

By: Jenny Whittle, Cabinet Member for Specialist Children's Services

Malcolm Newsam, Interim Corporate Director of Families and Social Care

To: Cabinet - 19 September 2011

Subject: Children's Services Improvement Plan – Quarterly Update

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary:

Provides Cabinet with an update on progress on the Children's Services Improvement Plan and outlines the focus for the next six months.

Recommendations

Cabinet is asked to NOTE:

- (a) the achievement of the August Improvement Notice Targets
- (b) the very significant progress that has been made since the last quarterly report, and
- (c) the themes that will be the focus of the Phase 2 Improvement Plan

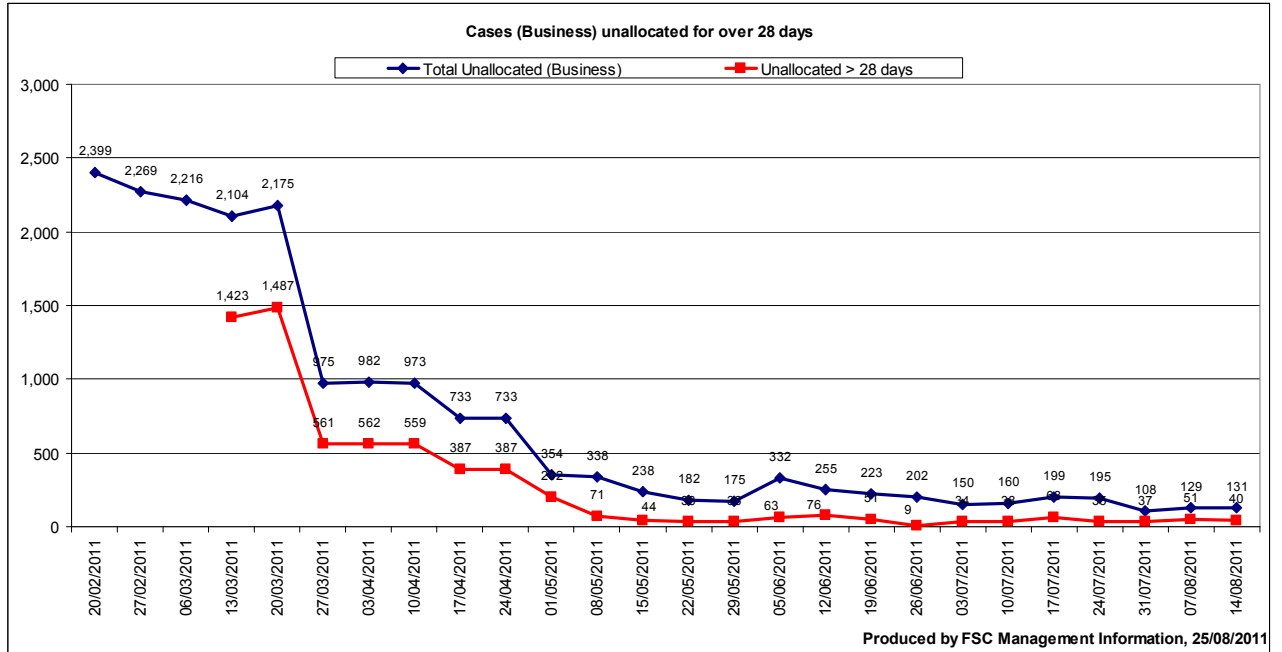
1. Introduction

1.1 This is the second regular report to Cabinet on progress made in implementing the Improvement Plan. The previous report, in May 2011, outlined the 10 Core Tasks which were the focus for the first six months of transformation, and summarised the actions taken to date.

