



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru  
Welsh Assembly Government

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Public Accounts Committee  
National Assembly for Wales  
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**Mr Paul Williams OBE OStJ DL**  
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**Chief Executive, NHS Wales**  
**Cyfarwyddwr Cyffredinol, Iechyd a**  
**Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol,**  
**Prif Weithredwr, GIG Cymru**

Eich cyf/ Your ref:  
Ein cyf / Our ref: PMW/BROWN/BS

3 March 2010

Dear *Jonathan*

### **Ambulance Service Response Times**

Please find enclosed a performance report detailing ambulance service response times between December 2008 and December 2009, as requested by the Public Accounts Committee, following the 'Ambulance Services in Wales Inquiry' report, published in July 2009.

Yours sincerely

**Paul Williams**  
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## 1. Issue

- 1.1 As part of the Public Accounts Committee's (PAC) 'Ambulance Services in Wales Inquiry' report (published in July 2009), the Welsh Assembly Government were asked to provide an update report detailing response times of the ambulance service. PAC requested that WAG include figures for the Christmas period.
- 1.2 WAG agreed to provide a report in February 2010.

## 2. Background

- 2.1 The Ambulance national response time targets are included within the Annual Operating Framework 2009/2010 for NHS Wales.
- 2.2 The principal Ambulance national targets are:
  - (i) a monthly all-Wales average performance of 65% of first responses to Category A calls (immediately life-threatening calls) arriving within 8 minutes;
  - (ii) a monthly minimum performance of 60% of first responses to Category A calls (immediately life-threatening calls) arriving within 8 minutes in each new Local Health Board area;

## 3. All Wales Analysis

- 3.1 During 2009, the Trust achieved an average performance of **63.9%** of first responses to Category A (immediately life-threatening) calls arriving within 8 minutes. This is an improvement in performance when compared to 2008, when an average performance of **59.9%** was achieved. See *figure 1* below for response time performance from December 2008 to December 2009.

Figure 1. Percentage of calls resulting in an emergency response arriving within 8 minutes (Category A)

