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To: Specialist Children's Services Policy Overview and Scrutiny  
Committee – 22 March 2012

Subject: **CHILDREN'S SERVICES IMPROVEMENT PLAN - UPDATE**

Classification: Unrestricted

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Summary: Provides Members with an update on progress on the Children's  
Services Improvement Plan

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## **Introduction**

1. (1) This report updates Members on developments since the last report, highlighting areas for attention.

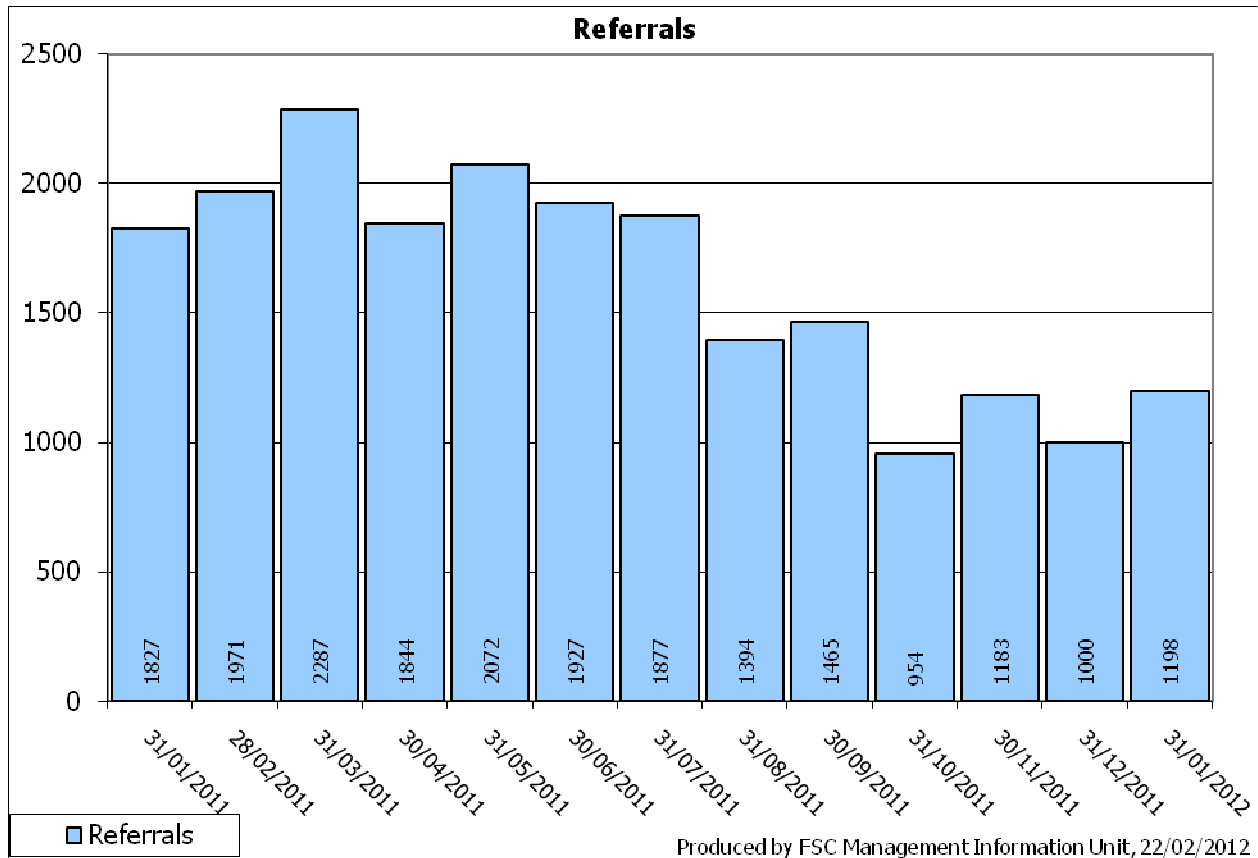
## **Progress**

2. (1) We have continued to sustain good progress across the key areas during this period:

- The Central Referral Unit went live on 23 January, with the Police and Health joining Specialist Children's Services (CDT). Examples of improved practice are already emerging.
- Sustained reduction in referrals
- Trend reduction in the number of Initial Assessments
- Improvement in Initial Assessments timescales
- Maintenance of low numbers of Initial and Core Assessments outside of time targets
- Cases remaining unallocated over 28 days are now rare
- Significant reduction in the number of children subject to a plan
- The first phase of the Specialist Children's Services (SCS) restructure is now underway with a range of staff consultations having commenced
- The last of the dedicated Looked After Children Teams became operational during this period
- The Adoption Service is now under the management of Coram with a Project and County Manager in place. Work has already begun to review all children who have been waiting for an adoption placement.
- The marketing element of the Fostering Service has been outsourced and work on rebranding and website for both Fostering and Adoption improvements has begun.
- 'Deep Dive' reviews have examined performance against the scorecard in all 12 Districts.

