



# Walsall Council

## Children's Scrutiny Board Exception Report

**Date of Board: 25 February 2014**  
**Reporting Period covered: December 2013**

### **Purpose of the report:**

From the high level scorecard, the key focus areas of Caseloads, Agency Staff and Early Help were identified and further information requested by Children's Services Performance and Scrutiny Panel.

This information is explored below and the Panel is invited to discuss the information, offer constructive challenge based on it and to consider the potential implications and / or further areas for exploration.

### **Key Issues:**

- The Safeguarding and Family Support Service establishment of a 7<sup>th</sup> SFS team be progressed.
- The Workload management tool application across the services needs to be consistent
- Agency staff reduction is being incrementally sought.
- As the process embeds, the volumes of early help assessments are increasing and are reducing the initial assessments required. Timeliness of the steps of the early help process are improving significantly.

### **Summary of areas of detailed focus below:**

#### **Caseload Information**

Initial Response Service (IRS) and Child protection caseload numbers have fallen considerably over time. IRS in particular now have reasonable caseloads due to the removal of the initial assessment backlog.

Looked after children (LAC) and Safeguarding and Family Support (SFS) caseloads have remained relatively stable from April to December 2013, though SFS continue to report reasonably high caseloads. The establishment of a 7<sup>th</sup> team is being progressed, formed largely from existing resources.

The workload management tool has been in use for some months and appears to be embedded, so peer confirmation of its rigorous and consistent use could be beneficial.

## **Agency Staff**

There continues to be reliance on agency staff while newly qualified staff are supported in building up their caseloads during their first year of employment. Managing the volume of incoming work through adherence to the new thresholds will also help reduce the need for agency staff.

## **Early Help**

Increased volumes appear to be being sustained and early stage timeliness in confirming where no further action beyond advice and signposting and in identifying a lead professional is improving. The timescales for an agreed lead professional to make contact (5 days) and for Early Help assessments to be completed (15 days from date of allocation) are being monitored and improved through workforce development.

### **1. Caseload Information**

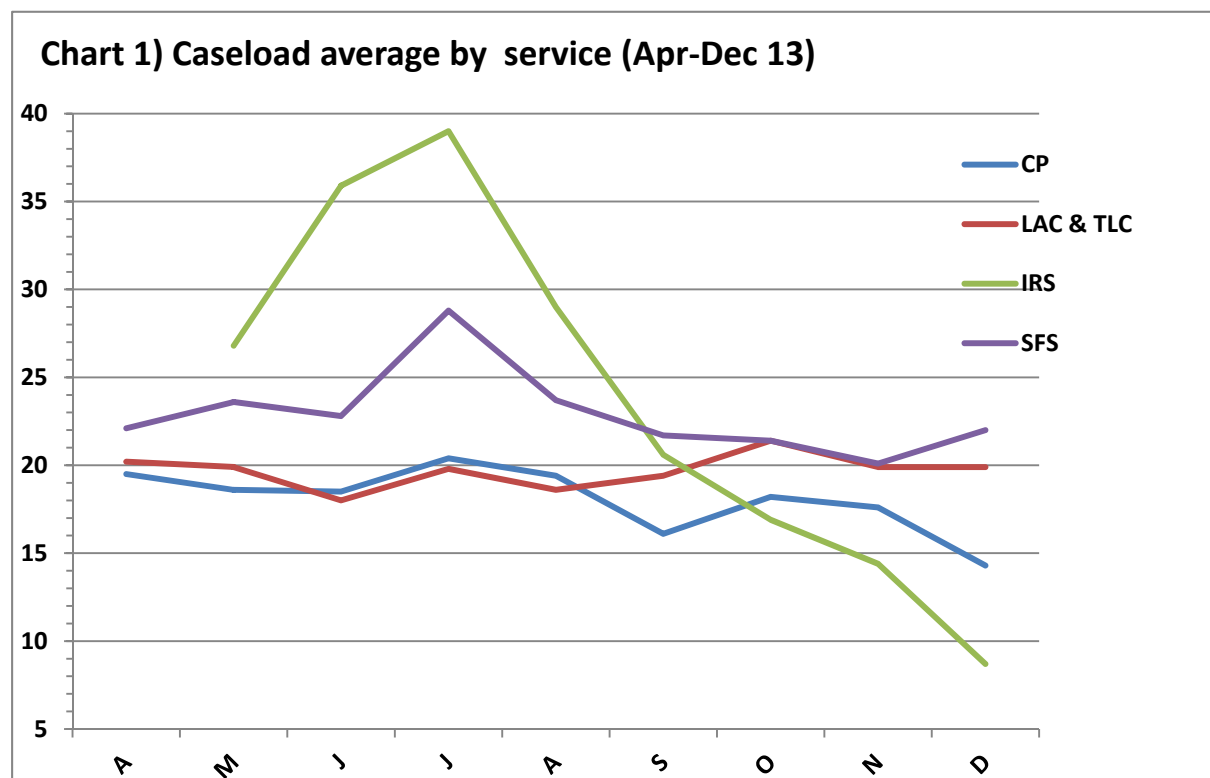
It is essential to recognise that children's cases are not equal in their depth, complexity or the amount of time required by a worker to meet the identified needs of the child to the required standards. An initial assessment, for example, should involve some information gathering, a visit and a small amount of time to write up and enter the information to the system. The preparation of court documents required for care proceedings on the other hand would involve a number of very detailed assessments, visits and the production of in-depth documentation taking several days of time to work through.