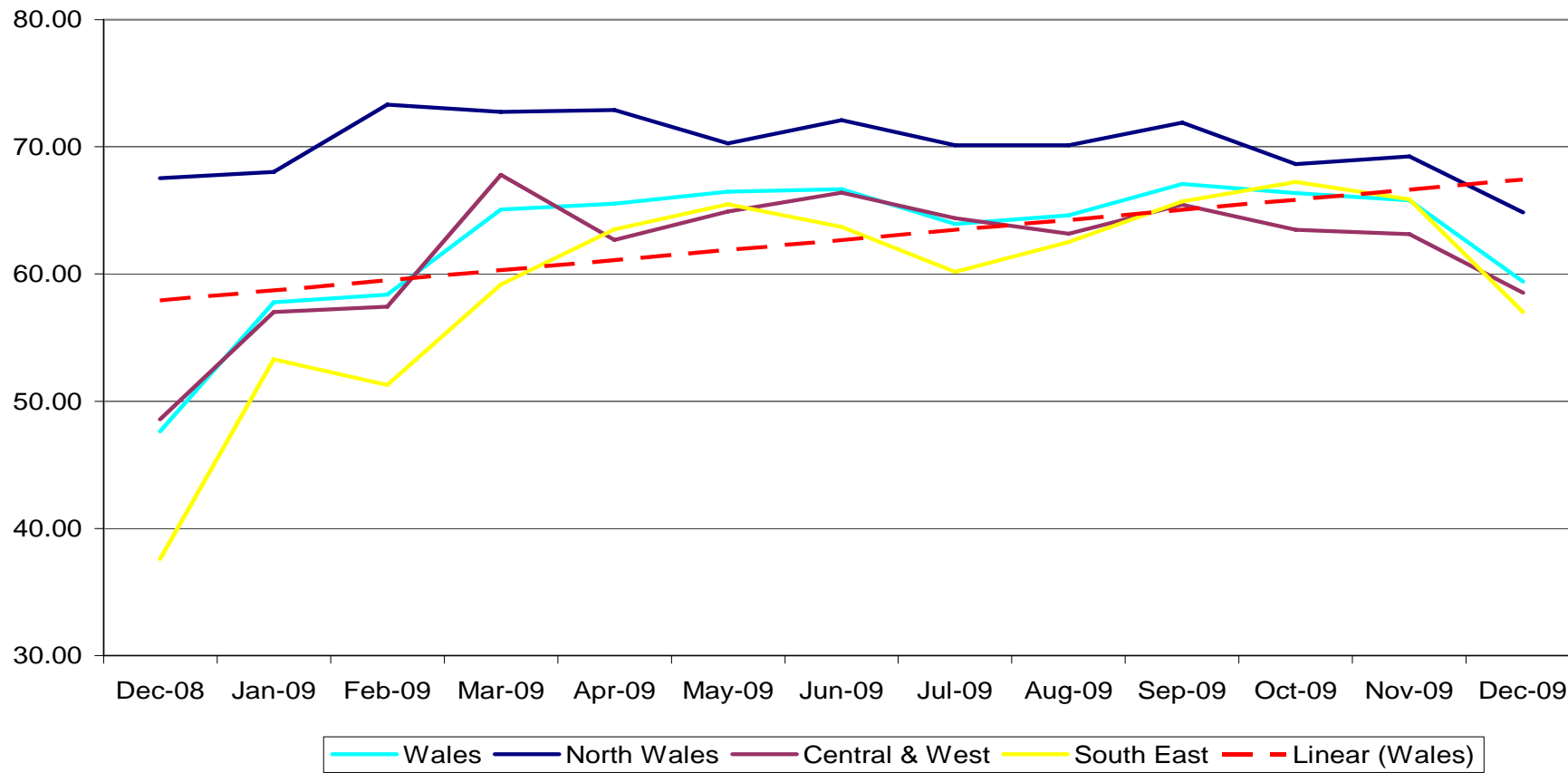
Month	Dec 08	Jan 09	Feb 09	Mar 09	Apr 09	May 09	Jun 09	Jul 09	Aug 09	Sept 09	Oct 09	Nov 09	Dec 09
<b>All Wales Performance</b>	47.6	57.8	58.4	65.1	65.5	66.5	66.7	63.9	64.6	67.1	66.4	65.8	59.4

Source: [www.statswales.wales.gov.uk](http://www.statswales.wales.gov.uk)

3.2 There has been a tangible improvement trend since December 2008 as illustrated by Chart a overleaf.

Chart a.

### All Wales Performance



- 3.3 The 8 minute response time target has been met during 7 of the last 12 months. The highest percentage of immediately life-threatened patients to receive an ambulance arrival within 8 minutes, since records on response times began in March 2006, was achieved in September 2009. During that month 67.1% of Category A 999 calls arrived within 8 minutes.
- 3.4 In July and August, performances of 63.9% and 64.6% respectively were achieved. During this two month period, and in October and November, the impact from swine was severely felt by the ambulance service. Its capacity to respond was stretched, both in terms of vehicles and staff, with the increased clinical safety measures required to reduce the risk of infection (within ambulances and at A&E / hospitals departments) resulted in significantly increased handover times for patients). The impact of this was felt by the Trust which recorded high levels of sickness absence, as a result of flu related issues and the increased stress and pressure placed on staff who were providing services in very difficult circumstances e.g. with staff routinely working extremely long hours (15 hour shifts) to ensure ambulance services could continue to operate. For example, the Trust experienced a sickness absence rate of 8.2% in November 2009, an increase of 1.9% when compared to November 2008. This larger than expected absence rate had a significant bearing on performance during following months when the Trust found difficulty in matching the staffing resources available to it with spiralling winter pressures.
- 3.5 The severity of the weather conditions over the winter period of 2009 was also unprecedented. The Trust had plans in place to deal with the expected seasonal increase in activity during December / the Christmas period, which were expected to deliver the 65% national all Wales target. However, the severity of the weather conditions towards the end of the month and through to the New Year was unprecedented. This continued into February, and created significant problems with regard to access to towns/properties as well as severely reducing driving speeds. As a result, travel times were significantly increased and the national 8 minute response time standard was extremely difficult to achieve.
- 3.6 Despite the weather conditions, the Trust achieved a performance of 59.4% during December 2009. This represents an increase of 11.8% when compared to December 2008, and is the highest performance achieved during the month of December since records began.