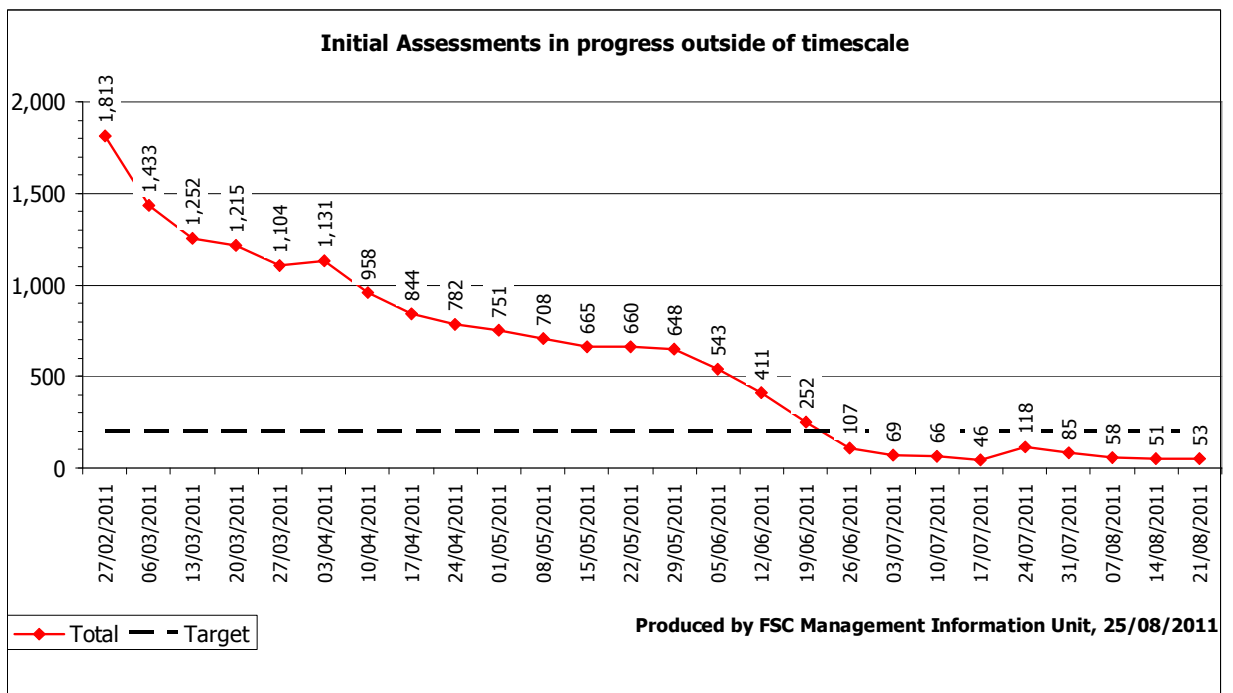
2. Achievement of the August Improvement Notice Targets

2.1 Three of the Improvement Notice targets had a deadline of August and all three have been met, which is a tremendous achievement. The enormous effort put into reducing the backlogs of cases - bringing in the peripatetic team, diverting the Parenting Capacity Team staff, relentless tracking progress through daily/weekly/monthly/quarterly monitoring reinforced at district meetings and through the Deep Dive exercises – has delivered the required results.

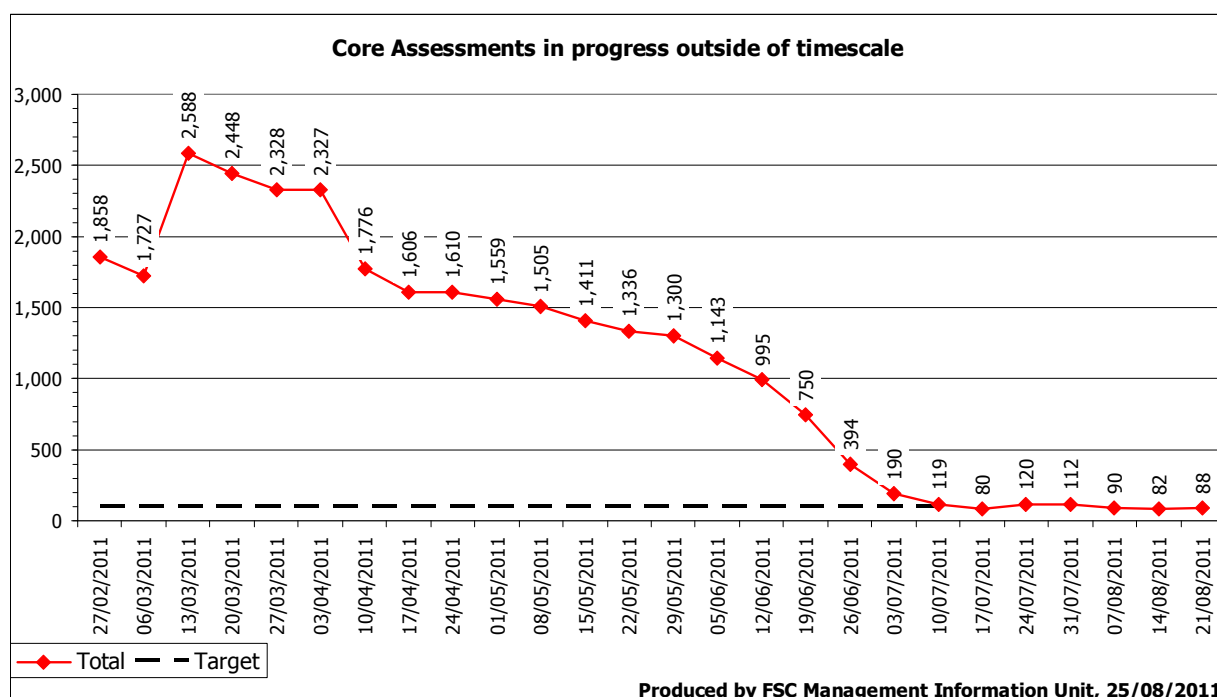
- (i) The first Improvement Notice target was to have no more than 100 unallocated cases over 28 days. Unallocated cases have been reduced from 2,633 to 131 (on 14 August), of which only 40 have been unallocated for more than 28 days, as the graph on the next page shows.