Quantifying caseloads by the number of children divided by the number of case-holding staff then is less than ideal. However, it does show in a consistent way across service areas how many children are being dealt with and gives a useful trend over time picture (please see chart 1 below).

For a more forensic analysis, the workload management tool results are useful. This method allocates points to a worker on the basis of the complexity of case and for essential routine tasks such as visits, supervision and paperwork. The degree of rigour and consistency in the application of this tool could beneficially be confirmed using a peer challenger from outside the service area. The maximum score that should reasonably be held by a worker is 100.

In some children's cases it is difficult to gauge the demands of working with a particular child or family; recent audits identified that not all children in need and children with disabilities (i.e. some of those below the CPP / LAC thresholds) had a clear plan in place. Some of these children's cases are now being stepped down to receive early help rather than social work based services and where children are to continue to receive a social care service, clear plans are being brought together for them.

Ascertaining the correct number of cases being held is a current priority; a data checking exercise was recently undertaken that compared the children with records on the Paris system to the children being worked with through social worker caseloads. For LAC, the results was that 16 LAC needed to be recorded on the system; they had been discharged some time ago but not recorded as such. This means that the overall number of LAC reduced, as did caseloads of individual workers. Similarly, 8 Child Protection Plan children have been removed from the system recently, though their actual de-listing had occurred prior to 31 March 2013. Importantly, the checks showed that there does not appear to be such an issue with the timeliness of recording new CPPs; it is essential that timely recording about these children is undertaken so that their vulnerability can be shared. Recording that new LAC have come into care though has not been as fast as necessary to support timely health checks. Worker level reports around timeliness of recording are now being provided so that staff can be supported through supervision to improve this.



Service area	Average Caseload per worker	Range	Total no. cases	Average Work Load Mgt Tool score (WLMT)	Comment
Adoption:	8		16	90.5	Of 14 workers, 2 have a caseload and other support families who have adopted. WLMT score below maximum.
Family & Friends: Family Placement Service	18.8	9 to 25	94	95.9	WLMT score below maximum.
Recruitment of Foster Carers	10.2	0 to 12	50	99.9	WLMT score just below maximum.
Family Placement Service: Support	21.0	12 to 23	149	105	WLMT score above maximum.
Children with Disabilities Team	25		125	Not utilised	Workload management tool not felt to be appropriate with the type of children's cases being dealt with
LAC Team 1	25	20 to 31	176	Not supplied; manager on leave)	11 cases were undertaken by student social workers under the supervision of substantive social workers
LAC Team 2	17	9 to 25	139	114	7 cases were undertaken by student social workers under the supervision of substantive social workers. WLMT score above maximum.
LAC Team 3	19	7 to 22	154	87	WLMT score below maximum.
Transition and Leaving Care	18	11 to 21	89	100	WLMT score at maximum.
IRS Team 1	9	3 to 14	69	Not utilised	Workload management tool not felt to be appropriate with the type of children's cases

					being dealt with by IRS Teams
IRS Team 2	5	0 to 7	32	Not utilised	As above
IRS Team 3	7	0 to 13	52	Not utilised	As above
IRS Team 4	18	14 to 27	109	Not utilised	As above
MAST Team (Multi Agency Screening Team)	0	0	0	Not utilised	The MAST Team are qualified social workers who undertake screening of cases; WLMT not felt to be appropriate with this type of work
SFS1	21.7	16 to 27	196	101.8	Reduction in unallocated work from 42 to 18 cases, which are being managed through duty staff.
SFS2	25.5	13 to 29	216	138.6	Team includes 2 x 0.8 staff and a departing SW has been replaced with an Assessed Year of Supported Employment (AYSE) Social Worker
SFS3	20.5	11 to 27	194	121.2	WLMT score significantly over the maximum level.
SFS4	21	7 to 27	197	112.9	WLMT score over the maximum level.
SFS5	19.5	13 to 23	214	103.6	WLMT score over the maximum level.
SFS6	24.5	16 to 32	246	101.2	WLMT score over the maximum level.

