

## **EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL**

### **GOVERNANCE AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE: 14 AUGUST 2014**

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

##### **Report by Director of East Ayrshire Health and Social Care Partnership**

### **PURPOSE**

1. To advise Governance and Scrutiny Committee of the performance of the local authority against the national standard and target in submitting reports to the Children's Hearing.

### **BACKGROUND**

2. In August 2012 and 2013, Governance and Scrutiny Committee was advised of the percentage of social background reports (SBR) submitted to the Children's Hearing within the target time as determined by the Scottish Children's Hearing Administration (SCRA). These reports noted improvements in performance and members requested a further progress report.
3. A SBR is a report requested by the Reporter to the Children's Hearing to gather information following a referral which suggests a child or young person may require support. 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 to proceed to a Children's Hearing. The Children's Hearing will consider, and make a decision, whether a Compulsory Supervision Order (CSO) is required to support a child. In addition, Initial Assessment Reports (IARs) may be required as an initial source of information to enable early decision making by the Reporter, where possible.
4. The completion of a SBR is a process which reflects assessment and planning activity undertaken in partnership with the child, their family and other involved professionals. In harmony with the national policy programme "*Getting it Right for Every Child*" (GIRFEC), the local authority has fully implemented the Integrated Assessment Framework (IAF). Thus, every child who is subject to social work intervention will have a co-ordinated multi-agency assessment and plan agreed. All SBRs submitted to the Children's Hearing will be individual to the child and have a strong focus on how to improve outcomes. This is a very positive improvement in practice and places the child at the centre of all planning and decision making about them.

### **NATIONAL STANDARDS AND TARGETS**

5. The Children's Hearing system operates within a framework of statutory time scales 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.
6. The standard with most relevance to the local authority is Time Interval Standard 3 (TI3)
7. The format for Standard 3 (TI3) consists of:
  - Objective – Social Work will submit reports on time

- Standard – All reports ( Initial Assessment Reports and Social Background 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.
8. In February 2013 the Scottish Children's Reporter's Administration (SCRA) replaced their information system (RAD) with a new system (CMS). The primary use of CMS is to process cases, therefore only data relating to outstanding reports was migrated. Consequently full TI3 statistics for the year 2013-2014 are no longer available. The TI3 figures in this report have been extracted from the data held on the Social Work Information System (SWIFT).
  9. The legislation by which a Children's Hearing operates is the Children's Hearings (Scotland) Act 2011 (the 2011 Act) – this Act came into force on 24 June 2013. Alongside the 2011 Act are a variety of different Rules which contain much of the detail about how the Children's Hearing system operates. One of the significant changes of the 2011 Act is the introduction of Pre-Hearing Panels (PHP). Where a PHP has been arranged, Social Work practitioners are expected to attend. The purpose of the PHP is to discuss a matter which requires resolution or decision making in advance of the Children's Hearing, such as excusing the attendance of a child at a Children's Hearing. In the time since the 2011 Act has been in force (July 2013 - March 2014), 166 PHPs have taken place. This is an additional panel that has been additional work, and has had an impact on the time that Social Work staff spend on this type of business.
  10. The 2011 Act has been gradually implemented in East Ayrshire, requiring training for all Reporters, panel members and social work staff. The additional work generated has had an impact on key processes, including the timescale for the submission of reports. It is anticipated that this will stabilise following the embedding of the legislation into practice.