- 3.7 In summary, there is a clear upward trend in performance across Wales which has been achieved despite the Trust being faced with truly exceptional circumstances beyond its control; swine flu and an extraordinary spell of severe weather. It is believed that without these two issues, performance would have been better than that achieved.

#### 4. Regional analysis

- 4.1 The North Wales Region achieved the 60% equity target during every month in 2009. See *figure 2* below for a data table on the Region's performance against the 8 minute target since December 2008.

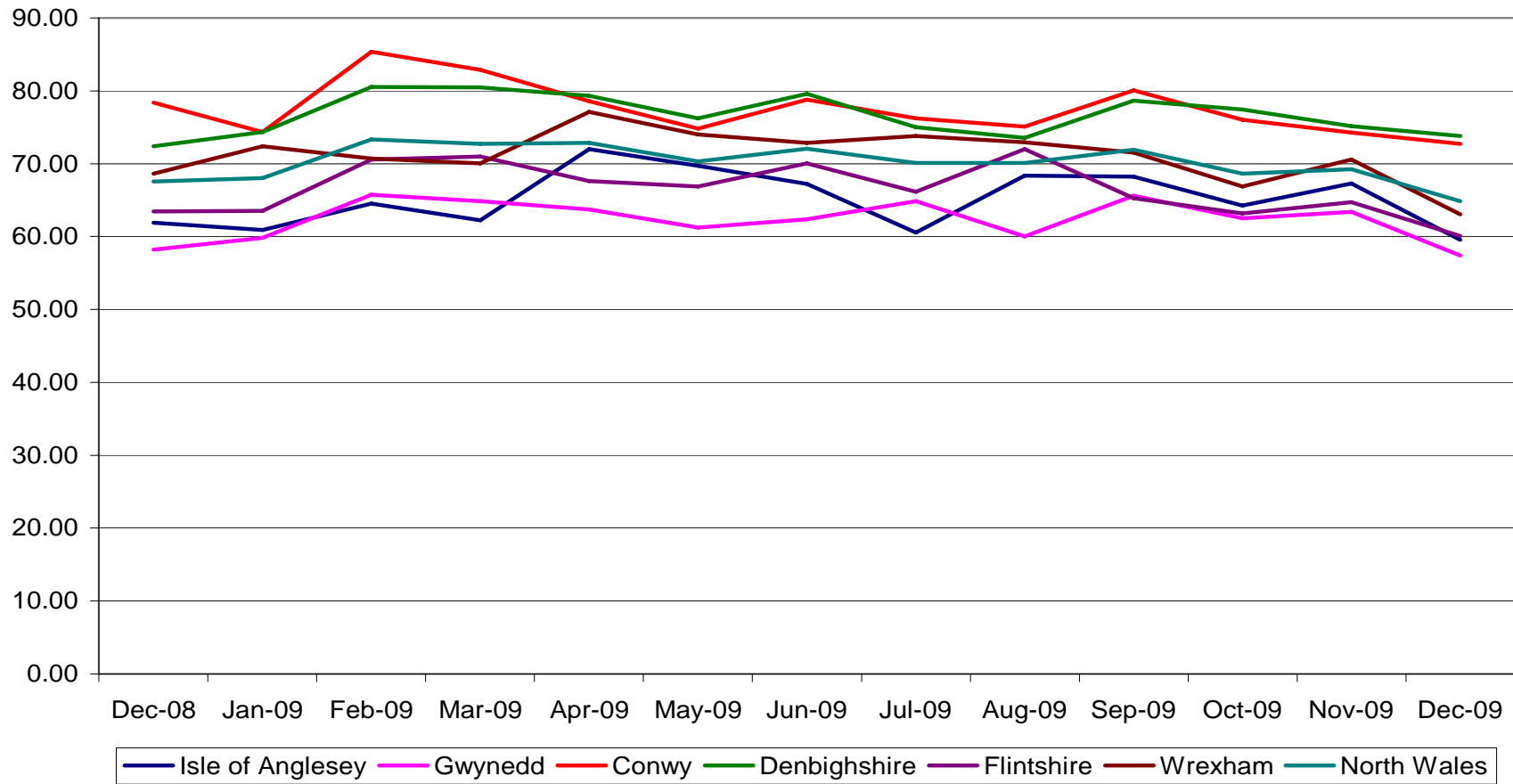
*Figure 2.* Percentage of calls resulting in an emergency response arriving within 8 minutes (Category A)