SFS report having particular challenges with caseloads: 1,339 cases across 6 teams. There were 83 unallocated Child in Need (CIN) cases (as of 31/01/14) managed on a duty basis within the respective teams. During a duty period, children's cases that come in are allocated out to social workers; it would be normal for their number to start higher and reduce as they are allocated. While prioritisation

is carefully ensured, the holding of some cases by duty managers due to staff caseloads being full is less than ideal, the desire is to reach zero unallocated cases.

On a trial basis, a 7<sup>th</sup> SFS team are being formed from the existing pool of agency workers and an agency team manager has been recruited to manage the team to reduce the number of cases for team managers to manage and also the numbers of staff to supervise. It is hoped that this will enable team managers to begin to focus on the progression of a smaller number of cases while agency staff reductions are sought through threshold management.

## **2. Agency Staff**

There continues to be reliance on agency staff. The overall numbers rose in November and decreased somewhat in December but not to as low a figure as in October. Recruitment of social workers continues to be successful, particularly in attracting newly qualified staff (ASYE). Agency workers have been retained to support ASYE staff in their first year while their caseloads are being built up and to cover vacancies / maternity etc.

The number of agency staff can be shown in the three ways:

- Counting how many agency staff are in work on a random day each month (potential for it not be a representative day and part time staff not taken into account, so tends to over-estimate numbers))
- Counting how many agency staff submit timesheets to enable payment each month (Does not take into account part time working, so can over-estimate numbers)
- Calculating from the number of hours worked on the timesheets how many full time equivalent (FTE) staff that would be. (More accurate but more bureaucratic.)

For accuracy, the FTE mechanism is preferred but random day headcount continues to be provided to ensure sufficient trend over time is available.

	Agency staff headcount (HR snapshot on one day in a month)	Agency staff headcount (No. submitting timesheets for pay):	Full Time Equivalents:
October	73	73	42.2 6796.3 hours worked
November	56	89	82.9 10673.5 hours worked
December	56	82	65.7 8449.7 hours worked

## Breakdown of Agency Job Titles

The table below shows the job titles of those who have submitted time sheets in October, November and December. It should be noted that it counts the number of individuals submitting timesheets rather than the FTE; e.g. there has only been one FTE for the LADO role.

Job Type	October	November	December
Qualified Social Workers	55	63	60
Team Managers	7	8	9
Senior Practitioners	7	9	5
LADO	3	4	4
Operations Managers	1	2	2
Independent Social Workers	0	1	1
Principal Social Workers	0	1	1
Head of Service	0	1	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>82</b>