## EAST AYRSHIRE PERFORMANCE

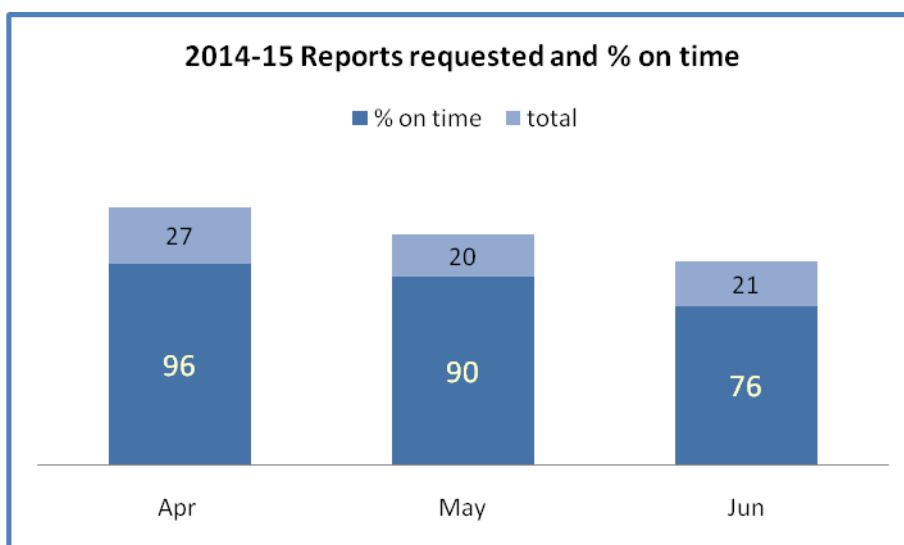
11. Figure 1 compares TI3 performance from 2008-09 to 2013-14 when 68% of reports (SBRs and IARs) were submitted by the due date. Whilst results (% on time) between 2012/13 and 2013/14 have dipped, it is within a 10% variance of the national target, and within the overall improvement trend since 2008/09.

**Figure 1: Reports submitted in the year**

Year	Reports submitted	% on time
2008-09	594	17%
2009-10	436	37%
2010-11	393	68%
2011-12	401	68%
2012-13	386	78%
2013-14	365	68%

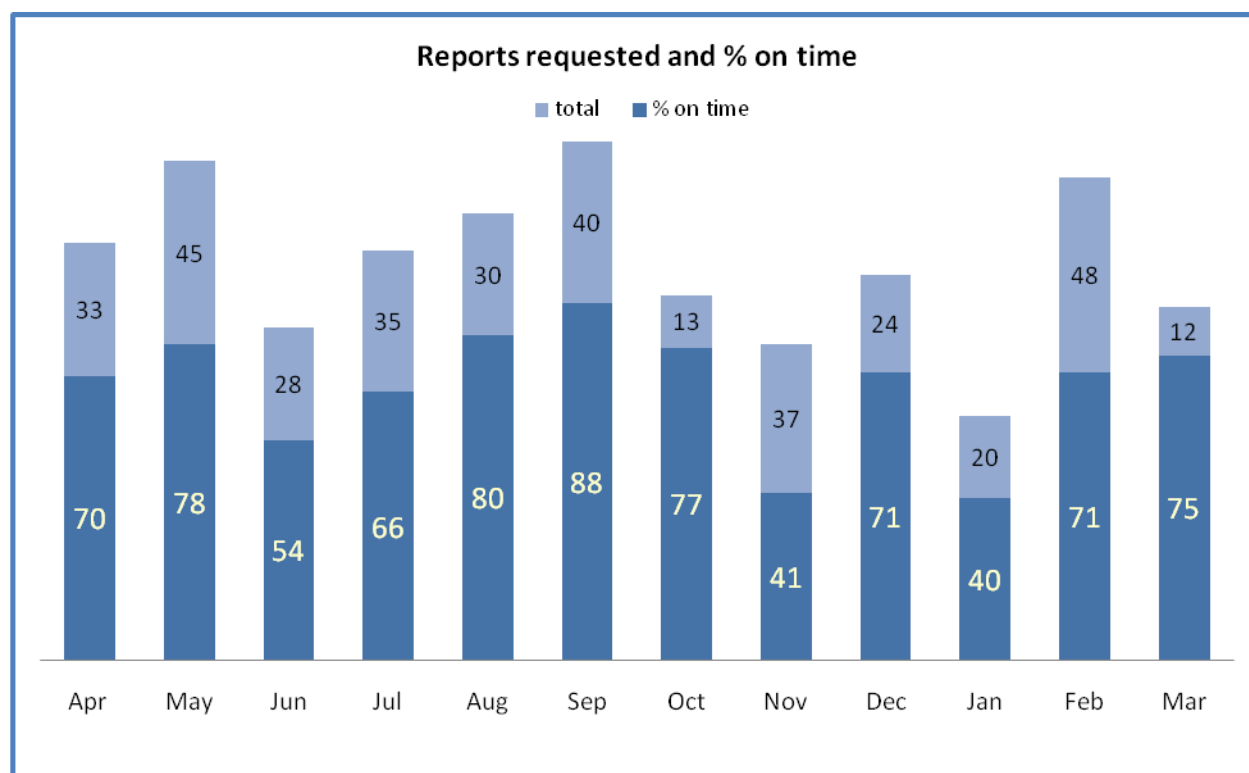
12. Given the changes outlined at section 9 and section 10, a change in performance is not surprising. However, for this reason increased focus was placed on the TI3 performance, with early indicators in 2014-2015 suggesting an upward trend and improvement in submission rates is being realised with the embedding of the recent changes (Figure 2).

