

CABINET ITEM COVERING SHEET PROFORMA

AGENDA ITEM

REPORT TO CABINET

10 JUNE 2010

**REPORT OF CORPORATE
MANAGEMENT TEAM**

CABINET DECISION

Children and Young People – Lead Cabinet Member – Councillor Mrs McCoy

CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE WORKLOAD PRESSURES

1. Summary

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.

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.

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.

The purpose of this report is to continue to keep Cabinet updated on these pressures further to the previous report on 11 March 2010. This report is based on information until the end of March 2010 (most recent available information).

2. 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.
2. Receive further update reports on a quarterly basis in order to continue to monitor the impact of these workload pressures.
3. Note the final action plan arising from the unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements in Stockton-on-Tees 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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SUMMARY

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RECOMMENDATIONS

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DETAIL

Referrals and Assessments

1. As illustrated by Table 1, the number of referrals has continued to rise sharply between January and March of this year.
2. This has resulted in a substantial increase in the numbers of initial and core assessments, placing the service under extreme pressure.
3. This volume of work will have an impact on key performance indicators, notably initial and core assessment timescales.

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
January	197	164	149
February	242	165	101
March	249	226	76

Child Protection

4. The overall number of children who are subject to a child protection plan has remained at a high level, reaching a peak of 282 in February.
5. This is reflected in the numbers of section 47 investigations, numbers of child protection conferences and children becoming subject to a child protection plan, with March being a particularly busy month.
6. The 'conversion rate' ie the percentage of referrals that subsequently led to a child protection plan in January to March was 5.8% compared with 4.9% in November and December. The overall conversion rate for the reporting year 2009/10 was 9.4%, which is lower than for 2008/9 (12%).

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
January	58	21	E - 1 N&E - 1 N&P - 3 P - 11 P&E - 5	21	278
February	46	31	E - 2 E&S - 2 N - 12 P - 7 P&E - 2	25	282
March	88	37	E - 7 N – 17 N&E - 4 P - 2 P&E – 3 S - 2	35	278

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

Looked After System

7. Whereas previously the looked after population has remained relatively stable, it is now evident from Table 4 that this is beginning to rise steadily, with increased numbers of admissions evident throughout January to March.
8. The overall number of looked after children has therefore increased significantly to a peak of 289 in March.

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
January	20	N1 - 18 N3 - 2	253	1	0	1
February	16	N1 - 16	259	5	0	5
March	37	N1 – 34 N4 – 2 N5 – 1	289	4	1	10

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

9. It is worth noting that the reason for the overwhelming majority of these admissions is 'abuse or neglect' which means that there is little option to these children entering the looked after system.
10. Due to the increased numbers of children entering the looked after system, it has not been possible to place all the children in 'in house' provision leading to a significant rise in the use of external placements. If this trend continues, this will result in a significant budget pressure as the year progresses.
11. The 'conversion rate' ie the percentage of referrals that subsequently led to a child becoming looked after in January, February and March was 4.2%, compared with 1.2% in November and December. The overall conversion rate for the reporting year 2009/10 was 4.5%, which is slightly lower than for 2008/9 (5.4%).

Staffing and Allocations

12. Of the management posts previously vacant, the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) post has now been appointed to, although the Duty Team Manager and Independent Reviewing Officer posts remain vacant despite being advertised again with both a 'golden hello' and retention payment attached.
13. Following the restructuring of the Operational Management Group (third tier management team) and one manager leaving the Authority, the two resulting vacancies; Service Manager, Referral and Assessment and Service Manager, Fieldwork have now been advertised and interviews are to take place shortly.
14. In terms of social work posts, the situation has deteriorated further from the 6 vacancies at the end of December to 7.5 posts, although 2 of these posts are currently being covered by agency staff. This situation is exacerbated by a further 7 very experienced staff being absent for a variety of reasons such as maternity leave, secondment and sickness.
15. Unfortunately it appears that the introduction of the retention payment scheme has had little impact so far in terms of recruitment. This will continue to be monitored closely.
16. It is considered particularly important to recruit to the Duty Team Manager post, so the possibility of regrading or attaching a further financial premium to this post will now be considered.
17. Work has been ongoing to further develop a 'grow our own' strategy with effect from September 2010. A report is to be presented to Children's Trust Management Team (CTMT) shortly for approval and further details will be included in the next Cabinet report regarding this.