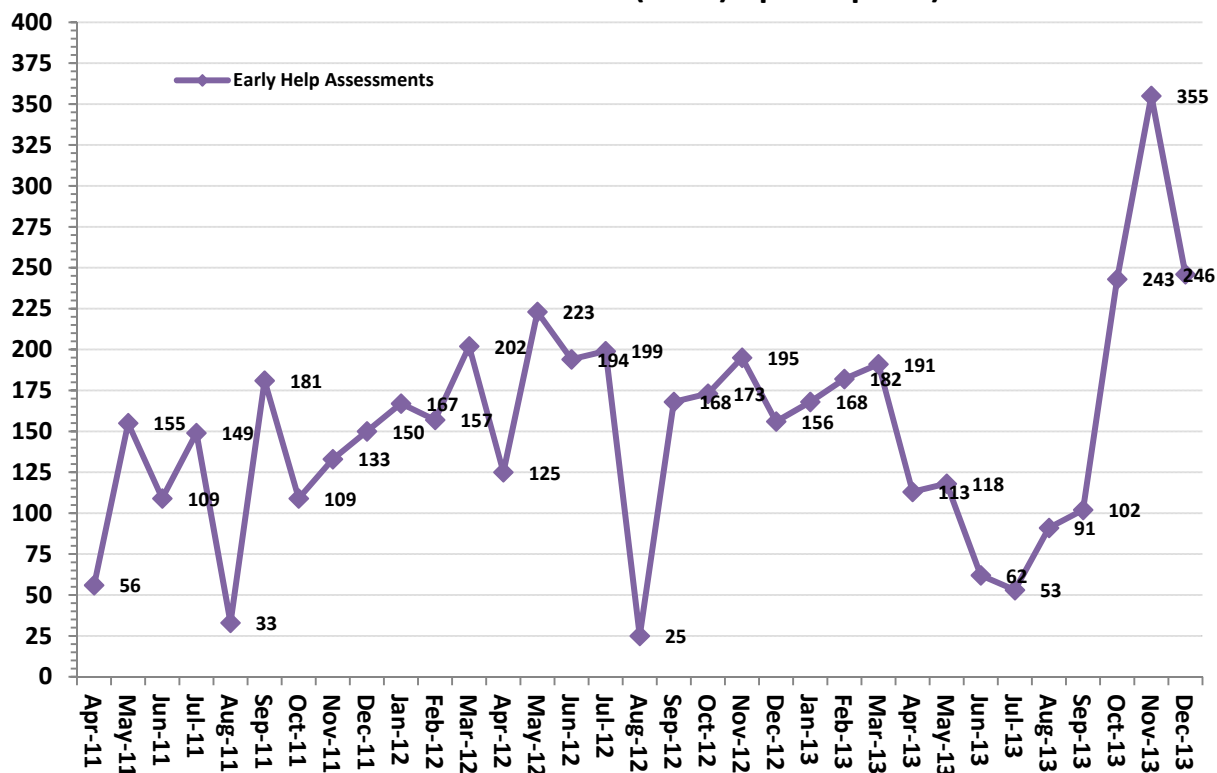
Within SFS there is still an overreliance on agency social workers to support the Service covering maternity, sickness and vacant posts. There are also agency staff over establishment to enable all highest priority complex work requiring experienced workers (child protection plans and children in care proceedings) to be allocated to a social worker. We still need to keep agency staff for a time limited period to support the Service as the 13 ASYEs are not at a stage where they can undertake any complex work; expectations increase over the course of their first year. There is one ASYE from the last recruitment of 2013 who started in the Service in early February. The first round of social work recruitment for 2014 took place on the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> January and one worker was recruited for the Safeguarding Service.

### **3. Early Help**

Some headline figures around early help are provided, further detail is available through the extracted section of the January 2014 Improvement Board report provided. Strategic conclusions are provided separately following the thematic inspection of early help in January 2014.

Early help assessment volumes have continued to be sustained at a much increased level. There was a drop in December, as there was also for initial assessments (please see chart 3) below and this decrease is expected to reflect a reduction of contacts over the Christmas period rather than any change in threshold application.