**Figure 2: Performance by Month- Apr, May, June 2014**



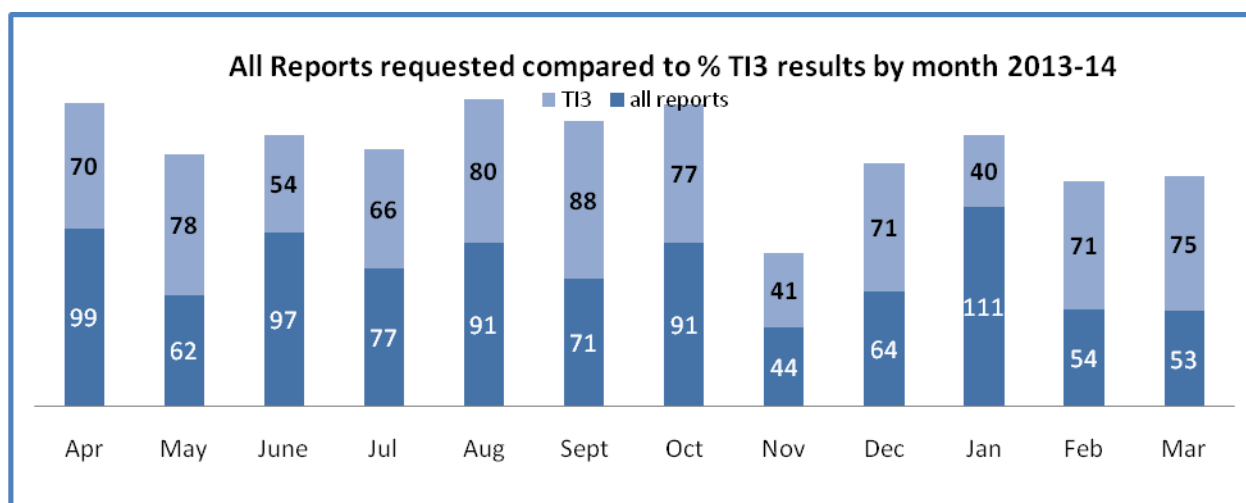
13. Figure 3 illustrates the performance in each month in 2013 -14 in comparison to the number of reports due each month. The local authority met or exceeded the TI3 target of 75% in five of the twelve months in this reporting period. The number of reports requested in each month ranged from 12 in March 2014 to 48 in February 2014. There is no clear statistical correlation between the number of reports requested and the percentage submitted within timescales. May, September and February had high numbers of reports requested and the highest percentage submitted on time. Conversely November, January and June, had low numbers of report requests and low submission percentages.