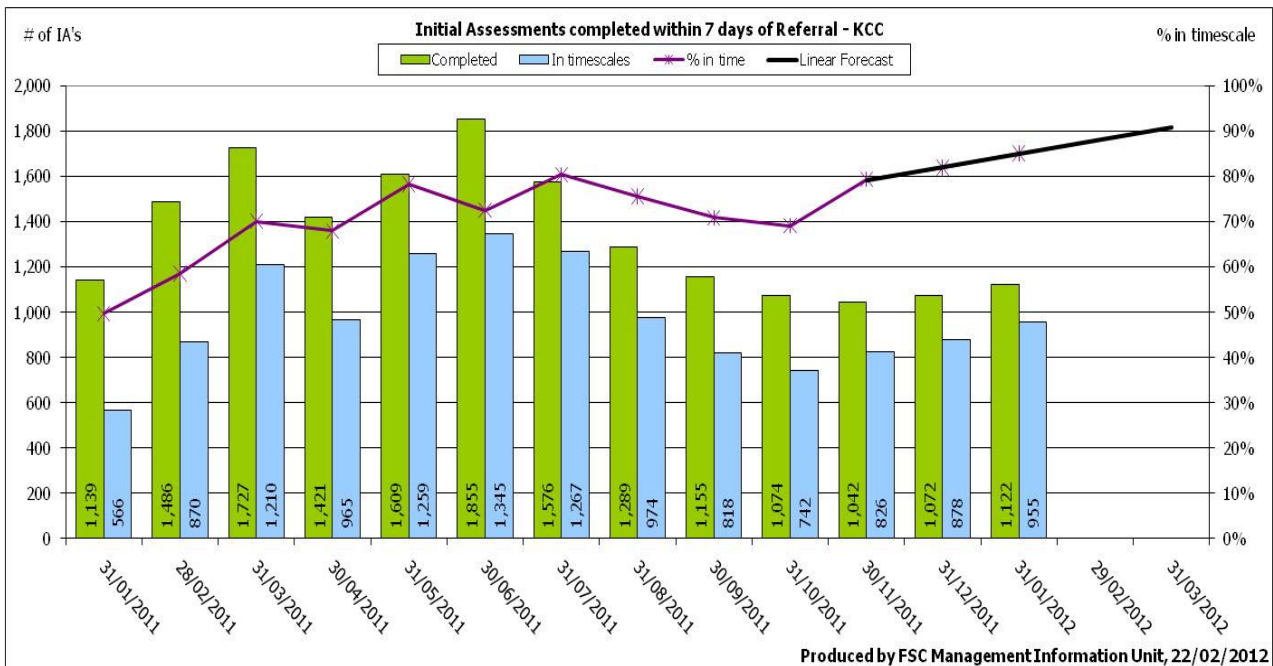
## Referrals

3. (1) The number of referrals accepted continues to reduce. We are currently performing above the target figure of 533.1 per 10,000 (at 631). This is an improvement on last month's performance (651.1), and shows an overall consistently positive trend. We expect this number to continue to reduce as the CRU becomes embedded.



