

## CABINET ITEM COVERING SHEET PROFORMA

**AGENDA ITEM**

**REPORT TO CABINET**

**9 JULY 2009**

**REPORT OF CORPORATE  
MANAGEMENT TEAM**

### **CABINET DECISION**

**CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE – LEAD CABINET MEMBER – COUNCILLOR ALEX CUNNINGHAM**

#### **CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE WORKLOAD PRESSURES**

1. Summary

- 1.1 Following the death of Baby Peter in Haringey and the subsequent progress report by Lord Laming, many Local Authorities across the country have reported an upsurge in the numbers of social care referrals being received.
- 1.2 It is also considered likely that the current economic climate is at least partially responsible for this rise, as financial hardship puts families under increased pressure and stress.
- 1.3 This trend has been mirrored locally with a marked rise in numbers of referrals which has translated into significant workload pressures throughout the social care system.
- 1.4 The purpose of this report is to provide Cabinet with a brief overview of these pressures as of 31 May 2009 (most recent available information), with a view to providing further update reports on a regular basis.

2. Recommendations

Cabinet is requested to:

- 2.1 Note the increase in social care referrals, children subject to a child protection plan, looked after children and the associated impact this is having on workload and budget.
- 2.2 Receive further update reports on a bi monthly basis in order to monitor the current rise in workload pressures.

3. Reasons for the Recommendations/Decision(s)

There is a significant and continuing rise in social care workload which could potentially impact on the Council's ability to effectively safeguard children, fulfil statutory duties and remain within allocated budget.

4. Members' Interests

Members (including co-opted Members with voting rights) should consider whether they have a personal interest in the item as defined in the Council's code of conduct (**paragraph 8**) and, if so, declare the existence and nature of that interest in accordance with paragraph 9 of the code.

Where a Member regards him/herself as having a personal interest in the item, he/she must then consider whether that interest is one which a member of the public, with knowledge of the relevant facts, would reasonably regard as so significant that it is likely to prejudice the Member's judgement of the public interest (**paragraphs 10 and 11 of the code of conduct**).

A Member with a prejudicial interest in any matter must withdraw from the room where the meeting considering the business is being held -

- in a case where the Member is attending a meeting (including a meeting of a select committee) but only for the purpose of making representations, answering questions or giving evidence, provided the public are also allowed to attend the meeting for the same purpose whether under statutory right or otherwise, immediately after making representations, answering questions or giving evidence as the case may be;
- in any other case, whenever it becomes apparent that the business is being considered at the meeting;

and must not exercise executive functions in relation to the matter and not seek improperly to influence the decision about the matter (**paragraph 12 of the Code**).

**Further to the above, it should be noted that any Member attending a meeting of Cabinet, Select Committee etc; whether or not they are a Member of the Cabinet or Select Committee concerned, must declare any personal interest which they have in the business being considered at the meeting (unless the interest arises solely from the Member's membership of, or position of control or management on any other body to which the Member was appointed or nominated by the Council, or on any other body exercising functions of a public nature, when the interest only needs to be declared if and when the Member speaks on the matter), and if their interest is prejudicial, they must also leave the meeting room, subject to and in accordance with the provisions referred to above.**

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2. It is also considered likely that the current economic climate is at least partially responsible for this rise, as financial hardship puts families under increased pressure and stress.
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**RECOMMENDATIONS**

Cabinet is requested to:

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**DETAIL**

**1. Referrals and Assessments**

- 1.1 There has been a gradual increase in the numbers of referrals being received over the last three years, as can be seen from Table 1. The numbers of initial assessments have increased dramatically however, rising from 1274 in 2007 to 1864 in 2009.

<b>Table 1: Referrals and Assessments (Last 3 Years)</b>			
<b>Year End (At 31 March)</b>	<b>Referrals</b>	<b>Initial Assessments</b>	<b>Core Assessments</b>
2007	1730	1274	585
2008	1673	1400	431
2009	1921	1864	657

\* Information not available

- 1.2 As illustrated by Table 2, in 2009/10 the numbers of referrals have increased significantly. The levels reported for April and May are the highest monthly levels recorded at any time over the last three years. If this were to continue, the projected number of referrals for 2009/10 would be in excess of 2700, which is substantially higher than any of the previous three years.

