

# EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

**GOVERNANCE AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE: 17 DECEMBER 2010**

**SOCIAL BACKGROUND REPORTS TO THE CHILDREN'S HEARING**

**Report by the Executive Director of Educational and Social Services**

## **1. PURPOSE**

- 1.1 To advise Governance and Scrutiny Committee of progress made in the performance of the council against the national standard and target in submitting reports to the children's hearing.

## **2. BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 In May 2010, a report was presented to Governance and Scrutiny Committee in respect of the percentage of social background reports to the Children's Hearing within the target time as determined by the Scottish Children's Hearing Administration (SCRA). The report noted improvements in performance and members requested an updated report in six months time.
- 2.2 A social background report is a report requested by the Reporter to the Children's Hearing following a referral which suggests the child is experiencing problems. The report is requested from the local authority via the social work service, and provides information based on an assessment of the child and their circumstances. The report assists the Reporter to make a decision about whether compulsory measures of supervision may be required.
- 2.3 The completion of a report is a process which reflects assessment and planning activity undertaken with the child and his / her family. As part of the implementation of the national policy programme "*Getting it Right for Every Child*", East Ayrshire Council has fully implemented the Integrated Assessment Framework. This means that every child who is subject to social work intervention will have a co-ordinated multi-agency assessment and plan. All reports submitted to the children's hearing will be individual to the child and has a strong focus on how to improve outcomes. This is a very positive improvement in practice and ensures the child is central to all decisions made about them.

## **3. NATIONAL STANDARDS AND TARGETS**

- 3.1 The hearing system operates within a framework of statutory time limits for the processing of referrals in respect of children. National Standards covering the process of the hearing system define the level of service expected at key points in the process.
- 3.2 The standard with most relevance to the council is Time Interval Standard 3 (TI3)
- 3.3 The format for Standard 3 (TI3) consists of:
  - Objective – Social Work will submit reports on time

- Standard – All reports will be submitted within 20 working days of the date of the request
- Target – 75% of reports will be submitted within 20 working days of the date of the request

#### 4. EAST AYRSHIRE PERFORMANCE

4.1 The Scottish average performance for Time Interval 3 in 2008 – 2009 was 41%, indicating that improvement is required across Scotland in reaching the national target.

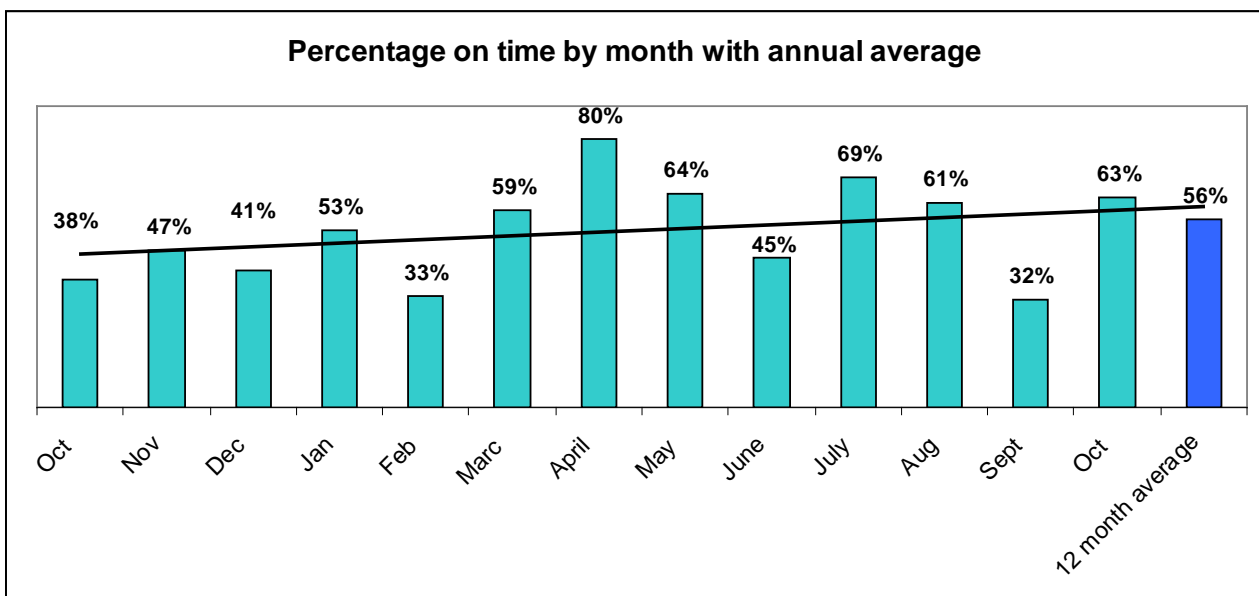
4.2 Historically, East Ayrshire Council's performance against the Standard is illustrated below:

Year	Number of Reports Submitted	% on time
2006 – 2007	813	22.4%
2007 – 2008	637	20.6%
2008 – 2009	594	16.8%
2009-2010	436	37%

4.3 In order to continually improve performance and reach the standard set by SCRA, the Senior Manager, Locality Services has assumed a lead role in driving improvements in the production of reports to the Children's Hearing. This has involved a change management process including change in systems, processes, culture, management and leadership. Detail of the range of changes were set out in the report to Governance and Scrutiny Committee in May 2010.

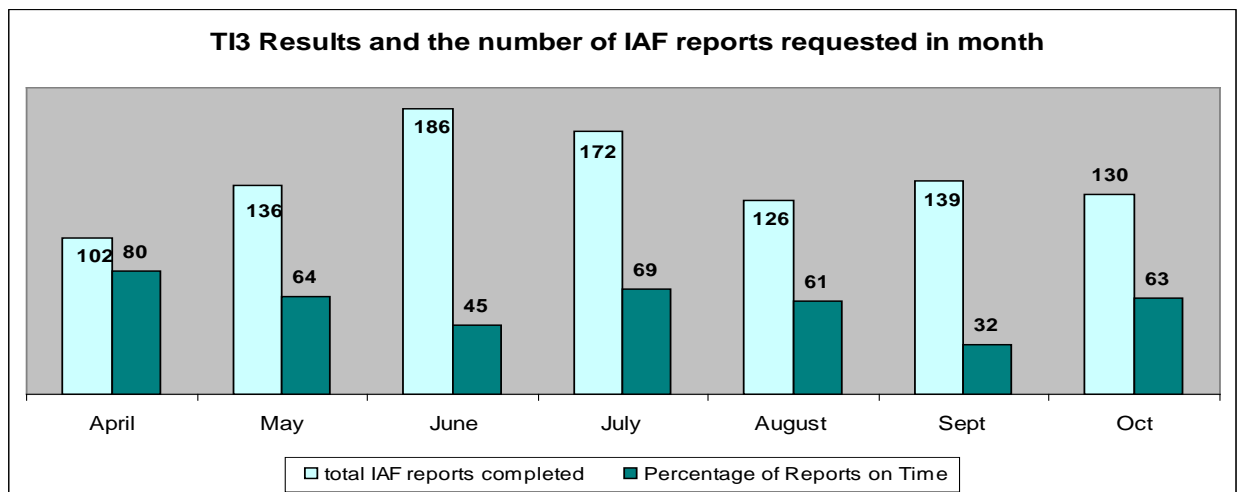
4.4 Figure 1 shows that continued progress is being made. At midway through 2010/2011, the average annual percentage performance (October 2009 to October 2010 is 56% as compared to 37% in 2009 / 2010.