## Initial Assessments

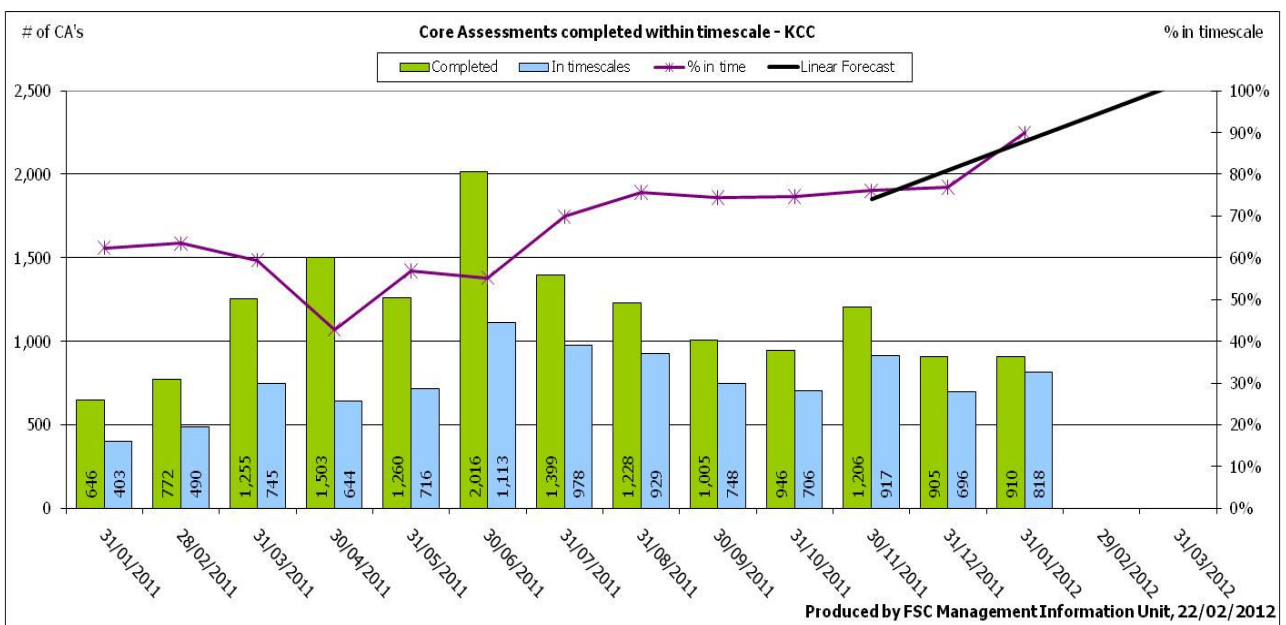
4. (1) We continue to be performing well in the timeliness of Initial Assessments. 75% were completed within 7 days of referral in December (exceeding the 69% target) and this shows a continuing of the upwards positive trend, signifying sustained improvement. The reduction in Initial Assessments has continued in-line with the reduction in referrals. In December, only 19 assessments were in progress outside of timescale, well below the target of 200, and this marks a consistent pattern of improvement. The year-to-date figures of the numbers of Initial Assessments per 10,000 population is above the target of 415.4 at 526, and though this is higher than the target rate, it is still within tolerance.

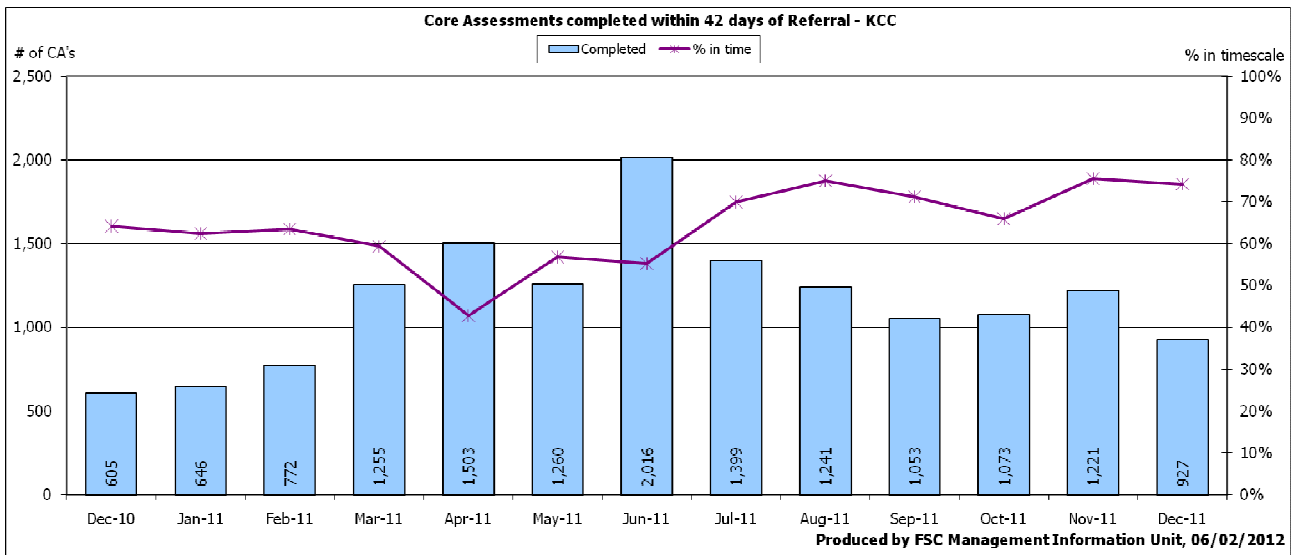


(2) The above chart demonstrates the continued improvement in Initial Assessments completed within timescale, indicating that better performance management practices are now the norm.