**Chart 2) Early Help Assessments (Child concern meetings and Common Assessment Frameworks (CAFs) up to Apr 13)**



**Chart 3) Initial Assessments Vs. Early Help**

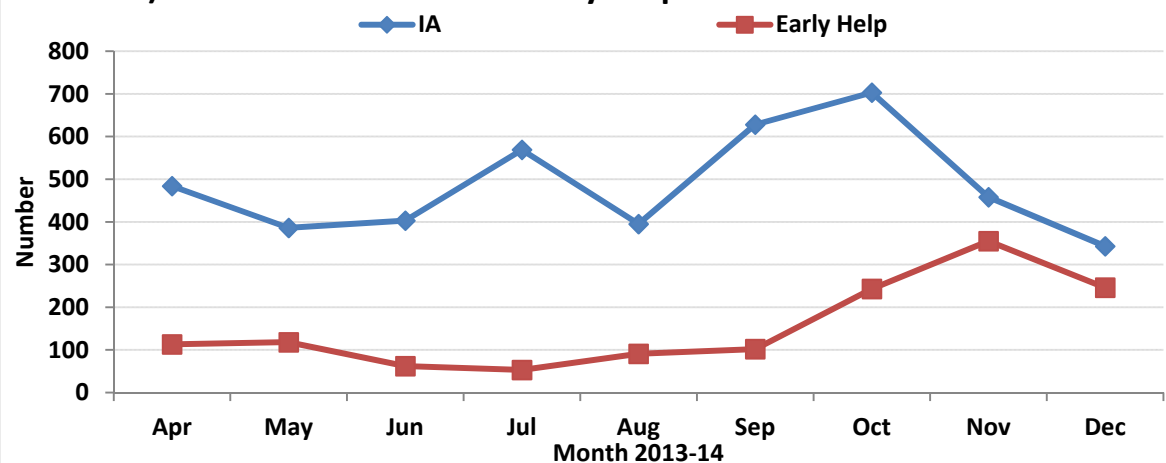
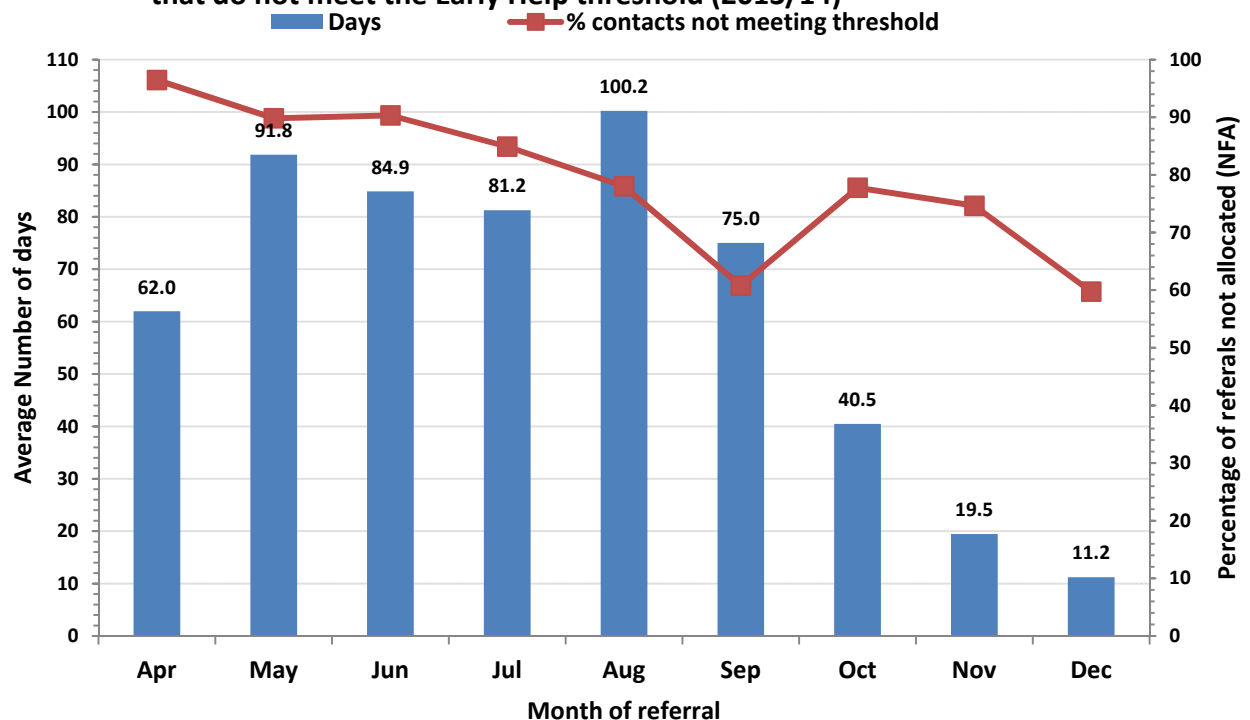


Chart 4 below shows the average number of days taken to gather additional information as required, consider and close Early Help contacts that do not meet the early help threshold. The time taken has reduced from 100 (calendar) days on average in August to 11 days average in December. This is a significant improvement and the target is for all early help assessments and plans are completed within 15 working days of contact.



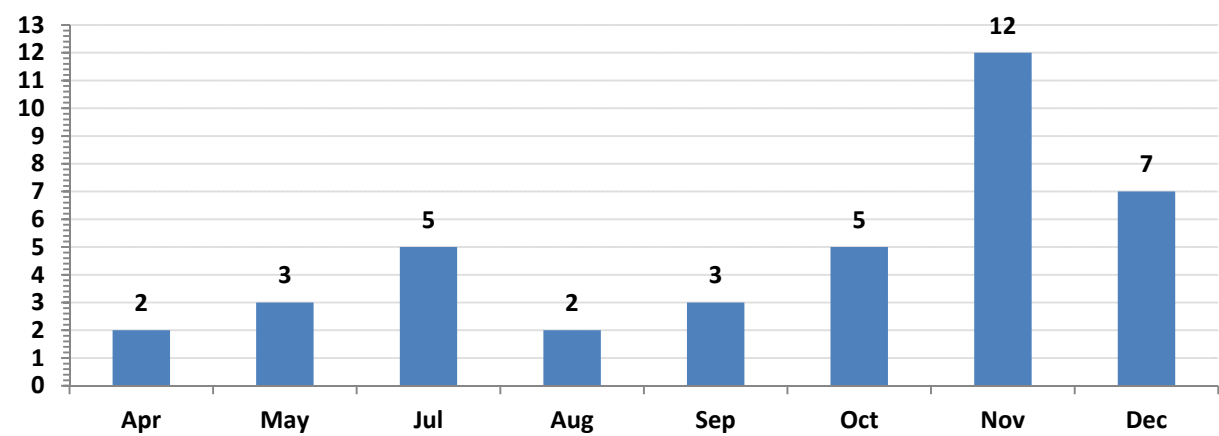
The percentage of contacts not meeting the Early Help Threshold so requiring no further action (other than information and advice or signposting) is also shown. This has been variable, falling from 96.5% in April to 60.8% in September, then increased in October and November to around 75% and fell back to 59.8% in December. It is thought that as well as overall increases in Early help service provision, more mature and developed recording mechanisms, (whilst still manual) may be filtering out some of the contacts that were included in the past but are not anymore.