<b>Table 2: Referrals and Assessments (2009/10)</b>			
<b>Month</b>	<b>Referrals</b>	<b>Initial Assessments</b>	<b>Core Assessments</b>
April	222	162	27
May	234	144	32

## **2. Child Protection**

- 2.1 As shown by Table 3, there has been a significant increase in the numbers of initial child protection conferences held which has led to a dramatic rise in the numbers of children subject to a child protection plan from 128 at the end of March 2007 to 212 at the end of March 2009 (previously referred to as the child protection register).

<b>Table 3: Initial Child Protection Conferences (Last 3 Years)</b>				
<b>Year End (At 31 March)</b>	<b>Child Protection (Section 47) Investigations</b>	<b>Conferences</b>	<b>Children becoming subject to Child Protection Plan</b>	<b>Children subject to Child Protection Plan (Total)</b>
2007	396	198	180	128
2008	371	230	202	160
2009	512	272	236	212

2.2 Table 4 clearly demonstrates that since April of this year this trend has continued, with May being an exceptionally busy month in terms of the numbers of child protection investigations and conferences held.

<b>Table 4: Initial Child Protection Conferences (2009/10)</b>					
<b>Month</b>	<b>Child Protection (Section 47) Investigations</b>	<b>Conferences</b>	<b>Reason for Conference</b>	<b>Children becoming subject to Child Protection Plan</b>	<b>Children subject to Child Protection Plan (Total)</b>
April	52	24	N – 5 N&E – 3 P – 1 P&E – 7 S – 3	19	209
May	88	33	E – 3 N – 10 N&E – 2 N&P – 1 P – 7 P&E – 3 S – 2	28	218

<b>Table 5: Reason for Conference</b>	
<b>Key</b>	<b>Reason</b>
E	Emotional Abuse
N	Neglect
P	Physical Abuse
S	Sexual Abuse

2.3 One emerging theme which is worth highlighting is the apparent rise in the numbers of children being subject to 'transfer in' child protection conferences this year. This occurs when a child is already subject to a child protection plan in another area and moves into Stockton-on-Tees. Between April and 17 June 2009, child protection conferences were held in respect of 13 children (3 families), with 11 children becoming subject to a child protection plan. In the same time period, 7 children were subject to 'transfer in' conferences to other areas. This is a net increase in 4 in less than three months, which will be monitored closely, as it appears to contrast sharply with 2008/09, when there was a net decrease of 3 children subject to child protection plans for the whole year.

2.4 Given the level of increase in child protection investigations and conferences during April and May, an analysis of the 'conversion rate' has been conducted ie the percentage of referrals that subsequently led to a child protection plan. For the same period in 2008 this was 2.3%, whereas in 2009 this had risen slightly to 3.5%. It is too early to say whether this is significant and is the beginning of an upward trend at this stage, but this will be monitored closely as the year progresses.

### 3. Looked After System

3.1 As illustrated by Table 6, the number of looked after children in Stockton-on-Tees has steadily increased over the last three years. Although the numbers of children placed in external residential placements has remained stable, the overall increase in the looked after population has resulted in an associated increase in the numbers of children being placed in independent fostering agency placements.

Year End (At 31 March)	LAC Admissions	Overall LAC Population	Independent Fostering Agency Placements	External Residential Placements	Family and Friend Placements
2007	115	188	30	19	16
2008	123	225	40	18	19
2009	133	239	46	18	24

3.2 Table 7 shows that the overall upward trend has continued since April 2009, with the predominant reason for becoming looked after being N1 (abuse or neglect). This is perhaps not surprising given the media attention and focus on safeguarding children since events in Haringey.

3.3 As in previous years the numbers of external residential placements remains stable, but there is already evidence of a continuing rise in the number of independent fostering agency placements being made.

