MERSEYSIDE
CRIMINAL JUSTICE BOARD

Criminal Justice System: working together for the public

MERSEYSIDE WITNESS CARE UNIT

BACKGROUND

- "No Witness No Justice" project introduced Witness Care Units across England & Wales by December 2005

- Underpinning this service is a set of minimum requirements which ensure:

  - Witness Care Officers provide single point of contact
  - Communication takes place at an early stage
  - WCO's keep Victims & Witnesses informed of progress and any developments in the case
  - Needs assessment conducted to ensure early identification of issues
  - Special measures, victim personal statements, support and pre trial visits offered

STRUCTURE

- Merseyside piloted the NWNJ principles in the Sefton Area in March 2005
- Lessons learnt & baseline data gathered – decision to create a single Witness Care Unit for the County
- Police & CPS staff recruited in preparation for county roll out
- Intensive 4 week training programme delivered for all Witness Care Officers
- Merseyside Witness Care Unit went live in November 2005

CHALLENGES

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- Governance structure
- Issues re differing terms & conditions between Police & CPS
- IT
- Communication links between WCU & other agencies
- On going funding
- New performance measures
- Raising the profile of the Unit
- Implementation of the Victims Code & Witness Charter

ACHIEVEMENTS

- Commitment by both agencies to sustain the Unit
- Integration & dedication of WCO's and WCM's
- Developed networks with large number of voluntary organisations
- Good news stories
- Single Unit – standard processes, resilience & efficient use of IT
- Performance – clearly defined measures & dashboards scrutinised at Area & Local level

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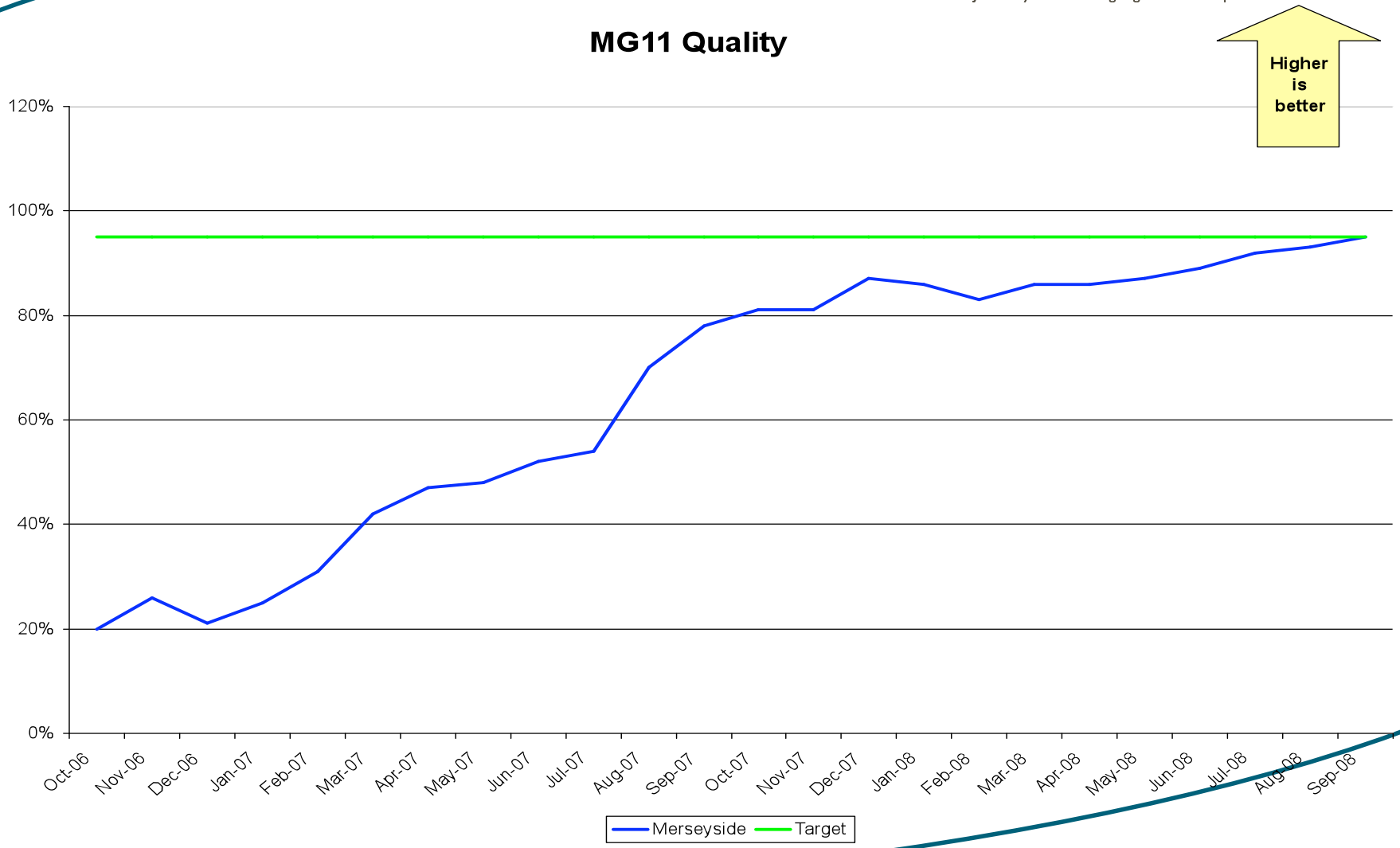

WHERE ARE WE NOW

- Re defined roles within the Management Structure
- Enhanced level of service to deal with serious crime – dedicated team commencing January 09
- Dedicated Domestic Violence WCO's in Sefton – rolling out across whole Unit in November 2008
- Raising the WCU profile – "Inside Justice Week"
- Escalation process to improve witness attendance
- Continued commitment to improve performance