### Core Assessments

5. (1) Despite a dip in December, overall improvement in completion within timescales remains steady. Some Districts are performing better than others, and are regularly exceeding the target. This was examined in detail at the recent Deep Dive sessions, and it was found that the volume of Core Assessments being undertaken across the County is still too high. This is being linked with high levels of s47 enquiries, and a piece of work is currently underway to review the application of thresholds in this regard.

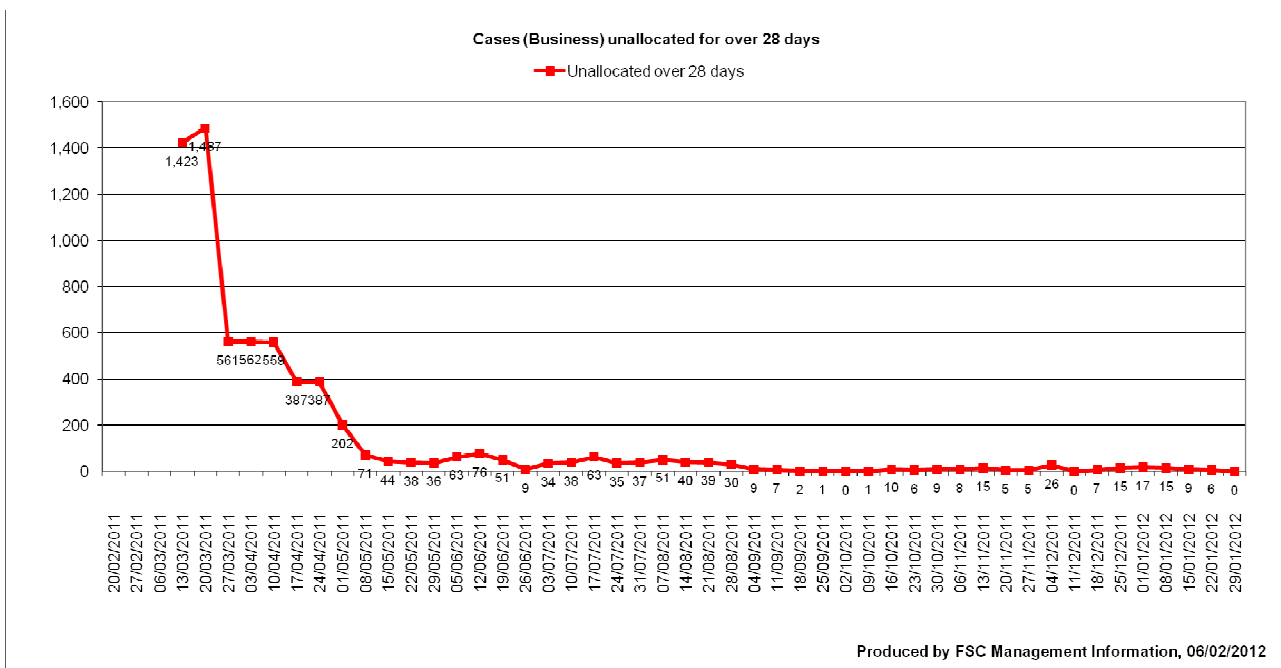




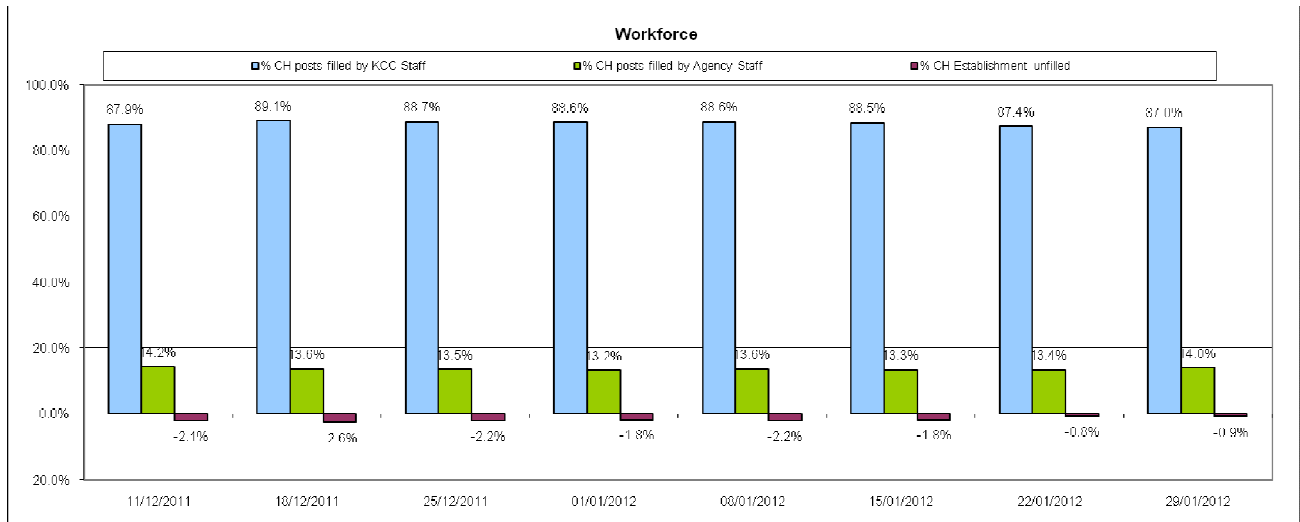
(2) We continue to sustain targets for Core and Initial Assessment outside of timescales. A slight rise in December led to a refocus on ensuring we maintained performance. This action was effective, and the graphs below demonstrate we remain within target.

### Unallocated Cases

6. (1) The number of unallocated cases both under and over 28 days remain within acceptable limits. The graph below demonstrates a reduction in all unallocated cases (those over 28 days) between March 2011 and January 2012.