Month	Admissions	Reason for Admission	Overall LAC Population	Independent Fostering Agency Placements	External Residential Placements	Family and Friend Placements
April	14	N1 – 9 N4 – 3 N5 – 1 N6 – 1	239	4	0	1
May	15	N1 – 13 N4 – 1 N6 – 1	245	5	1	2

Code	Definition
N1	Abuse or Neglect
N2	Disability
N3	Parental Illness or Disability
N4	Family in Acute Stress
N5	Family Dysfunction
N6	Socially Unacceptable Behaviour
N7	Low Income
N8	Absent Parenting

3.4 An analysis of the 'conversion rate' i.e. the percentage of referrals that subsequently led to a child becoming looked after highlights that for the same period in 2008 this was 2.3%, whereas in 2009 this had fallen slightly to 1.5%. As before, it is too early to say whether this is significant and is the beginning of a trend, but this will also be monitored closely as the year progresses.

#### **4. Staffing and Allocations**

4.1 At present there is a well documented national shortage of qualified and experienced social workers, with most local authorities reporting some level of difficulty in recruitment and retention. Whilst these difficulties have been reflected locally and there has been a reliance on agency staff to fill vacant posts over the last three years, we are currently in a relatively positive position where we only have 4.8 vacancies, plus one temporary vacancy as a result of an 'acting up' arrangement. Four of these are covered on a temporary basis by agency staff. Two of these agency staff have recently been offered permanent contracts.

4.2 One of the key actions to address the need for social workers locally is the cadetship scheme which was launched in 2004 to 'grow our own' talent and attract young people into a career in social work. Whilst studying towards the social work degree qualification, cadets are paid a bursary allowance, subsistence and all course fees, which totals approximately £30k per cadet over the duration of the scheme. The first cadet has recently qualified and has now taken up employment with us. There are eight cadets due to qualify in summer 2010 and a further 2 due to qualify in summer 2011.

4.3 Despite these efforts, there are continuing difficulties in filling key posts, both at social; work practitioner and management levels. To illustrate this point, the Duty Team Manager and Operational Safeguarding Manager posts are both vacant at present. The Duty Team Manager post has been advertised externally on one occasion previously but the level of candidates who applied were not sufficiently experienced or skilled. This is now being readvertised with a 'golden hello' attached. It is considered likely that the Operational Safeguarding Manager will also be a difficult post to recruit to, so a decision has been taken to advertise this nationally in *The Guardian* in order to recruit as strong a field as possible.

4.4 Coupled with the significant rise in workload outlined earlier in the report, these ongoing recruitment issues create difficulties in the allocation of work. Stockton-on-Tees is committed to safe and manageable workloads for social work staff, but clearly it is less than ideal to have unallocated work at any time.

4.5 Although we are no longer required to report the numbers of unallocated child protection cases nationally, it is worth noting that the accepted definition of an allocated case is one which has a named social worker who is actively working the case.

4.6 All new cases referred to social care where there are child protection concerns will be responded to by the Duty Team and investigated within 24 hours, however when a case moves from the Duty Team to the Specialist Team for ongoing intervention (or for subsequent case transfers) it is not always possible for a social worker to immediately pick up the case.

4.7 Whenever it is not possible to immediately allocate the case to a named social worker, the case would be held on a temporary basis by the appropriate team manager, who would ensure that partner agencies are appropriately notified and all essential tasks such as core group meetings and visits to children are undertaken. This process would also apply to looked after children cases. Any unallocated cases are reported to both Head of Service and Director on a fortnightly basis.

4.8 In an effort to effectively manage rising workloads and cover for staff vacancies, the use of limited Saturday overtime has been agreed for staff volunteering to take on additional work over and above their regular caseloads. This has enabled work to be safely allocated and effectively progressed when otherwise it would not have been possible to do this.

4.9 As of 16 June 2009, there are six unallocated child protection cases and two unallocated looked after child case, roughly equating to a full-time social worker's caseload. As always, every effort will be made to ensure that these cases are appropriately allocated as soon as possible.

