

CABINET ITEM COVERING SHEET PROFORMA

AGENDA ITEM

REPORT TO CABINET

1 OCTOBER 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 Peter Connelly 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 continue to keep Cabinet updated on these pressures further to the initial report on 9 July 2009. This report is based on information until the end of July 2009 (most recent available information). Further reports will be brought on a bi monthly basis.

2. Recommendations

Cabinet is requested to:

- 2.1 Note the continued workload pressures within the social care system and the associated impact this is having on caseloads, performance and budget.
- 2.2 Receive further update reports on a bi monthly basis in order to continue to monitor the impact of these workload pressures.
- 2.3 Note the update relating to Ofsted inspections of contact, referral and assessment.

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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SUMMARY

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RECOMMENDATIONS

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DETAIL

1. Referrals and Assessments

- 1.1 As illustrated by Table 1, the number of referrals has reduced in June and July of this year as compared with the dramatic increase in the previous two months.

Month	Referrals	Initial Assessments	Core Assessments
April	222	162	27
May	234	144	32
June	199	166	42
July	173	124	51

- 1.2 A 'dip' in the numbers of referrals is common during July and August, linked to school holidays, so the numbers of referrals in September and October will be critical in determining whether this has been a seasonal 'dip' or the beginnings of a levelling off in terms of referral numbers.
- 1.3 The numbers of initial assessments has also started to fall, linked to the reduction in referrals, but the numbers of core assessments remains high as the referrals from May and June work their way through the system. The numbers of core assessments should begin to fall in August and September as a result of the reduction in referrals and assessments during July.

2. Child Protection

- 2.1 Table 2 shows that, linked to the reduced number of referrals and initial assessments, there has been a corresponding reduction in the number of Section 47 investigations during June and July of this year.
- 2.2 The number of child protection conferences remains high however, and this has been translated into a continued rise in the number of children becoming subject to a child protection plan and a consequent increase in the overall numbers of children subject to a child protection plan.

Month	Child Protection (Section 47) Investigations	Conferences	Reason for Conference	Children becoming subject to Child Protection Plan	Children subject to Child Protection Plan (Total)
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
June	54	30	E – 3 N – 9 N&E – 3 N&P – 1 P – 2 P&E – 10 P&S – 1	29	234
July	48	36	E – 3 N – 12 N&E – 3 N&P – 7 P – 5 P&E – 3 S – 1 N&S – 1	35	240

Key	Reason
E	Emotional Abuse
N	Neglect
P	Physical Abuse
S	Sexual Abuse

2.3 In terms of the reasons for child protection conferences it is worth noting the numbers of cases where neglect is seen as a significant issue appears to be increasing both in real terms and as a proportion of the number of conferences overall. This will be monitored closely and should this apparent trend continue it will be worth undertaking some more in depth study of the reasons behind this.

2.4 In June and July the 'conversion rate' ie the percentage of referrals that subsequently led to a child protection plan was 4.5%, whereas in April and May this was 3.5%. This will continue to be monitored closely as the year progresses.

3. Looked After System

3.1 It can be seen from Table 3 that the numbers of children entering the looked after system increased in June, but then reduced in July.

3.2 The overall numbers of children looked after continues to rise and has exceeded 250 for the first time in the last three years.

3.3 In June and July the 'conversion rate' ie the percentage of referrals that subsequently led to a child becoming looked after was 2.3%, whereas in April and May this was 1.5%. This will continue to be monitored closely as the year progresses.

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
June	16	N1–14 N4 – 1 N8 – 1	247	0	0	0
July	12	N1 – 8 N3 – 1 N4 – 1 N5 – 1 N6 – 1	251	1	0	1

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

4. Staffing and Allocations

- 4.1 The difficulties in filling key posts continue, particularly at management levels. Both the Duty Team Manager and Operational Safeguarding Manager posts remain vacant following external recruitment exercises, although are filled by agency managers on an interim basis. In addition the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) and Throughcare Team Manager posts are also vacant following unsuccessful attempts to recruit. These two posts are being covered internally on a temporary basis. All posts will be externally readvertised in the Autumn.
- 4.2 In terms of social work posts, the situation has improved slightly from the 4.8 vacancies previously to 2.8 vacancies at the end of July. This apparent improvement does mask the overall pressures the service is under to some extent with 4 very experienced staff absent for a variety of reasons such as maternity leave, secondment, sickness and suspension.
- 4.3 At the end of July there were four unallocated child protection cases and no unallocated looked after children cases, which is an improvement from the previously reported position of six unallocated child protection cases and two unallocated looked after children cases. Every effort is being made to ensure that these cases are appropriately allocated as soon as possible and in the meantime the cases are being held on a temporary basis by the appropriate team manager, who is responsible for ensuring that partner agencies are appropriately notified and all essential tasks such as meetings and visits are undertaken.