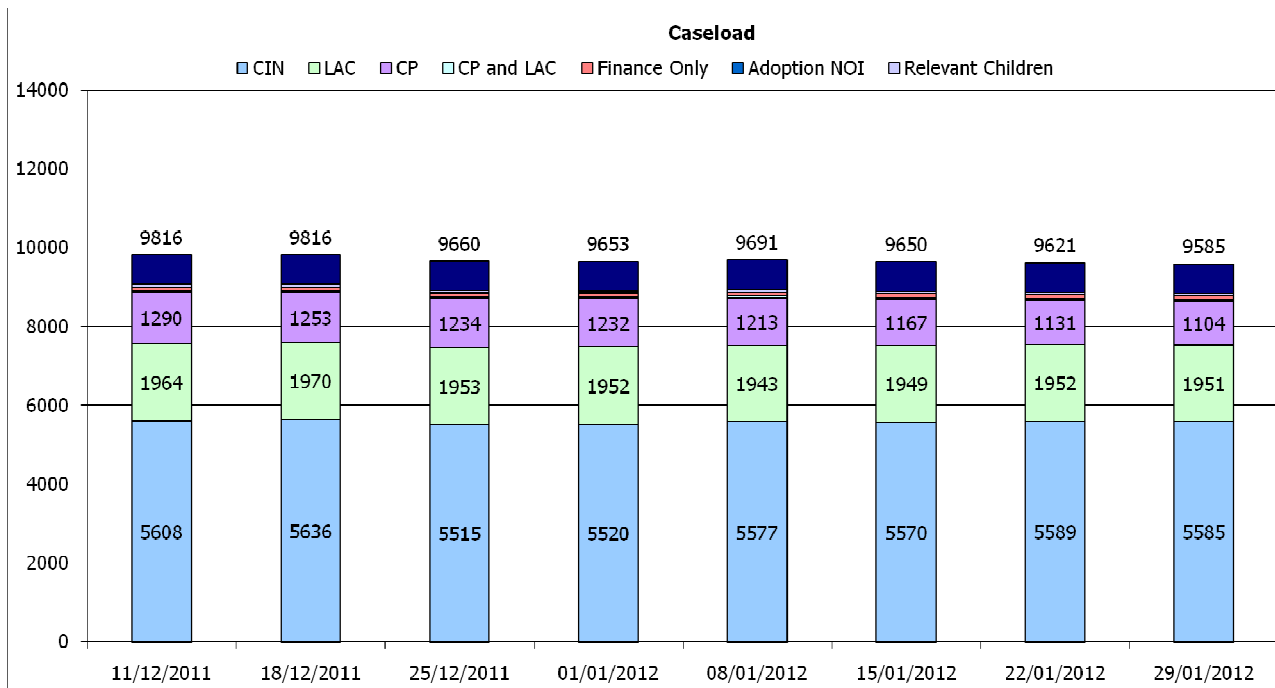


## Establishment



7. (1) The graph above shows the number of agency staff members has remained fairly static, though measures are in place to boost the recruitment of experienced social workers - and thereby to reduce this figure - in the medium term. These measures include the employment of a recruitment firm, TMP, to lead the next phase of the recruitment campaign. Workforce information demonstrates we are very slightly over establishment for case-holding posts, with an additional 0.9% (2.2% in the January Scorecard). Case-holding posts filled by KCC staff members have remained relatively consistent, rising slightly from 87.0% to 88.7% over the period. Work undertaken as part of the restructure proposals will address the over establishment issue by ensuring that teams have, within their revised establishment, sufficient staff to undertake the work required in every District.

