

CABINET ITEM COVERING SHEET PROFORMA

AGENDA ITEM

REPORT TO CABINET

11 MARCH 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 previous report on 14 January 2010. This report is based on information until the end of December 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.
- 2.3 Endorse the introduction of a retention payment in order to recruit and retain staff in 'hard to fill' key social work posts.
- 2.4 Note the attached action plan as the response of Stockton Borough Council and partner agencies to the unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements in Stockton which took place on 5 and 6 January 2010.

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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**REPORT OF CORPORATE
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CABINET DECISION

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

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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.
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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 risen significantly in November and December, in sharp contrast to what had previously appeared to be the beginning of a levelling off of these pressures.
- 1.2 The numbers of initial and core assessments have also substantially increased as a result of the rise in referrals experienced.
- 1.3 An initial analysis has been conducted of the nature and source of these referrals and there is no clear observable trend at this stage. This will continue to be monitored closely.

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
November	179	147	69
December	208	155	80

2. Child Protection

- 2.1 The overall number of children who are subject to a child protection plan has further increased to a peak of 281.
- 2.2 The increase in referrals and assessments experienced through November and December has resulted in a corresponding increase in the number of child protection conferences and children becoming subject to a child protection plan, with December being a particularly busy month.
- 2.3 The 'conversion rate' ie the percentage of referrals that subsequently led to a child protection plan in November and December was 4.9%, compared with 3.9% in August, September and October. It is worth noting that the overall conversion rate for the first 3 quarters of 2009/10 was 8.5%, which was significantly lower than the same period for 2008/9 (13.1%).

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 2: Initial Child Protection Conferences (2009/10) (continued)					
Month	Child Protection (Section 47) Investigations	Conferences	Reason for Conference	Children becoming subject to Child Protection Plan	Children subject to Child Protection Plan (Total)
November	63	23	E&S – 5 N – 2 N&E - 5 N&P – 2 P-2 P&E – 6	22	267
December	39	39	N – 8 N&E – 3 N&P - 7 P – 11 P&E - 6 P&S – 2 S - 1	38	281

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 4 overleaf that the numbers of children entering the looked after system continues to fluctuate, with no clear observable pattern.
- 3.2 The overall number of looked after children remains at 245 at the end of December, the same as the end of October.
- 3.3 The 'conversion rate' ie the percentage of referrals that subsequently led to a child becoming looked after in November and December was 1.2%, compared with 1.4% in August, September and October. Overall, the conversion rate for the first 3 quarters of 2009/10 was 3.2%, slightly lower than the same period for 2008/09 (5.1%).

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
November	5	N1 – 4 N4 – 1	236	0	0	1
December	14	N1 – 10 N3 - 1 N4 – 2 N6 – 1	245	1	0	0

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 Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) post has now been appointed to, with the Duty Team Manager and one Independent Reviewing Officer post remaining vacant.
- 4.2 Following the restructuring of the Operational Management Group (third tier management team) and one manager leaving the Authority, there are now two vacancies; Service Manager, Referral and Assessment (this replaces the previously vacant Operational Safeguarding Manager post) and Service Manager, Fieldwork which are to be advertised shortly.
- 4.3 In terms of social work posts, the situation has deteriorated further from the 5 vacancies at the end of October to 6 posts, although 2 of these posts are currently being covered by agency staff. This situation is exacerbated by a further 5 very experienced staff being absent for a variety of reasons such as maternity leave, secondment and sickness.
- 4.4 At the end of December, there were 2 children in need and 6 child protection cases which were unallocated. Every effort continues to be made to ensure that all cases are appropriately allocated as soon as possible and in the meantime any unallocated cases are 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.
- 4.5 The relative costs of using agency staff as opposed to substantive post holders is set out in Table 6 below. As this demonstrates there is a substantial additional cost incurred to the Local Authority resulting from the ongoing use of agency staff to cover vacant posts.

Job	Agency Costs		Employee Cost		Difference
	Per Hour	Annual Cost	Grade	Annual Salary (inc on costs)	
Social Worker	£34.99	£65,573	Grade L	£40,896	£24,677
Team Manager	£40.00	£77,167	Grade N	£47,508	£29,659
Service Manager	£62.25	£120,091	SM2	£62,784	£57,307

- 4.6 To illustrate this point, the cost of using one agency Service Manager, Team Manager and Social Worker for a year will cost the Council in excess of £110,000 more than the costs of the equivalent substantive posts.
- 4.7 In order to address this, a review of Stockton Borough Council's 'Grow our Own' strategy is currently underway and proposals will be brought back to a future Cabinet meeting. Given this is a longer term strategy, there is an immediate need to improve our ability to recruit and retain qualified social work staff and both practitioner and management levels.
- 4.8 It is therefore proposed to establish retention payments for specific 'hard to fill' posts over a two year period where it can be demonstrated that attempts to recruit at the standard salary level have not been successful due to the particular recruitment market at this time.
- 4.9 The retention payments will be applied to key posts where at least two unsuccessful attempts have been made to recruit on an external basis. The amount paid will be calculated on a pro rata basis according to the post salary and will be weighted towards the second year so as to reward the loyalty of staff who remain with Stockton Borough Council. The average payment for year 1 will be £1,500 and year 2 £2,500.