18. At the end of March, there were 7 children in need, 16 child protection and 11 looked after children 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.
19. For information, the situation as of 25 May 2010 is that there are 9 children in need, 7 child protection and 4 looked after children cases which are unallocated.
20. Every effort continues to be made in order to allocate cases, but this needs to be balanced with the need to ensure workers have manageable caseloads commensurate with their ability and level of experience. Cases have been distributed across all the social work teams as evenly as possible in order to spread the workload and there is currently no spare capacity within the system. Whilst not ideal, discussions have taken place with Government Office North East (GONE) regarding the possibility of stable looked after children cases being held by unqualified staff. This is currently being explored further and should it be decided to pursue this option, a full risk assessment will be carried out prior to this being introduced.
21. Senior colleagues across the region have been approached regarding the possibility of releasing social workers to assist us at the current time. Whilst supportive, all of the responses received have indicated that other local authorities are also experiencing similar levels of workload pressures and difficulties in the allocation of work currently. Work is being undertaken under the auspices of the Vulnerable Children Safeguarding Network (VCSN) to collate comparative staffing and workload figures on a regional basis and once received these will be attached to a future Cabinet report.

Budgetary Impact

22. These pressures continue to have an impact on the Children, Education and Social Care budget in a number of key areas. This is being considered as part of the overall Medium Term Financial Plan position.
23. Firstly the independent fostering agency budget, which was £2,079,874 for 2009/10. The outturn for 2009/10 was £2,380,667 ie an overspend of £300,793.
24. Secondly the children's homes agency placements budget, which was set at £1,776,897 for 2009/10. The outturn for 2009/10 was £1,881,862 ie an overspend of £104,965.
25. Thirdly the social work staffing budget, which was set at £2,614,699 for 2009/10. The final outturn was £2,925,371 ie an overspend of £306,482.
26. Financial pressures linked with the pressures on the Review Unit and Legal Services have been highlighted in previous reports.
27. Given the further rise in workload outlined in this report it is expected that all of these budget pressures will continue into 2010/11.

Unannounced Inspection

28. Further to the previous report, the action plan has been monitored by the Children's Trust Management Team (CTMT) on a monthly basis. The final version was considered at CTMT on 5 May 2010 and is attached at Appendix 1 for information.
29. At this meeting it was noted that the majority of the actions have now been completed and fully implemented. It was agreed that any outstanding actions will now be carried forward as part of mainstream business planning processes.
30. The action plan indicates that a further independent review of contact, referral and assessment arrangements would be undertaken in June 2010. Given there are ongoing reviews of both First Contact and the Domestic Violence Team, it is now proposed to reschedule this review later in the year when this work is completed in order to test out the robustness of the new arrangements. Senior management case file audits will continue in the meantime in order to assure the quality of current social work practice.

Review of Laming Compliance

31. A year on following the publication of the Laming report into the death of Peter Connelly, Stockton Local Safeguarding Children Board (SLSCB) has been undertaking a review of progress. As part of this exercise all agencies were asked to evaluate their progress in relation to the Laming recommendations and responses were submitted to SLSCB for scrutiny and further exploration. This was discussed at SLSCB on 20 May 2010.
32. As far as the key recommendations relating to Stockton Borough Council are concerned, it was acknowledged that the majority of these have been appropriately responded to and services are compliant with Lord Laming's requirements.
33. A small number of areas were identified where Stockton Borough Council and partners are not currently compliant, and where appropriate actions agreed to address these.
34. These included the following:

- *Recommendation 13*
Children's Trusts must ensure that all assessments of need for children and their families include evidence from all the professionals involved in their lives, take account of case histories and significant events (including previous assessments) and above all must include direct contact with the child.