Date	Dec-08	Jan-09	Feb-09	Mar-09	Apr-09	May-09	Jun-09	Jul-09	Aug-09	Sep-09	Oct-09	Nov-09	Dec-09
Isle of Anglesey	61.92	60.89	64.53	62.23	71.98	69.67	67.20	60.54	68.34	68.21	64.29	67.26	59.57
Gwynedd	58.21	59.81	65.73	64.86	63.72	61.21	62.39	64.86	60.04	65.62	62.50	63.36	57.42
Conwy	78.36	74.34	85.35	82.84	78.57	74.78	78.75	76.25	75.06	80.05	76.03	74.25	72.71
Denbighshire	72.41	74.31	80.56	80.47	79.34	76.21	79.58	75.00	73.54	78.62	77.44	75.12	73.81
Flintshire	63.42	63.52	70.57	70.99	67.59	66.89	70.02	66.12	72.00	65.27	63.19	64.69	60.10
Wrexham	68.61	72.36	70.68	70.05	77.08	74.03	72.85	73.83	72.91	71.52	66.91	70.59	63.05
<b>North Wales</b>	<b>67.54</b>	<b>68.04</b>	<b>73.33</b>	<b>72.73</b>	<b>72.89</b>	<b>70.28</b>	<b>72.08</b>	<b>70.14</b>	<b>70.10</b>	<b>71.90</b>	<b>68.63</b>	<b>69.23</b>	<b>64.85</b>

- 4.2 Both the Conwy and Denbighshire Local Authority areas achieved a performance of above 70% against the 8 minute target throughout 2009. Performance decreased across the Region from October onwards as a result of an unusually high increase in sickness absence, and in view of the unprecedented weather conditions during December.
- 4.3 Chart *b* overleaf illustrates that the variation in performance across the region has reduced over the past 12 months.

Chart b.

### North Wales Performance



4.4 The Central and West Region consistently achieved a performance of above 60% between March and November 2009. See *figure 3* below for a data table on the Region's performance against the 8 minute target since December 2008.