- (ii) Initial Assessments out of timescale have been reduced from 2,208 to 53 (on 21 August), easily overshooting the Improvement Notice target of 200.



(iii) Even the most challenging target - to have no more than 100 Core Assessments out of timescale – has been achieved as the graph below shows.



3. Other Progress

3.1 We are now also able to demonstrate a significant improvement in the timeliness of our Initial Assessments. Our current year performance (1 April 2011 to 31 July 2011) is 74% (5% above our Improvement Notice target of 69% for 2011/12).

3.2 The timeliness of core assessments is still masked by the closing of the large numbers that have been out of timescale. When we filter these out the underlying performance much stronger - 89% of assessments due were completed on time.

3.3 The focus on tackling the backlog has also brought dividends for throughput – caseloads are substantially reduced, and there is a more disciplined approach to case management including setting target end dates to avoid drift. Numbers of children in need are starting to reduce. A Throughput Improvement Programme has been established to ensure that throughput is maintained and backlogs do not build up again. The peripatetic (interim) team of social workers have worked through the backlogs of unallocated cases during their six month contract and we will ensure that backlogs do not build up again on their departure at the end of their contract in October. The Throughput Improvement Programme will help to avoid a similar situation arising again and enable social workers to have manageable caseloads.

3.4 The Performance Management Framework has been implemented, and processes around performance management have been strengthened. Heads of Service now receive daily information on cases out of timescale or unallocated, and weekly and monthly reports are scrutinised by managers and acted upon. The Duty Tracker is embedded in all Duty and Initial Assessment Teams (DIATs), which has greatly strengthened the management grip on new cases coming through the system. The Deep Dive meetings held in June resulted in a step change in performance and will be repeated in the autumn.

3.5 The Quality Assurance Framework has also been approved, and from August every social work manager from the Corporate Director down to Principal Social Worker will audit a case a month. The DIAT Improvement Programme comprises a combination of written guidance and protocols (“inspection-ready” packs issued to each DIAT, Duty Manual, Practice Standards, Transfer Protocol, Duty Tracker) with ‘hands on’ mentoring and guidance, and will be completed by November.

3.6 The new County Duty Team of temporary social workers went live on 12th May, dealing with inter-agency referrals and domestic violence notifications. It has already had an impact in terms of consistent, better quality decision-making and has reduced referrals substantially. It is shortly to be expanded to take on all children’s phone contacts, and will form part of the planned multi-agency referral unit being established in January.

3.7 To improve working conditions for staff, every site has been visited, issues identified and reviewed, and priorities agreed with local managers and Heads of Service. A planned programme of costed actions is being implemented, with a number of quick wins already making a difference. On the technology front, the tender for a new Integrated Children’s System is progressing well, and in the meantime improvements have been made to the network and to the memory capacity of individual laptops/PCs.

3.8 Considerable work has been undertaken to implement a new and strategic approach to commissioning. The Families and Social Care Directorate Management Team has approved an overall framework that will ensure local commissioners are operating within a clear strategic framework, on the basis of specific outcomes, as well as a thorough understanding of local need.

3.9 The senior management group within Specialist Children’s Services have now been through an assessment centre (based on the Kent competencies combined with a leadership survey that identified gaps and weakness). Following this, a programme is being developed to promote the demonstration of competencies, required behaviours and expectations of leaders. Guidance is also being drawn up around management responsibilities, accountabilities and competencies. Communications have also been improved with weekly bulletins, ‘Jenny’s Journal’ a regular communication from the Lead Member and the development of the Children’s Services Improvement Plan (CSIP) hub on KNet to give staff a clear sense of direction and purpose. The member-led Corporate Parenting Panel has also urged that social workers are properly

recognised and discussions are ongoing with a local newspaper group to establish a “Social Worker of the Year” award for Kent.