It is acknowledged that further development of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) is required in Stockton-on-Tees, and to support this, a CAF Coordinator has recently been appointed. Work is also underway by SLSCB to review common thresholds for intervention across all agencies.

- *Recommendation 14*
Local authorities must ensure that 'Children in Need', as defined by Section 17 of the Children Act 1989, have early access to effective specialist services and support to meet their needs.

Following the launch of the new Children and Young People's Operational Services structure on 1 April 2010, a review of specialist and targeted social work provision is currently underway in order to ensure that the available resources are appropriately structured to meet these needs.

- *Recommendation 25*
Children's Trusts should ensure a named, and preferably co-located representative from the police service, community paediatric specialist and health visitor are active partners within each children's social work department.

It was acknowledged at SLSCB that we were not currently compliant with this recommendation and that the recent restructuring of Children and Young People's Operational Services had arguably moved us further away from this strategic direction. This will now be referred to the Children's Trust Board for further consideration, although given the recent change in government, it may be appropriate to await revised guidance before taking final decisions in this regard.

Social Work Taskforce Report

35. The report of the Social Work Taskforce 'Building a Safe, Confident Future' has now been published. The report recommends a fundamental reform of the social work profession, addressing the following key areas:
- Better training – with employers, educators and the profession all taking their full share of responsibility for investing in the next generation and in enabling social workers already in practice to develop their skills continuously
 - Improved working conditions – with employers signing up to new standards for the support and supervision of their frontline workforce that make good practice possible
 - Stronger leadership and independence – with the profession taking more control over its own standards, how it is understood and valued by the public, and the contribution it makes to changes in policy and practice
 - Greater understanding among the general public, service users, other professionals and the media of the role and purpose of social work, the demands of the job and the contribution social workers make
 - More use of research and continuing professional development to inform frontline practice
36. The report makes fifteen recommendations which have all been accepted by the previous government which established a Reform Board chaired by Moira Gibb to take this work forward.
37. As chair of the Reform Board, Moira Gibb has subsequently written to all Local Authorities introducing a voluntary 'health check' across adult and children's services. This covers five key areas known to make a significant contribution to the development and delivery of excellent services as follows:
- effective workload management
 - proactive workflow management
 - having the right tools to do the job
 - a healthy workplace
 - effective service delivery
38. In response to this, the North East Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnership (RIEP) has now established a project team to support all 12 local authorities in the region to complete the organisational health checks by the end of October 2010.

39. A decision has been made for Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council to participate fully in this process and a representative for this project team has been identified. Further updates on the progress of this work will be included in future reports.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

40. As outlined above these workload pressures continue to have a significant impact on the Children, Education and Social Care budget and are likely to continue into 2010/11. 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.
41. These pressures will continue to be managed within the overall Children, Education and Social Care budget for 2010/11.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

42. As outlined in previous reports, these workload pressures have resulted in a corresponding increase in the numbers of children subject to care proceedings. This in turn has placed a significant additional burden on Legal Services. Additional resources have been agreed previously in order to respond to this, although this will continue to be monitored closely.

RISK ASSESSMENT

43. 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
44. Given the further rise in social care workload pressures outlined in this report, these risks will now be reviewed at CTMT and the risk scores amended as appropriate. Any resulting changes will be fed into the corporate risk register and highlighted in the next report to Cabinet.

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY IMPLICATIONS

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

EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 47 This report has not been subject to an Equalities Impact Assessment because it is not seeking approval for a new policy, strategy or change in the delivery of a service.

CORPORATE PARENTING

48. For those children who are looked after, the Council has a responsibility as Corporate Parent to ensure that their needs are appropriately met.
49. 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

50. 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.