**Chart 4) Average number of days to signpost and close Early Help Referrals that do not meet the Early Help threshold (2013/14)**



It appears that early help is reaching the vulnerable groups successfully; for example Chart 5 below shows similar increases in the number of early help assessments concerning children with disabilities to the total number shown in Chart 3 above.

**Chart 5) Number of Early Help Referrals concerning children with disabilities**



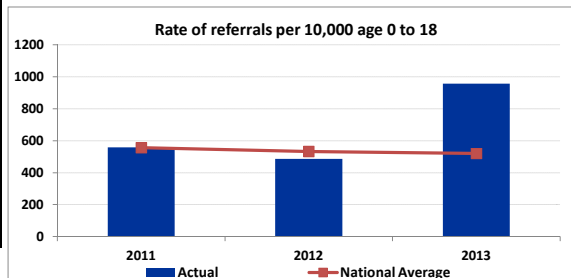
## 1.0 Early Help

## Charts for Selected Areas

(There are known recording issues being addressed, so the below is likely to be a under-estimation)	<b>Oct-13</b>	<b>Nov-13</b>	<b>Dec-13</b>
Early Help Rate per 10,000 CYP	210.5	267.5	289.9
✓ Average number of days to close early help assessments with no allocation (SB)	40.5	19.5	11.2
✗ % of Contacts progressing to Children's Social Care (SB)	22.2	25.4	40.2

## 2.0 Front Door

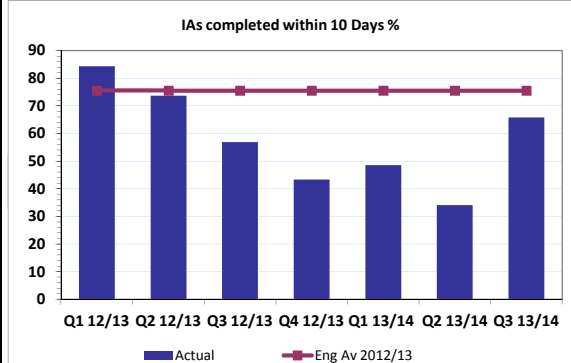
	<b>Mar-13 Eng</b>	<b>Mar-13</b>	<b>Dec-13</b>
Number of referrals received	593500	4454	4562
Referral rate per 10,000	520.7	703.4	956.4
✗ % re-referrals in 12 months (SB)	24.9	13.8	14.7
CiN rate per 10,000 CYP (excluding LAC and CPP)	332.2	294.5	210.7



## 3.0 Assessments

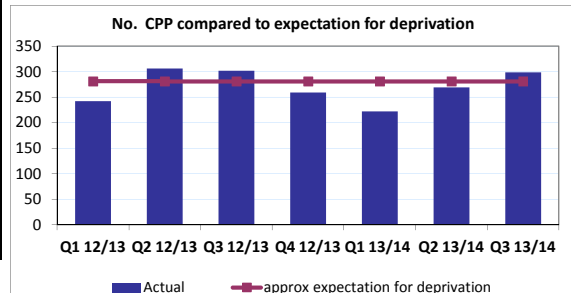
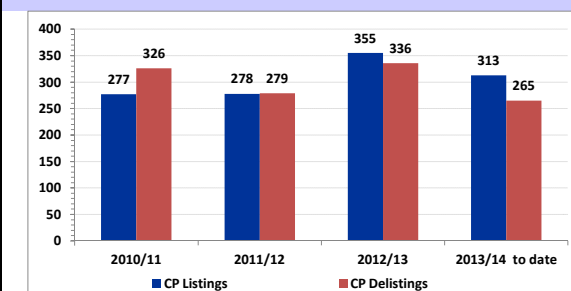
<b>Assessment Timeliness</b>	<b>Mar-13 Eng</b>	<b>Mar-13</b>	<b>Dec-13</b>
✗ % Initial Assessments (IA) completed < 10 days (BB)	75.5	64.9	49.6
✓ % Core Assessments (CAs) completed < 35 days (BB)	76.7	64.7	83.2

In December, 92.6% of initial assessments have been completed within 10 working days which suggests this back in-line with the national average for March 2013.