**Figure 1: TI3 Performance in the Year to September 2010**



- 4.5 The overall trend is a positive one and evidences improvement, however there are periods of fluctuation and this has been the subject of more detailed analysis.
- 4.6 February to April 2010 was a period of steady improvement with performance rising from 33% to 80%. Thereafter, performance has been consistently at 60% and above with the exception of two periods in June and September 2010.
- 4.7 An analysis of contributory factors relating to performance in these months has been undertaken. A range of issues have been identified which have impacted on performance including: the introduction of the Integrated Assessment Framework (ie individual reports rather than one report for all children in the family), annual leave, bereavement leave, admin error, and recording errors by SCRA. These matters form the basis for discussion and action planning at the *Managing Performance - Improving Outcomes* working group.
- 4.8 In addition, social workers have a statutory responsibility to produce reports for the children's hearing, but Time Interval 3 only applies to new reports. It does not include other report requests that social workers will receive from SCRA for example: review reports, reports for advice hearings and reports for continued hearings.
- 4.9 SCRA records report requests as one request for a family. In keeping with the principles of *Getting it Right for Every Child*, the council requires every child to have a separate integrated report and child's plan. To illustrate, a report request from SCRA may relate to a family of five children and be one request, however the allocated social worker will be required to complete 5 separate reports and plans.

**Figure 2: TI3 Results and the Total Number of Reports Completed**



4.10 Figure 2 shows the TI3 results set against the overall volume of reports requested in the month.

- April had the lowest number of reports and the best performance,
- June had the highest number of reports and the second worst performance.
- The number of reports requested in May (136) and October (130) were similar with comparable TI3 results.

- In contrast July had the second highest number of requests and the second best performance.

- 4.11 Figure 2 illustrates the significant workload for social work staff in completing reports for the children's hearing, which need to be prioritised alongside other reports such as reports for child protection conferences, pre birth case discussions, looked after and accommodated children review meetings, permanency planning meetings, court and adoption / fostering panels. For this reason, there will always be month to month fluctuations as the wider workloads and priorities for the service need to be taken into account.
- 4.12 Table 1 highlights that a total of 144 social background reports were due between 1 April and 31 October 2010. 88 (61%) of these were within the timescale and 56 (38%) were late. The detail of the number of days late is shown in table 1. Reports were most commonly late by a week or less (41%). This is an improvement on last years performance of 24%. 23% of reports were late by between 8 and 30 days compared to 60% in the year to April 2010.

**Table 1**

<b>Days late</b>	<b>Number of SBR's</b>	<b>Percentage %</b>
1 day	3	5%
2-7 days	20	36%
8 -30 days	13	23%
31-60 days	11	20%
Over 60 days	9	16%
<b>total</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>100%</b>

## **5. LEGAL/POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 There are no specific legal or policy implications.

## **6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 There are no specific financial implications.

## **7. RISK IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 A child in immediate need is prioritised for assessment and service provision, and therefore the risks mainly relate to reputational risks to the council. These relate to not meeting statutory responsibilities, not being responsive enough to families awaiting the outcome of the Reporter's decision and not performing well in comparison to other local authority areas. The performance improvement programme set out in the initial report to Governance and Scrutiny (21 May 2010) is being implemented, and is beginning to impact in practice. There is evidence of improvement and the approach is designed to continuously improve performance, thereby addressing the risks outlined.

**8. EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS**

8.1 There are no specific equality implications

**9. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS**

9.1 There are no specific personnel implications.

**10. RECOMMENDATIONS**

10.1 It is recommended that Governance and Scrutiny Committee: -

1. note contents of the report;
2. note the improved performance in this area and the work undertaken in progressing continuous improvement.

**IMPLEMENTATION OFFICER: CELIA GRAY, SENIOR MANAGER CHILDREN & FAMILIES, (LOCALITY SERVICES)**

**LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS:**

Blueprint for the processing of Children's Hearing Cases - Interagency Code of Practice and National Standards

**If you require any further information please contact Susan Taylor, Head of Service: Children and Families and Criminal Justice on 01563 576597 or Celia Gray, Senior Manager (Children and Families) on 01563 576952**