*Figure 3.*

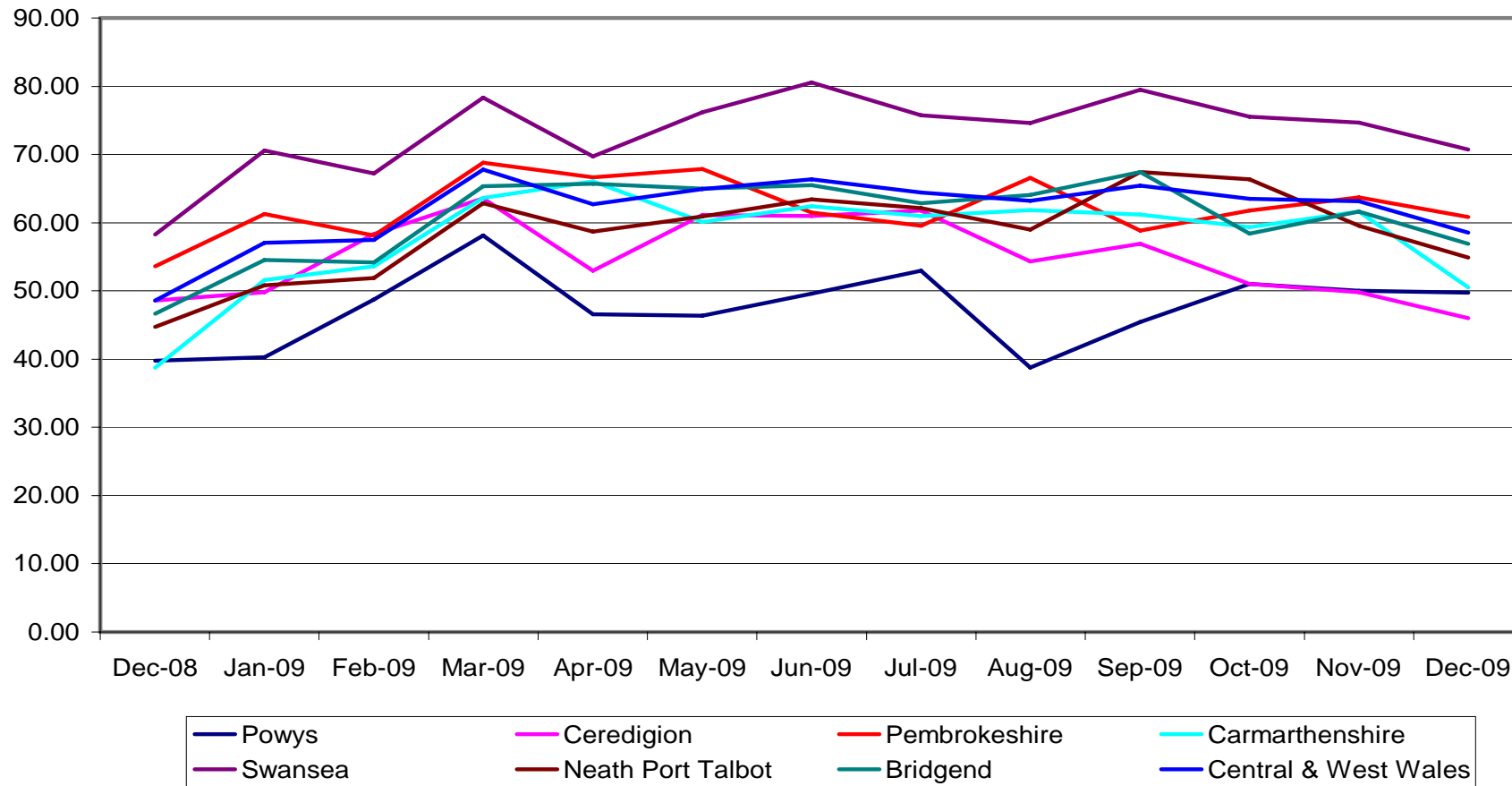
<b>Date</b>	<b>Dec-08</b>	<b>Jan-09</b>	<b>Feb-09</b>	<b>Mar-09</b>	<b>Apr-09</b>	<b>May-09</b>	<b>Jun-09</b>	<b>Jul-09</b>	<b>Aug-09</b>	<b>Sep-09</b>	<b>Oct-09</b>	<b>Nov-09</b>	<b>Dec-09</b>
Powys	39.78	40.25	48.69	58.14	46.57	46.37	49.57	52.98	38.75	45.40	51.04	50.00	49.71
Ceredigion	48.56	49.79	58.33	63.57	52.92	61.09	60.94	61.76	54.32	56.88	50.99	49.77	46.02
Pembrokeshire	53.60	61.27	58.08	68.78	66.67	67.82	61.48	59.55	66.60	58.82	61.80	63.70	60.86
Carmarthenshire	38.77	51.56	53.59	63.60	66.09	60.09	62.42	61.01	61.82	61.21	59.36	61.63	50.52
Swansea	58.27	70.61	67.22	78.35	69.72	76.14	80.52	75.74	74.60	79.50	75.54	74.63	70.69
Neath Port Talbot	44.69	50.83	51.90	62.83	58.71	60.93	63.44	62.10	58.97	67.44	66.38	59.52	54.91
Bridgend	46.66	54.50	54.20	65.34	65.68	64.98	65.50	62.85	64.04	67.40	58.37	61.59	56.90
<b>Central &amp; West Wales</b>	<b>48.59</b>	<b>57.01</b>	<b>57.45</b>	<b>67.80</b>	<b>62.67</b>	<b>64.91</b>	<b>66.38</b>	<b>64.40</b>	<b>63.18</b>	<b>65.45</b>	<b>63.49</b>	<b>63.12</b>	<b>58.53</b>

4.5 The Swansea Local Authority area achieved a performance of 70% and beyond during 9 of the past 10 months. See chart c overleaf for further detail on the Region's performance since December 2008. Performance decreased across the Region from December onwards as a result of an unusually high increase in sickness absence, and in view of the unprecedented weather conditions. The rural areas of Powys, Carmarthenshire and Ceredigion were particularly badly affected as a result of access issues.



