

# Children's Services Committee

Item No.....

<b>Report title:</b>	<b>Social Work Assessment Performance</b>
<b>Date of meeting:</b>	<b>16 October 2018</b>
<b>Responsible Chief Officer:</b>	<b>Sara Tough, Executive Director of Children's Services</b>
<b>Strategic impact</b>	
<p>Under the Children Act 1989, Local Authorities are required to provide services for children in need for the purposes of safeguarding and promoting their welfare and undertaking an assessment of their needs in accordance with protocol outlined in Working Together 2018.</p> <p>The completion of Social Work Assessments within 45 days is a key performance measure submitted in central data returns, a comparator nationally and regionally, and judged by the inspectorate, Ofsted, as a signifier of the quality of response in adequately protecting and offering support to children and their families locally. It is a hallmark of timely and decisive action taken on behalf of vulnerable children and young people.</p>	

## Executive summary

<p>If following a referral to what was Norfolk's Multi-Agency Safeguarding Service (now Norfolk's Children's Advice and Duty Service), there are indications through the initial triage and decision-making process that a child may be a child in need of services to safeguard them and/or promote their wellbeing, then Children's Social Work Service will conduct a Social Work Assessment.</p> <p>In respect of the timeliness of Social Work Assessments, Norfolk's social work teams have persistently underperformed across the County since September 2017 (12-month average figure of 65.5%), and have been an outlier in respect of national, regional and Statistical Neighbour comparison (National Average: 82.9%, Statistical Neighbour Average: 83.8% and Regional Average: 83.9%). This is in addition to falling markedly short of an internal target set at 80%.</p> <p>Previous meetings of the Children's Services Committee, have requested a more detailed and updated account around that performance, the challenges underlying it and management actions taken to remedy and improve timeliness.</p> <p>This report summaries how the new Children's Services and Social Work Senior Leadership Teams' concerted focus, working alongside frontline teams and managers, and despite continued significant operational pressures, has resulted in recent improvements in assessments being completed on time. This is with a confidence that this trajectory can be maintained in a sustainable way that does not unduly compromise the quality of the work whilst solely achieving a deadline.</p> <p>Issues concerning the migration and system shift from Carefirst to Liquid Logic, has meant that reporting an accurate average monthly figure on assessment timeliness since April 2018 has not been possible until now.</p>
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**Recommendations:**

That Committee make note of and comment on recent improvements in Social Work Assessment timescales and actions taken to achieve and sustain this improvement going forward.

**1. Background and context**

- 1.1 In respect of the timeliness of Social Work Assessments, Norfolk's social work teams have persistently underperformed across the County since September 2017 (12-month average figure of 65.5%), and have been an outlier in respect of national, regional and Statistical Neighbour comparison (National Average: 82.9%, Statistical Neighbour Average: 83.8% and Regional Average: 83.9%). This is in addition to falling markedly short of an internal target set at 80%.
- 1.2 There are a number of factors which have contributed to this less than optimal performance, and include;
- 1.3 A legacy of a service under formal intervention for a prolonged period since 2013, meaning whilst frontline practice and management oversight has been improving over time, and formally recognised by Ofsted in their inspection November 2017, the quality, consistency and timeliness continues to need attention to ensure continual improvement.
- 1.4 Whilst Ofsted's most recent judgement of the Council's Children's Services was 'Requires Improvement', a key remaining recommendation recognised that the large volume of referrals was overwhelming the staff at the front door leading to drift and delay for children.
- 1.5 This was resulting in too many assessments being undertaken, the majority of which (60%+) were not leading to a social work service, unmanageable caseloads in the social work assessment teams, and high turnover and reliance on locums.
- 1.6 As such, the quantity of assessments has significantly undermined the timeliness, and to an extent the quality of assessments, which has been an urgent priority and focus of the social work management team, recognising that whilst this is a process target, at the core of it remains decisive and purposeful action to safeguard and protect children.

**2. Actions to address**

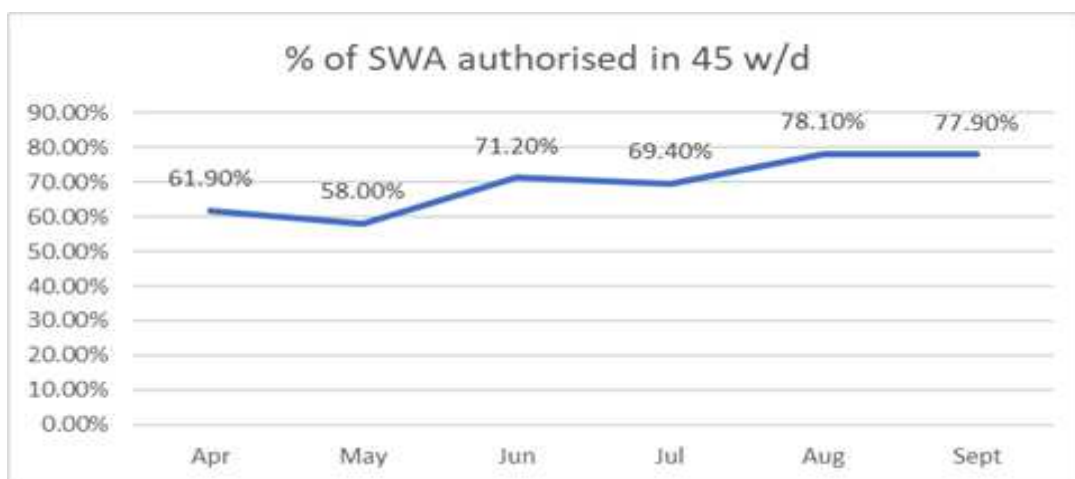
- 2.1 A change in operational management in MASH following inspection in November 2017 and focusing on improved processes and management oversight at the front door, has seen a 15% decrease over time in new assessments being initiated across the County and increase in those assessments leading to a social work service from 32.2% to 42.5%. This has helped reduce caseloads gradually and create an environment where greater attention can be paid to timeliness and quality as volume is decreased.
- 2.2 An external and comprehensive review of MASH/front door arrangements reported at last Committee, suggesting that the introduction of the new Children's