**Figure 3: Performance by Month 2013-14**



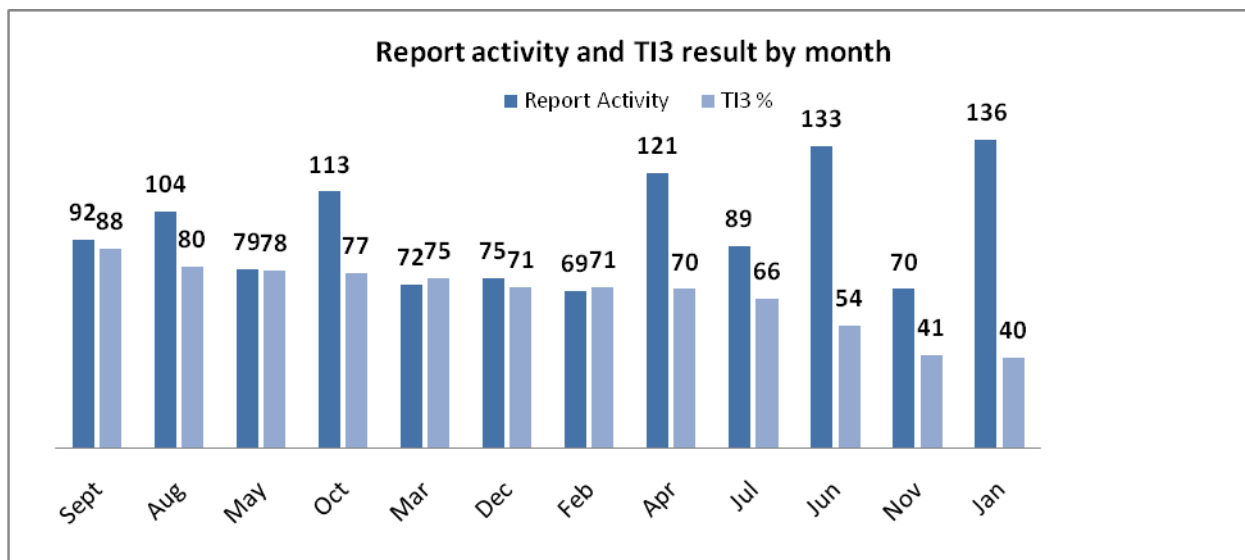
14. Social Workers have a statutory responsibility to produce a range of reports for the Children's Hearing. However TI3 only records new reports and does not include other report requests received from SCRA such as, review reports, reports for advice hearings and reports for continued hearings (shown in Figure 3). January had the highest number of total reports requested (111) and the poorest performance on TI3 (40%); by contrast November had the lowest number of total reports requests (44) which also had the second lowest performance (41%). This emphasises the overall complexity of the factors influencing performance in this area.

**Figure 4: TI3 performance with all reports requested by SCRA in the month by Month**



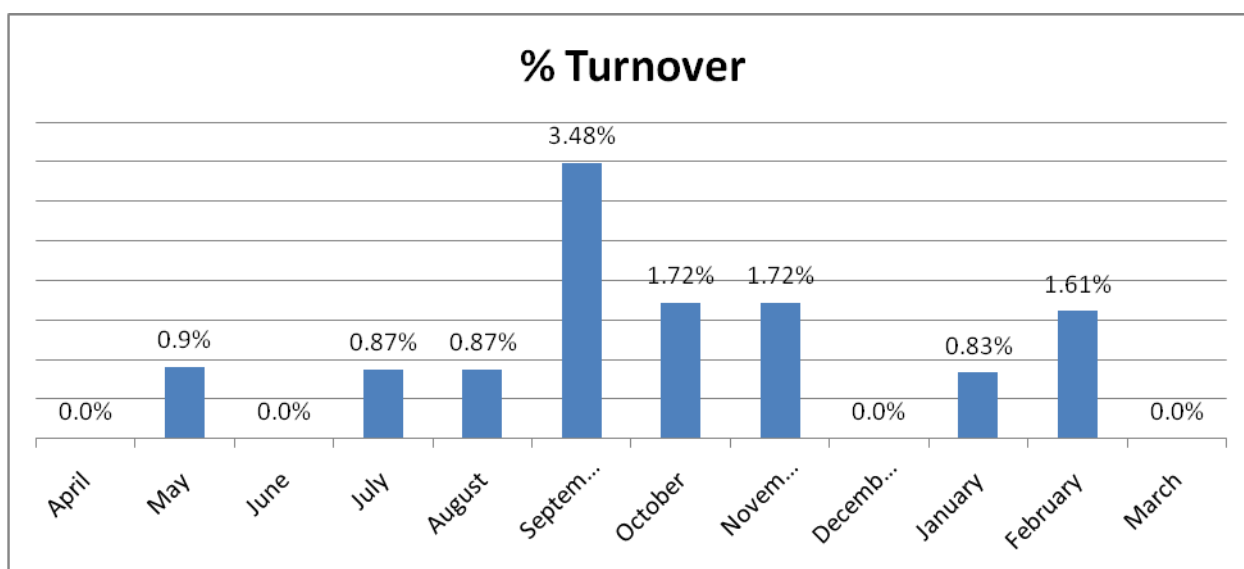
15. In order to better understanding the range factors that influence performance in this area it is important to consider the competing demands experienced by workers. There are a range of reports, other than those completed for SCRA that, are prioritised and must be completed. Should a worker receive information that a child is at risk of harm they will be required to carry out a child protection investigation and complete a multiagency child protection assessment and report (CP1). The CP1 requires to be completed within 10 calendar days and is integral to the considerations and discussions that to be considered at a case conference. There may be a requirement to produce reports to court where there is a custody dispute, or a report to a permanency panel to secure a child's future care via adoption or permanent foster care. Children who are looked after and accommodated (LAAC) are reviewed in accordance with regulations and reports are produced for these reviews. The range, scope and type of report demanded of a Children and Families practitioner requires to be prioritised on a daily basis in conjunction with the allocation of reports to the Children's Hearing. This highlights the need for management oversight and professional decision making regarding what requires to be prioritised. Figure 5 shows TI3 performance in descending order set against the competing demands for other reports and child protection work and illustrates that in the majority of months where the demands for other reports was higher the TI3 results were lower. There are of course exceptions again emphasising the complexity of the work involved.