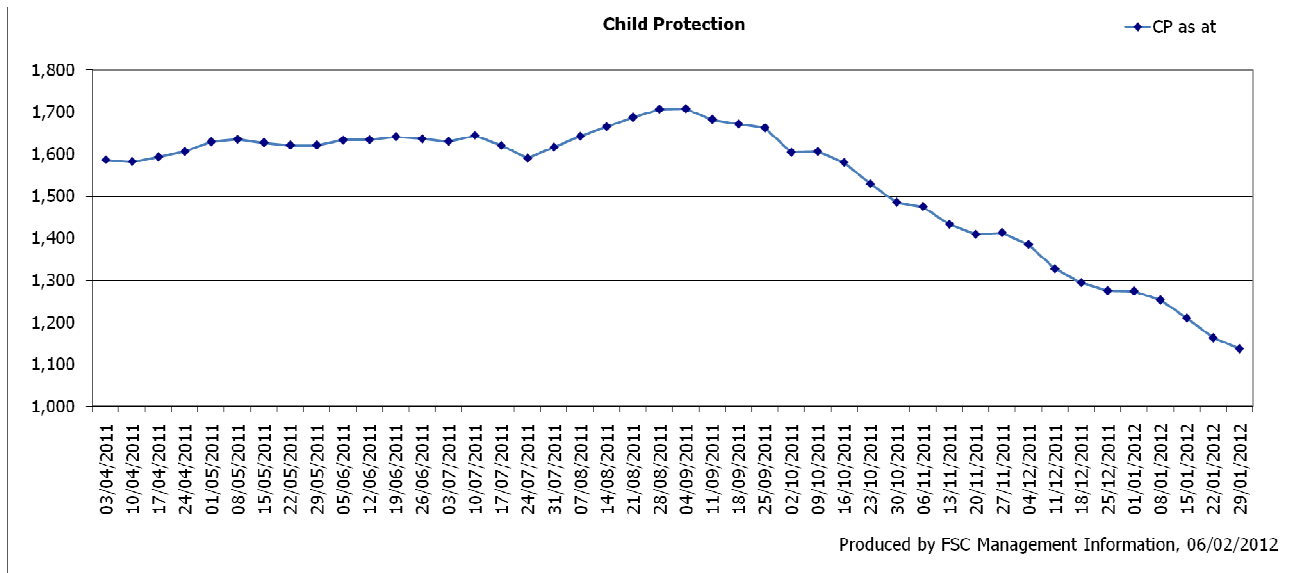
## Caseloads



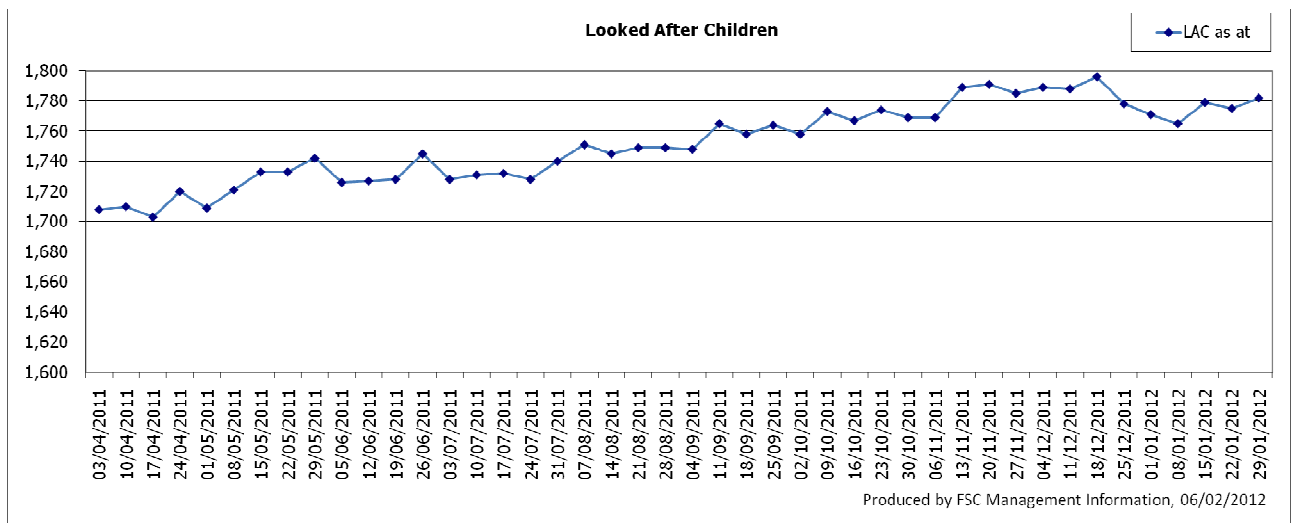
8. (1) Total caseloads have continued to reduce, with the caseloads for social workers in fieldwork teams averaging 20.4 per person. There are still some anomalies in the system which, once ironed out, will see average caseloads reducing still further.

### Child Protection Plans

9. (1) The graph below shows we are continuing to see the considerable reduction in the numbers of children subject to a plan. This reduction has largely been achieved as a result of the sustained focus on ensuring that the right children have plans. The biggest gain has been in terms of de-planning children who are now Looked After. However, greater scrutiny of existing plans and tighter application of thresholds by District Managers and Conference Chairs has also contributed to the reduction. In addition, revised and enhanced Children In Need planning processes appear to be serving to reassure other agencies that children who are not subject to CP plans will nonetheless continue to be in receipt of appropriate levels of intervention.



### Looked After Children



10. (1) The number of children who are Looked After continues to be a challenge although the numbers do appear to have stabilised overall. However, many of the plans and strategies that aim to reduce numbers are only just beginning to be realised in operational terms and some are still to be implemented.

(2) The restructure proposes the development of dedicated Adolescent Teams in all areas. Currently not all Districts can access this type of service. These in-house teams will be supplemented and enhanced by the commissioning of an adolescent focussed crisis response service. The service specification has been completed and the tender process will commence in early March. Work is also underway to go out to tender for a provider who can better manage the demands posed by 16 and 17 year olds who require supported housing (Southwark Judgment).

