

CABINET ITEM COVERING SHEET PROFORMA

AGENDA ITEM

REPORT TO CABINET

14 JANUARY 2010

**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 October 2009 (most recent available information).

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 quarterly basis in order to continue to monitor the impact of these 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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SUMMARY

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.
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.
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.
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 October 2009 (most recent available information).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Cabinet is requested to:

1. Note the continued workload pressures within the social care system and the associated impact this is having on caseloads, performance and budget.
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DETAIL

1. Referrals and Assessments

- 1.1 As illustrated by Table 1, the number of referrals has continued to fall as compared with the dramatic increase earlier in the year. Given this has now continued into September and October, this does not just appear to be a seasonal 'dip' due to school holidays and now could be the beginning of a levelling off of these pressures.

Month	Referrals	Initial Assessments	Core Assessments
April	222	162	27
May	234	144	32
June	199	166	42
July	173	124	51
August	163	161	71
September	153	124	44
October	150	111	31

- 1.2 The numbers of initial and core assessments have also fallen considerably from the levels earlier in the year.

2. Child Protection

- 2.1 Although the overall number of children who are subject to a child protection plan has steadily increased over the last three months to a peak of 267, the numbers of conferences and children becoming subject to a child protection plan have remained relatively stable.
- 2.2 If the numbers of referrals, initial assessments and core assessments continues to fall, in time it is likely that this will result in a reduction in the overall number of children subject to a child protection plan, although this will not be an immediate impact.
- 2.3 In terms of the reasons for child protection conferences, neglect continues to be a significant and increasing issue. One possible explanation for this is the impact of the current economic downturn. This will now be picked up by Stockton Local Safeguarding Children Board to explore the reasons behind this in more detail.
- 2.4 The 'conversion rate' ie the percentage of referrals that subsequently led to a child protection plan in August, September and October was 3.9%, whereas in June and July this was 4.5%. This will continue to be monitored closely.

Table 2: Initial Child Protection Conferences (2009/10)					
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
August	60	23	E – 4 N – 7 N&E – 6 N&P – 2 P&E – 1	20	257
September	64	23	E – 1 E&S – 2 N – 10 P – 1 P&E – 8	22	263
October	37	25	E – 11 N – 4 N&P – 2 P – 2 P&E – 6	25	267

Table 3: Reason for Conference	
Key	Reason
E	Emotional Abuse
N	Neglect
P	Physical Abuse
S	Sexual Abuse

3. Looked After System

- 3.1 It is evident from Table 3 that the numbers of children entering the looked after system has continued to fluctuate, with no clear observable pattern.
- 3.2 The overall numbers of looked after children peaked at 254 in August but has since reduced slightly to 245 at the end of October.
- 3.3 The 'conversion rate' ie the percentage of referrals that subsequently led to a child becoming looked after in August, September and October was 1.4%, whereas in June and July this was 2.3%. This will continue to be monitored closely.

Table 4: Looked After System (2009/10)						
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
August	11	N1 – 8 N3 – 1 N5 – 2	254	2	0	0
September	16	N1 – 14 N4 – 1 N5 – 1	248	3	0	4
October	12	N1 – 5 N2 – 5 N3 – 1 N6 – 1	245	3	1	4

Table 5: Reason for Admission	
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 Of the management posts previously vacant, the Throughcare Team Manager post has now been appointed to, with the Duty Team Manager and Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) posts still vacant following a further advert. There is also an Independent Reviewing Officer vacancy currently, which has been advertised on one occasion unsuccessfully.
- 4.2 The Operational Safeguarding Manager post has not yet been readvertised, pending further discussions about the organisational structure, although is currently being covered by an interim manager.
- 4.3 In terms of social work posts, the situation has deteriorated slightly from the 2.8 vacancies reported previously to 5 vacancies at the end of October, although 2 of these posts are currently being covered by agency staff. This situation is exacerbated by a further 4 very experienced staff being absent for a variety of reasons such as maternity leave, secondment and sickness.
- 4.4 At the end of October, there were 6 children in need, 4 child protection and 2 looked after children cases which were unallocated. Every effort continues to be 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 October 2009) is £1,367,003. On that basis, the projected expenditure for the year (based on a further 3 placements) is £2,263,336 ie an overspend of £183,462.
- 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 October 2009) is £1,099,432. On that basis, the projected expenditure for the year (based on no additional placements) is £1,632,454 ie an underspend of £144,443.
- 5.4 The third area relates to the social work staffing budget, which is £2,629,239 for 2009/10 (adjusted). The current spend (to 30 September 2009) is £1,379,433. On that basis, the projected expenditure for the year is £2,919,004 ie an overspend of £289,765.
- 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. As a result of the 45% increase in child protection conferences and 21% increase in looked after children reviews over the last three years, a decision has now been made by Children's Trust Management Team to increase the staffing complement by employing one additional Independent Reviewing Officer and one Administrative Assistant post at a cost of £51k per annum.
- 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 Further to the previous report dated 1 October 2009, three Local Authorities in the North East region have now had an unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements.
- 6.2 In preparation for the unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment to take place in Stockton Borough Council, a mock inspection has taken place, carried out by external consultants with experience in this area. This proved to be a valuable learning experience and a number of areas for further development were identified, which are currently in the process of being addressed.

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.