Chart c.

### Central & West Performance



4.6 All Local Authority areas in the South East Region have shown a marked improvement over 2009. See figure 4 below for further detail.

Figure 4.

Date	Dec-08	Jan-09	Feb-09	Mar-09	Apr-09	May-09	Jun-09	Jul-09	Aug-09	Sep-09	Oct-09	Nov-09	Dec-09
Vale of Glamorgan	41.58	49.51	50.00	64.58	57.02	62.17	63.33	64.57	55.62	67.00	67.55	63.77	63.94
Cardiff	41.76	57.62	51.87	60.12	68.81	70.61	73.93	69.50	71.98	71.83	71.26	70.45	65.97
Rhondda Cynon Taff	37.19	52.50	48.71	54.20	57.81	61.35	57.03	57.99	53.48	53.78	59.77	60.17	46.59
Merthyr Tydfil	56.67	65.67	64.74	65.24	72.07	70.50	72.58	65.70	62.69	71.20	70.20	70.30	57.81
Caerphilly	43.19	56.00	57.66	61.89	63.60	68.71	65.59	60.18	60.04	64.23	67.76	66.96	52.38
Blaenau Gwent	33.52	52.99	53.39	64.92	70.54	69.35	59.92	63.73	66.67	71.06	74.33	65.97	56.58
Torfaen	17.94	39.94	40.39	46.91	50.88	49.64	53.55	40.77	62.12	68.97	70.17	68.56	56.15
Monmouthshire	30.53	50.55	45.93	52.66	57.14	56.03	45.54	47.12	49.79	50.22	52.65	52.55	52.52
Newport	31.18	49.83	49.79	63.45	70.57	69.41	62.96	53.31	68.39	71.43	69.49	67.91	58.87
<b>South East Wales</b>	<b>37.58</b>	<b>53.29</b>	<b>51.27</b>	<b>59.19</b>	<b>63.51</b>	<b>65.49</b>	<b>63.68</b>	<b>60.18</b>	<b>62.52</b>	<b>65.71</b>	<b>67.25</b>	<b>65.87</b>	<b>57.01</b>