(3) Similarly other high level family support services which aim to prevent family breakdown have yet to come on-line, although the tenders are underway. The combination of the dedicated Looked After Children Teams and the arrival of Coram to manage Adoption Services will see a renewed focus on tackling drift in care planning to ensure that children benefit from permanent care arrangements outside of the care system whenever possible.

(4) In short, we would not expect to see significant reductions in numbers of Looked After Children at the current time, as whilst the mechanisms to necessitate the requisite reductions are in place they are still to be implemented. Once implementation of the plans has commenced and changes to working practices have begun to become embedded, the expected outcomes will begin to be realised.

## **Conclusion**

11. (1) Overall steady progress has been maintained over this period, and holistically it appears that positive trends are being maintained. The complimentary focus of the Phase 2 Plan is on improving the quality of the work that lies underneath the headline indicators.

(2) The Deep Dive Reviews have revealed that in some Districts good practice is a common feature - though there remains some inconsistency across the County as a whole, and there is still much work to do to embed comprehensive change. However, the Deep Dives were mostly extremely reassuring as they showed the desire and commitment of front line managers to adapt where required in order to achieve sustained improvement.

(3) Furthermore, the proposed restructure is designed to enhance integration across service areas and to increase management oversight; it is also designed to increase understanding of the child's journey, and the early signs are that it will generally be welcomed by staff.

## **Recommendation**

10. Members are asked to NOTE and COMMENT on the progress that has been made since the last report.

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*Background documents:* None.