3.10 The compelling offer, which aims to bring trained and experienced social workers into Kent, retain our existing experienced staff, and recruit more staff from within Kent (returners and ‘grow your own’) was approved by the County Council, and is being implemented. A new 3 month campaign is being launched at the end of August aimed at recruiting experienced social workers, Principal Social Workers and Team Leaders.

3.11 Corporate parenting governance arrangements have been considerably strengthened since the Ofsted report. The all-party Children’s Service Improvement Panel meets on a monthly basis and the Corporate Parenting Panel meets quarterly. The Lead Member has visited 11 of the 12 District Children’s Social Services offices and discussed delivery of the Improvement Plan with managers and front line social workers. Members have also signed up to the Shadow a Social Worker scheme and are providing feedback to Council Committees and the Lead Members about their experiences. Members have also attended two corporate parenting training sessions in July and further dates have been set for the 7th, 21st, 25th and 26th of October.

4. Next Steps

4.1 Whilst it is right to celebrate the achievements of the last six months, Cabinet should be under no illusions about the challenges ahead. There is still a great deal of work to be done to meet the aspiration for Kent County Council to be excellent in terms of safeguarding children and providing services to looked after children. Now that the backlog has been addressed, throughput improved and caseloads reduced we can focus on quality and sustainability, ensuring that the Council has a positive impact on outcomes for children and young people.

4.2 A Phase 2 Improvement Plan is being drawn up that builds on but moves on from the original Improvement Plan. The key themes will be:

1. Maintain the timeliness of assessments and ensure all cases are allocated appropriately
2. Raise the quality of casework
3. Put in place a range of preventative services to avoid unnecessary family breakdown, with particular focus on high level family support, services for vulnerable adolescents, and more effective use of the Common Assessment Framework
4. Improve care planning and outcomes for looked after children
5. Reduce the numbers of looked after children, including increasing adoptions and implementing the recommendations of the independent review of the adoption service
6. Reduce the number of children subject to Child Protection Plans
7. Deliver services through a locality-based integrated structure which is fit for purpose, strongly managed, and staffed by experienced and competent social workers.

5. Financial Implications

5.1 £3.5m has been allocated to support the improvement programme this year, in addition to the costs of implementing the workforce strategy.

6. Bold Steps for Kent and Policy Framework

6.1 Improving Children's Services following the Ofsted Inspection last autumn has been identified as the Council's top priority.

7. Legal Implications

7.1 The Secretary of State has the power to issue a statutory intervention notice if he or she deems this is required to secure the necessary improvements within a failing service.

8. Equality Impact Assessments

8.1 There are no issues to report on this.

9. Risk and Business Continuity Management

9.1 A risk register has been established and maintained, and is reported regularly to the external Improvement Board.

Key strategic risks we need to mitigate are:

- Numbers of Looked After Children may continue to increase with impacts on staffing resources and outcomes for children
- There may continue to be an increase in the number of children subject to a Protection Plan due to low thresholds, shortages in preventative services and inadequate multi-agency working
- Recruiting and retaining experienced staff and managers
- Untoward safeguarding incidents

10. Consultation and Communication

The programme will continue to communicate with staff, managers, KCC Members, the Children's Trust and the External Improvement Board on improvement achievements and challenges.

Staff engagement has also been a major focus of programme communications, with weekly progress bulletins from the Interim Corporate Director issued to Specialist Children's Services employees and the development of an improvement intranet site providing staff with all relevant consultation and communication information relating to the improvements in a

'one stop shop'. The Cabinet Member for Specialist Children's Services also provides staff with a journal update on a monthly basis.

11. Sustainability and Rural Proofing Implications

11.1 There are no sustainability and rural proofing implications.

12. Conclusion

12.1 There has been very significant progress in key areas across the Improvement Plan as a whole and staff and colleagues are to be commended for achieving this rapid and successful transformation. However, there is still considerable work to do, with some complex challenges to address. The Phase 2 Improvement Plan will re-focus our efforts to ensure that this rapid improvement is maintained over the next six months and beyond.

13. Recommendations

Cabinet is asked to NOTE the:

- (a) achievement of the August Improvement Notice Targets
- (b) very significant progress that has been made since the last quarterly report, and
- (c) themes that will be the focus of the Phase 2 Improvement Plan

Malcolm Newsam

Interim Corporate Director Families & Social Care

01622 694173

malcolm.newsam@kent.gov.uk

Background documents: