness of performance whilst continuing the improvement on quality.

1. The volume of the referrals this year; the impact of the multi agency screening in supporting families who do not reach the threshold for social work intervention has meant that significant support for families is provided by universal services and the Common Assessment Framework. High quality screening ensures that social workers have good quality information at the start of the assessment process. This will be further enhanced in 2012 when Haringey joins



with the metropolitan police and probation to provide a Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)

2. The impact of a domestic violence specialist working between Hearthstone and First Response. In 60% of referrals Domestic Violence is a factor. The specialist has enhanced the quality of practice and given social workers additional authority. It has also allowed better linking with voluntary partners such as Haringey Women's Forum who have supported families through the difficult process of separation from violent partners.
3. The impact of specialist Roma advice and support in CYPS. This worker is available for consultation and joint visits. She has quickly developed an understanding Haringey's Roma population. This in turn has speeded up potentially complex assessments. One social worker is quoted as saying that the support of the Roma worker meant that she was able to ascertain as much information in one visit as she would have done in three.
4. Close working with the UK Border Agency for families who have No recourse to Public Funds which has enhanced our ability to share information with the Home Office and progress applications.
5. Changes in the criteria for progression to Core Assessment to more closely reflect the work the thresholds in neighbouring boroughs, In short this means that work is progressed to Core Assessment at an earlier stage, allowing social workers sufficient time to complete complex pieces of work.
6. Recruitment of a stable workforce of social workers, managers and administrative support. As reflected in the recent Munro report high quality and permanent administrative support has meant that key tasks such as sending out appointment letters have been delegated leaving social workers to carry out their core business.
7. Improved 'step down' pathways for children and families who need longer term lower level support has allowed First Response Social Workers to concentrate on the assessment process as opposed to longer term work. 41% of allocated work in First Response relates to children under the age of 4 years and the development of our work with children centres and nurseries as well as health provision is fundamental to ensuring that we meet the needs of these children and provide robust intervention to address parenting issues at an early stage.

Closer work with Youth Service and start up of the 'Miss U ' Barnardo's project around children and young people who are absent from home without permission and to offer early intervention and support where families are struggling. This will be further enhanced by access to Multi Systemic Therapy service from April 2012.



5.8 The Munro review of Child Protection recognised the importance of balancing professional judgements with national timescales and made the following recommendation which has been accepted by government:

5.9 **Recommendation 1 (Chapter 3):** The Government should revise both the statutory guidance, *Working Together to Safeguard Children* and *The Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families* and their associated policies to:

- distinguish the rules that are essential for effective working together, from guidance that informs professional judgment;
- set out the key principles underpinning the guidance;
- remove the distinction between initial and core assessments and the associated timescales in respect of these assessments, replacing them with the decisions that are required to be made by qualified social workers when developing an understanding of children's needs and making and implementing a plan to safeguard and promote their welfare;
- require local attention is given to: timeliness in the identification of children's needs and provision of help; the quality of the assessment to inform next steps to safeguard and promote children's welfare; and - the effectiveness of the help provided;
- give local areas the responsibility to draw on research and theoretical models to inform local practice; and
- remove constraints to local innovation and professional judgment that are created by prescribing or endorsing particular approaches, for example, nationally designed assessment forms, national performance indicators associated with assessment or nationally prescribed approaches to IT systems.

As a consequence we will be establishing local indicators and monitoring arrangements when the national guidance changes.

5.9 In conclusion there is an upward trajectory in the timescales which are currently established in line with the safeguarding action plan . This progress has been achieved alongside an improvement in the quality of work undertaken in the service.

5. **Financial Implications**
none

6. **Legal Implications**



Haringey Council
N/A

7. Equalities and Community Cohesion Comments
N/A
8. Head of Procurement Comments
9. Policy Implications
10. Use of Appendices – appendix A
Appendix A - Insert Threshold of Need and Intervention document
Appendix B – The Jar Action Plan (February 2009)
Appendix C – Safeguarding Action Plan (December 2009)

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11. Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

N/A