Advice and Duty Service approach from 17/10/18, should reduce assessment levels by a further 1/3, will enhance this further, and will accelerate improvements in qualitative and quantitative performance.

- 2.3 A new performance management framework introduced in June 2018, means that all social work teams, including assessment teams, are now expected to meet on a weekly basis to address performance in proactive ways, where those assessments at periodic intervals and nearing the 45-day deadline are prioritised for completion.
- 2.4 Temporary gaps in Liquid Logic reporting functionality to date has been dealt with by development of a Social Work Assessment Tracker which is sent around to managers on a weekly basis, which gives a locality by locality breakdown and trends in relation to assessments that are 'In Time', 'Becoming Overdue' (open between 34-45 days) and 'Overdue'. This allows operational managers to target their actions and individual workers earlier where there may be a breach of timescales.
- 2.5 There is oversight of the tracker at the weekly Social Worker Leadership Team chaired by the Assistant Director for Social Work where improvements or drops in performance in any specific area or locality can be explored and acted on.
- 2.6 Alongside more rigorous monitoring of assessment timescales, there is a focus on the quality of assessments, to ensure that good practice that is analytical, curious and effective, is being evidenced and most importantly is the foundation for decision-making and interventions that support children at the right level and right time.
- 2.7 To this end the Quality Assurance Team are undertaking audit of assessment work across all 6 localities, including an evaluation of management grip and decision making. In the case of 1 locality, poor performance in respect of the later was identified and robust performance of that individual manager has led to their departure from the service.
- 2.8 Alongside auditing, Assessment and Analysis workshops are being held with all assessment teams and a 'Getting To Good Assessment & Planning' workshop is included in the NIPE induction package for newly qualified Social Workers.

### **3. Impact and current performance**

- 3.1 There has been a significant increase in the percentage of Social Work Assessments completed and authorised in 45 working days since the low of 50.2% in February 2018. August's figure of 78.10% is the highest in the past 12 months and for 2 consecutive months we have been close to our 80% target.



3.2 The data also shows that where cases are of a more serious concern e.g. requiring child protection intervention, then completion of those assessments are prioritised;

	% of SWA with CP/ strategy discussion as an outcome completed in 45 w/d	% of SWA with CIN as an outcome completed in 45 w/d
May-18	86%	53%
Jun-18	83%	62%
Jul-18	81%	70%
Aug-18	70%	80%
Sep-18	93%	79%
<b>Average</b>	<b>82.6%</b>	<b>68.80%</b>

3.3 Using the Social Work Assessment Tracker, locality performance for authorising assessment within 45 working days can be broken down as follows;

Locality	No SWA	no completed in 45 w/d	% in 45 w/d
Breckland	90	88	<b>97.8%</b>
Gt Yarmouth	97	71	<b>73.2%</b>
North and Broadland	53	44	<b>83.0%</b>
Norwich	100	65	<b>65.0%</b>
South	104	58	<b>55.8%</b>
West	104	98	<b>94.2%</b>

3.4 This shows significant difference in performance with Breckland and West both over 90%, whilst South completed only 55.8% in timescales. However, this reflects known issues regarding staffing and management within the Assessment Teams in the locality which are being addressed.

- 3.5 It is also acknowledged that with the introduction of weekly analysis of open assessments, there has been a focus on ensuring overdue assessments are completed and closed, which will have had an impact on those localities clearing a backlog of overdue assessments, and in addition to greater management oversight and challenge on quality, can result in a temporary, but defensible, drop or slowing in improvement rates concerning timelines.
- 3.6 Whilst Norwich's performance is under 70%, this is a significant improvement from 36% in March and 49% in April. Breckland have improved from a low of 36% in March, whilst North and Broadland's performance is over 80% for the first time in 12 months, the previous high being 70% in August 2017. West have maintained their previously good performance, whilst Gt Yarmouth have remained fairly static.

#### **4. Conclusion and next steps**

- 4.1 There is clear evidence demonstrated in this report that progress has been made in improving the completion of Social Work Assessments within timescale that is bringing Norfolk increasingly close to national, regional and statistical neighbour performance.
- 4.2 Likewise, that the groundwork is being prepared for further improvement to meet and exceed the Council's 80% target, that is now well within reach.
- 4.3 However, the service recognises the significance of this particular indicator as a measure of addressing unacceptable drift and delay for children. As such, it commits to continued focus in this area, not only to address timeliness, but with reduced volumes, drive down on the quality and purposefulness of social work interventions at this stage.

#### **Officer Contact**

If you have any questions about matters contained or want to see copies of any assessments, eg equality impact assessment, please get in touch with:

If you have any questions about matters contained in this paper, please get in touch with:

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