5. Budgetary Impact

- 5.1 These pressures continue to have an impact on the Children, Education and Social Care budget for 2009/10 in four key areas. This is being considered as part of the overall Medium Term Financial Plan position.
- 5.2 Firstly the independent fostering agency budget, which is £2,079,874 for 2009/10. The current spend (to 31 July 2009) is £772,157. On that basis, the projected expenditure for the year (based on a further 3 placements) is £2,329,600 ie an overspend of £249,726.
- 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 July 2009) is £692,234. On that basis, the projected expenditure for the year (based on no additional placements) is £1,590,454 ie an underspend of £186,443.
- 5.4 The third area relates to the social work staffing budget, which is £2,511,348 for 2009/10. The current spend (to 30 June 2009) is £658,833. On that basis, the projected expenditure for the year is £2,847,301 ie an overspend of £335,953.
- 5.5 The fourth area relates to the increase in child protection conferences and looked after children reviews which continues to impact on the workload in the review unit. A recent report from the Review Unit highlights an increase of 45% in child protection conferences and 21% in looked after children reviews over the last three years. Whilst to date the increase in workload has been managed using a combination of increased staff hours and agency staff, this is not sustainable given the level of increases being experienced. A report is therefore due to be considered by CTMT shortly exploring the need for permanent additional staff within the review unit to meet this increase. The costs of these proposals will be detailed in a subsequent Cabinet report.
- 5.6 Previous financial pressures linked with the increase in legal costs were highlighted in the report to Cabinet in July 2009.

6. Inspection Framework

- 6.1 The new unannounced inspections of contact, referral and assessment were introduced by Ofsted in April 2009, with the actual inspections commencing in June 2009. Ofsted describes these two day inspections as 'an inspection of front line practice in relation to contact, referral and assessment processes for children in need and children who may be in need of protection and an assessment of how well practice helps to manage risk of harm to children and young people and minimise the incidence of child abuse and neglect'.
- 6.2 Although to date there have been no unannounced inspections within the North East region, all local authorities are scheduled to receive one of these inspections before 31 March 2010.
- 6.3 Following pressure from the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS), Ofsted agreed to drop the use of the term 'serious concerns' in relation to any shortcomings. Feedback letters now are structured under three headings; 'strengths', 'areas for development' and 'areas for priority action'.
- 6.4 To date, 18 inspection letters have been published nationally, half of which had areas for priority action.
- 6.5 There appears to be no direct correlation between local authorities which have previously been judged to be performing highly in relation to safeguarding and the identification of 'areas for priority action', which underlines the very different nature of these inspections from the previous regime.
- 6.6 Looking at the 'areas for priority action' across these Local Authorities, it can be seen how workload pressures are contributing to poor outcomes in these inspections. For example, in one Local Authority, Ofsted judged that 'a lack of capacity in one team including high turnover of staff and historical recruitment difficulties in another leads, in both cases, to some delays in allocating lower priority cases for initial assessment. As a result, front-line managers are left to manage a degree of risk and to continually adjust social workers' priorities. Capacity issues also result in high caseloads and work being held in short-term teams because it cannot be transferred. There are delays in completing lower priority work and maintaining up-to-date electronic records'.
- 6.7 In another Local Authority Ofsted concluded that 'in one of the teams visited there were 50 unallocated referrals, some dating back to March/April 2009, which were awaiting allocation for an initial assessment. All of these cases had been risk assessed and were subject to regular review by managers. There were also 25 cases which had been allocated for workers to carry out initial assessments which had not been completed. Some of these cases had been with the team for some months and, although allocated to a named worker, had not been worked on. In another team, there were 15 cases with initial assessments completed, which were now unallocated due to staffing issues within that team. As a result there is the potential for some children and young people not to receive appropriate services or being safeguarded effectively in a timely manner'.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

7. 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 continue to be monitored closely and highlighted in future reports to Cabinet. This will also form part of mainstream budget reporting through the usual channels.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

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

RISK ASSESSMENT

9. There are three 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
 - 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.