## 4.0 Children on a Child Protection Plan

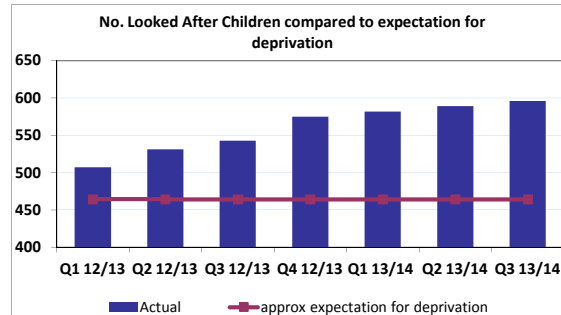
<b>Child Protection Plans</b>	<b>Mar-12</b>	<b>Mar-13</b>	<b>Dec-13</b>
No. Child Protection Plans (CPP) at the end of year	230	249	297
No. de-listed during the year	248	336	265
No listed during the year	255	355	313
The number of CP listings for December has superseded the income deprivation expected level for March 2013 of 281, which the Walsall figure for March 2013 is shown to be below.			
CPP Rate per 10,000 (England March 2013 = 37.9)	36.2	39.6	47.0
<b>Repeat CPPs</b>	<b>Mar-13 Eng</b>	<b>Mar-12</b>	<b>Mar-13</b>
✓ % of CPP subject to a second or subsequent CPP	14.9	10.5	14.1
10-15% is considered as ideal. Walsall's rate has remained good, indicating appropriate caution levels.			



## Walsall Children's Scrutiny Board - Q3 scorecard (November)

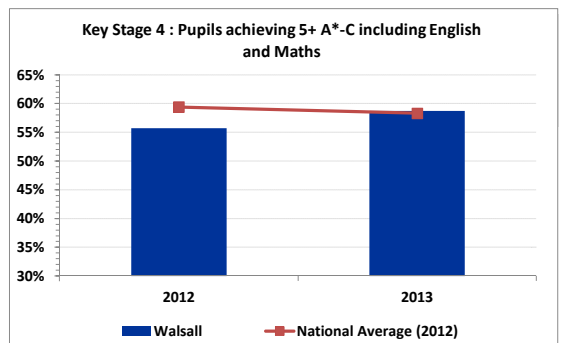
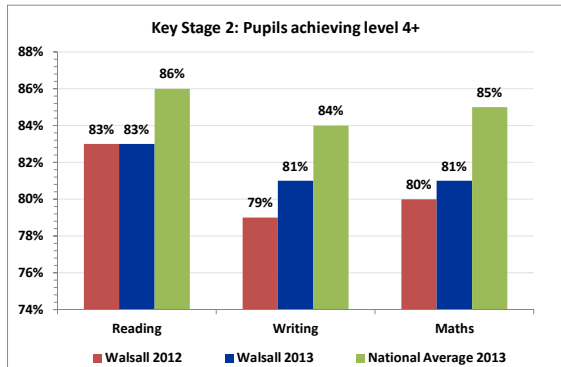
### 5.0 Looked After Children/ Adoption

	Mar-13 Eng	Mar-13	YTD Dec-13
Numbers of Looked After Children	68110	575	596
LAC Rate per 10,000 CYP	60.0	90.8	93.7
⚠ Long Term Stability of LAC (% in care 2.5 years in same placement 2 years) (BB)	67%	65.7%	54.2%
✅ Average time from Entering Care to being adopted (Days) (SB)	647	1196	484



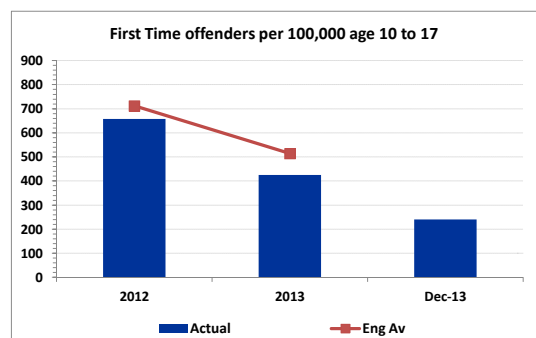
### 6.0 Education - attainment/attendance