4.10 Based on the groups included in the initial assessment the overall financial costs are as follows:

Year 1	£102,759
Year 2	£196,318
Total	£299,072

4.11 The introduction of this scheme is considered crucial in order to fill the key posts identified above, which remain vacant despite now having been advertised on a number of occasions.

5. Budgetary Impact

5.1 These pressures continue to have an impact on the Children, Education and Social Care budget for 2009/10 in a number of 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 December 2009) is £1,749,503. On that basis, the projected expenditure for the year (based on a further 3 placements) is £2,267,612 ie an overspend of £187,738.

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 December 2009) is £1,458,075. On that basis, the projected expenditure for the year (based on no additional placements) is £1,746,385 ie an underspend of £30,512.

5.4 The third area relates to the social work staffing budget, which is £2,614,699 for 2009/10 (adjusted). The current spend (to 31 December 2009) is £2,126,757. On that basis, the projected expenditure for the year is £2,902,814 ie an overspend of £288,115.

5.5 Financial pressures linked with the pressures on the Review Unit and Legal Services have been highlighted in previous reports.

5.6 Whilst the introduction of the retention payment will result in a further budget pressure in 2010/11, the impact of this will be offset to a significant degree by a reduction in the overspend on the social work staffing budget, although the impact of this will not be realised until 2011/12.

6. Unannounced Inspection

6.1 Further to the previous report, an unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements was conducted by Ofsted on 5 and 6 January 2010. A copy of the letter detailing the outcome of the inspection is attached as Appendix 1.

6.2 Whilst the inspection highlighted a number of strengths in this service area, it also outlines some significant of challenges for Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council and partner agencies. A number of these had been previously identified by the mock inspection carried out by external consultants in November 2009 and were already in the process of being addressed, as acknowledged by the inspection letter. A robust and comprehensive action plan has been developed and agreed with partner agencies.

6.3 The action plan will be monitored by the Children's Trust Management Team on a monthly basis and updated to reflect progress. A copy of the first updated version is attached at Appendix 2.

7. Organisational Structure

- 7.1 The Integrated Service Area (ISA) structure was well intentioned and introduced with a clear rationale to further integrate services in line with Every Child Matters agenda. Whilst it has been successful in terms of bringing staff from a range of different professional backgrounds together, it has also resulted in a lack of clarity in relation to management accountability.
- 7.2 Whilst the primary motivation for a review of this structure stemmed from concerns relating to social care, it is also worth noting that similar concerns were expressed from a health and youth perspective.
- 7.3 Following a formal consultation period, it has therefore been agreed to move to a new structure based on functional management accountability with effect from 1 April 2010. A copy of the high level structure chart is attached as Appendix 3.
- 7.4 It is important to stress that the new structure will still be based on the principle of establishing co-located locality based teams and integrated service delivery.
- 7.5 Given the previously unsuccessful attempt to recruit to the post of Operational Safeguarding Manager, the approval of the retention payment scheme will be particularly important in order to attract high quality candidates to the posts of Service Manager, Referral and Assessment and Service Manager, Fieldwork which are integral to the success of the new organisational structure.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

8. As outlined above these workload pressures continue to have a significant impact on the Children, Education and Social Care budget outturn for 2009/10. This is also likely to be the case in 2010/11 and will therefore be monitored closely and highlighted in future reports to Cabinet. This will also form part of mainstream budget reporting through the usual channels.
9. These pressures will continue to be managed within the overall Children, Education and Social Care budget, which is currently projecting a £532k underspend for 2009/10.
10. All of the budget pressures outlined in this report, including the proposed retention payment scheme, will be managed within the overall Council budget allocation over the next two years.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

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

RISK ASSESSMENT

12. 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

13. 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

14. 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.
15. The effective safeguarding of children and young people will also have a significant impact on the community safety agenda.

CORPORATE PARENTING

16. For those children who are looked after, the Council has a responsibility as Corporate Parent to ensure that their needs are appropriately met.
17. 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

18. 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.