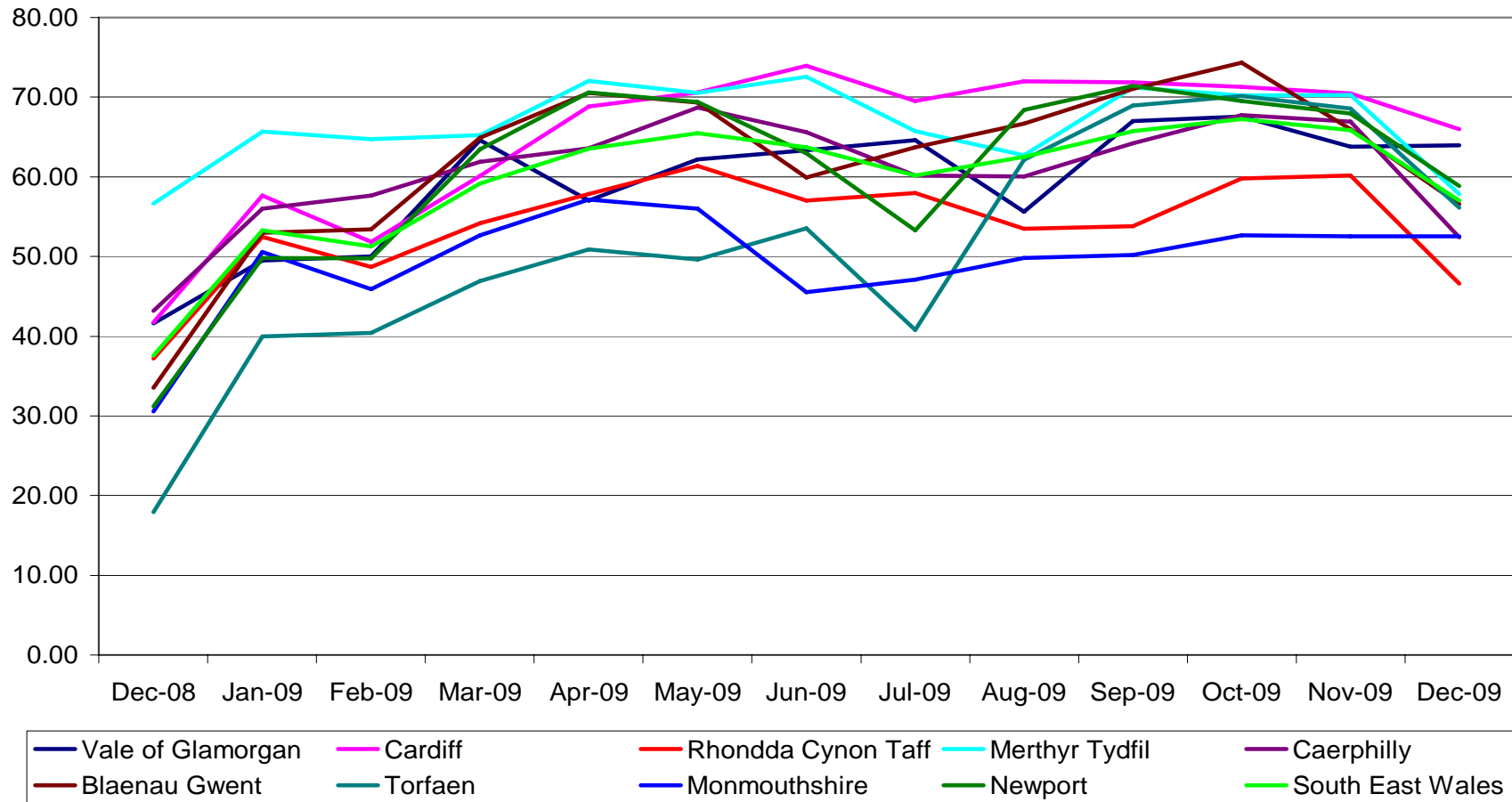
4.7 Variation in performance across the Region has reduced significantly over the past 12 months. There was a disparity of just under 40% between the best (Merthyr) and worst (Torfaen) performing areas in December 2008. This reduced significantly to a difference of 19% in December 2009, when the best performing area (Cardiff) achieved 66%, and the worst (RCT) achieved 47% against the 8 minute target. Performance decreased across the Region from December onwards as a result of an unusually high increase in sickness absence, and in view of the unprecedented weather conditions.

4.8 The Region has achieved performance in excess of 60% during 8 of the past 9 months.

4.9 The reduction in performance variation and an overall improvement trend is illustrated by chart *d.* overleaf.

Chart d.

### South East Performance



## 5. Improvement in specific LHB areas

- 5.1 There have been difficulties in improving performance in four particular issues: Torfaen, Rhondda Cynon Taf, Powys and Monmouthshire.
- 5.2 All four areas have improved markedly over the past 12 months. See *figure 5* below for performance against the 8 minute Target.

*Figure 5.*

Date	Dec-08	Jan-09	Feb-09	Mar-09	Apr-09	May-09	Jun-09	Jul-09	Aug-09	Sep-09	Oct-09	Nov-09	Dec-09
Powys	39.78	40.25	48.69	58.14	46.57	46.37	49.57	52.98	38.75	45.40	51.04	50.00	49.71
RCT	37.19	52.50	48.71	54.20	57.81	61.35	57.03	57.99	53.48	53.78	59.77	60.17	46.59
Torfaen	17.94	39.94	40.39	46.91	50.88	49.64	53.55	40.77	62.12	68.97	70.17	68.56	56.15
Monmouthshire	30.53	50.55	45.93	52.66	57.14	56.03	45.54	47.12	49.79	50.22	52.65	52.55	52.52

- 5.3 The Torfaen locality has achieved a significant improvement in performance, meeting the 60% equity target for four of the past 5 months. The locality also improved its performance by 38% in December 2009, when compared to December 2008.
- 5.4 Chart e overleaf demonstrates the improvements achieved by the four areas since 2009.

Chart e.

### Improvement in Specific Areas