	2013 Eng	2012	2013
Early Years : Pupils Working at a Good Level Of Development	52%	51%	46%*
↔ Key Stage 2 (Level 4+) : Reading (BB)	86%	83%	83%
✅ Key Stage 2 (Level 4+) : Writing (BB)	84%	79%	81%
✅ Key Stage 2 (Level 4+) : Maths (BB)	85%	80%	81%
✅ Key Stage 4 : Pupils achieving 5+ A*-C including English and Maths (BB)	58.3%	55.7%	58.7%
✅ Key Stage 5 : Average Points per Candidate (BB)	709.1	641.9	701.3
⚠ Key Stage 5: Average Points per candidate: School Sixth Forms (BB)	775.5	767.3	775
⚠ Persistent Absence (All Schools) (SB)	4.9% (Terms 1 & 2)	4.8%^	5.7% (Terms 1 & 2)
✅ % of schools rated good or outstanding (BB)	70%	63%	68%
	2012 Eng	2011	2012
✅ % of pupils receiving fixed term exclusions (SB)	4.05% (304,370)	4.1% (1,910)	3.3% (1,540)
⚠ % of pupils receiving permanent exclusions (SB)	0.07% (5,170)	0.04% (20)	0.06% (30)
* the methodology for measuring this indicator changed in 2012/13 so not comparable with previous year			



### 7.0 Youth Offending / Participation/ Positive Activities

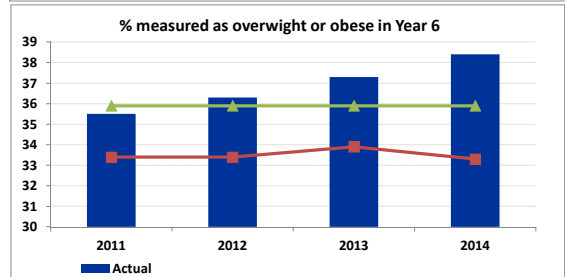
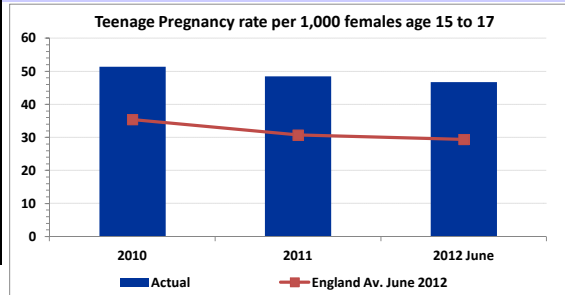
	2012	2013	Dec-13
✅ First Time offenders per 100,000 age 10 to 17	658	425	240
⚠ Re-offending rate (SB) (Dec figure a Q in arrears)	0.54	0.76	1.28
Numbers of Young People engaged in Positive activities (nb. generous counting rules)	14251	19310	tbc
✅ Rates of anti-social behaviour	2870	2344	1608
✅ 16 18-year-olds who are not in education, training or employment (NEET)	7.4%	6.4%	n/a



## Walsall Children's Scrutiny Board - Q3 scorecard (December)

### 8.0 Health Outcomes

	2010	2011	2012 June
↗ Teenage Pregnancy Rate * (SB)	51.4	48.5	46.7
	2012	2013	2014
↘ % measured as overweight or obese in Year 6 (SB)	36.3	37.3	38.4
* Data is reported 5 Quarters in arrears			



### 9.0 Staffing / Workforce

	Mar-13	Nov-13	Dec-13
↔ Vacancy Rate - the number of vacant social worker posts as a % of all SW posts (SB)	14.4	19.2	19.2
↘ Turnover Rate - the number of social workers leaving as a % of workforce establishment on 1st April (SB)	10.5	16	18.8
↔ Average number of days lost to Sickness Absence by social workers. (SB)	16.5	13.2	13
	Oct-13	Nov-13	Dec-13
Number of Agency Staff - Headcount (Snapshot of one day in a month)	73	56	56
Number of Agency Staff - Headcount (no. submitting timesheets)	73	89	82
↗ Numbers of Agency Staff - FTE (SB)	42.2*	82.9†	65.6†
*- 5 week month †- 4 week month			
NB: The headcount is a count of the number of agency workers that were in work on a particular day in the month. The FTE is based on the number of hours worker from weekly timesheets submitted during the month.			

### 10.0 Complaints received relating to CYP

Complaints	Mar-13	YTD Dec 13
Complaints Stage 1	116	162
Complaints Stage 2	8	5
Complaints Stage 3	0	0

15 safeguarding complaints

#### Legend

Direction of travel from previous period:

↗	improved in performance
↔	Maintained level
↘	deteriorated in performance
BB	bigger is better
SB	smaller is better