## **5. Budgetary Impact**

5.1 These pressures are likely to have a significant impact on the Children, Education and Social Care budget for 2009/10 in three key areas.

5.2 Firstly the independent fostering agency budget, which is £2,079,874 for 2009/10. The current spend (to 31 May 2009) is £402,753. On that basis, the projected expenditure for the year (based on a further three placements only) is £2,265,453 i.e. an overspend of £185,579.

5.3 The second area which could potentially be affected is the children's homes agency placements budget, which is set at £1,776,897 for 2009/10. The current spend (to 31 May 2009) is £414,830. On that basis, the projected expenditure for the year (based on no additional placements) is £1,764,626 i.e. an underspend of £12,271.

5.4 It is worth highlighting that both of these budgets are particularly volatile due to the high cost of individual placements. A small variation either way in the number of children placed has a major impact on the overall projection, which makes budget forecasting especially difficult in this area.

5.5 The third potential budget pressure relates to staffing. Given it is still relatively early in the year this is difficult to quantify at this stage, however. It is worth noting that the use of agency staff to cover vacant posts is both expensive and unsatisfactory, as the quality of staff is extremely variable and they can leave at very short notice. Attempts will therefore continue to recruit permanent social workers, using a variety of measures such as 'golden hellos' in order to make Stockton-on-Tees as attractive an employer as possible to prospective candidates, although this also has a potential budgetary impact.

5.6 Further information in relation to this issue will be brought forward to Cabinet as the year progresses.

5.7 The increase in child protection conferences and looked after children reviews has resulted in pressures being experienced within the Review Unit due to the significant increase in the number of meetings to be chaired. It is too early to quantify these precisely at this stage, but if the current trend was to continue this would result in additional staffing being required. This will be monitored and further information will be brought back to Cabinet in subsequent reports.

5.8 There has also been a corresponding increase in court activity which has resulted in difficulties for the Legal Department in providing adequate solicitor cover. This is being addressed by increasing hours for existing staff and the recruitment of an additional part-time Assistant Solicitor.



## **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

6. As outlined above these workload pressures are likely to have a significant impact on the Children, Education and Social Care budget outturn for 2009/10. This will be monitored closely and highlighted in future reports to Cabinet. This will also form part of mainstream budget reporting through the usual channels.
7. It is estimated that the additional staffing costs within the Legal Department attributable to children's issues will be in the region of £30k for 2009/10.

## **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

8. There are no specific legal implications which have been identified at this stage.

## **RISK ASSESSMENT**

9. There are four risks relating to this area of activity which have been already been identified and included in the service group risk register. These are listed below with their current risk score.
  - Demographic changes and demand for services (CESC02)  
Current score: 16
  - Finance & resource availability in all CESC Services (CESC07)  
Current score: 12
  - Placement of adults and young people with complex needs (CESC12)  
Current score: 16
  - Serious injury or death leading to a Serious Case Review (CESC14)  
Current score: 20
10. The impact of continuing social care workload pressures on these risks will continue to be monitored closely and risk scores amended as appropriate. Any changes will be highlighted in future reports to Cabinet and will also form part of mainstream risk reporting through the usual channels.

## **COMMUNITY STRATEGY IMPLICATIONS**

11. The safeguarding of children is a key component of the children and young people theme in the Community Strategy. Improving outcomes for children by effective service delivery will also impact on their potential quality of life in adulthood.
12. The effective safeguarding of children and young people will also have a significant impact on the community safety agenda.

## **CORPORATE PARENTING**

13. For those children who are looked after, the Council has a responsibility as Corporate Parent to ensure that their needs are appropriately met.
14. As service pressures and workload increases, this could potentially impact on the Council's ability to effectively fulfil its responsibilities as Corporate Parent.

## **CONSULTATION INCLUDING WARD/COUNCILLORS**

15. No consultation has taken place in relation to this issue at this stage.

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Background Papers

The Protection of Children in England: A Progress Report HMSO 2009.  
The Protection of Children in England: Action Plan HMSO 2009.

Ward(s) and Ward Councillors

Not applicable.

Property

There are no implications for Council property.