**Figure 5 %TI 3 and Report activity including Child Protection Investigations by month and TI3 Performance in descending order**



16. In addition to the prioritisation of competing demands, consideration is required to the level of employee turnover within social work Localities. Whilst the turnover of qualified social workers has been stable since 2009/10, Figure 6 illustrates that there were particular pressure times in September, October and November 2013 due to a Glasgow City Council recruitment initiative. As would be expected the impact of employee turnover is not immediately evident in the submission or SBRs within timescales. However, the impact of locality teams carrying vacancies emerges in the months from October onwards with a pattern of decreasing submission percentage rates (Figure 3). A recruitment initiative resulted in seven new social work practitioners coming into post in November and December 2013. Following an induction period, the positive impact of this recruitment may be seen by the increasing trend of submission rates since February 2014.

**Figure 6: turnover in Social Work Localities**



## **BENCHMARKING**

17. In June 2013, SCRA informed local authorities that as a result of moving systems mid year, they would be unable to report on full year TI3 data for 2012/13 and therefore would not be including it in their annual report. There have been no monthly reports on TI3 in this reporting period (2013/14) and no information available for benchmarking purposes or national ranking. Thus, there is no data currently available to highlight how the local authority performance in this area compares with the other 31 local Authorities in Scotland.
18. As outlined at section 7, the practice standard of 75% is adopted to measure performance, whilst also recognising that reports cannot always be completed within timescales for good professional reasons.

## **LEGAL/POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

19. There are no specific legal or policy implications.

## **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

20. There are no specific financial implications.

## **RISK IMPLICATIONS**

21. The role and duties of a social work practitioner are varied and complex. In all instances the immediate priority of the local authority social work service is to ensure that all child protection referrals are dealt with and investigated thoroughly and without delay and this requires consideration when examining TI3 performance. Failure to prioritise this work may result in serious risk and harm to children and young people and as a direct consequence the reputation of the local authority by the adverse publicity this would generate. Clearly there are a number of other priority areas as outlined above, such as securing permanence for children in our care.
22. There is a statutory duty on the local authority to prioritise for assessment and service provision those children and young people referred by SCRA via the completion of a SBR. Failure to meet this statutory duty carries a risk to the reputation of the local authority. It is important for the local authority to maintain a focus on recruiting to social work practitioner posts once they become vacant as this is a contributing factor in being unable to meet the TI3 standard.

## **EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS**

23. There are no specific equality implications

## **HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

24. There are no specific human resource implications.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

25. It is recommended that Governance and Scrutiny Committee: -

- (i) note the performance in this area;
- (ii) note the arrangements in place to monitor and continue to improve performance;
- (iii) otherwise note the contents of this report.

**IMPLEMENTATION OFFICERS: SUSAN TAYLOR, HEAD OF SERVICE: CHILDREN AND FAMILIES AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE / MARION MACAULAY, SENIOR MANAGER**

### **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 Marion MacAulay, Senior Manager on 01563 503358**