

## CABINET ITEM COVERING SHEET PROFORMA

**AGENDA ITEM**

**REPORT TO CABINET**

**2 SEPTEMBER 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 10 June 2010. This report is based on information until the end of June 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. 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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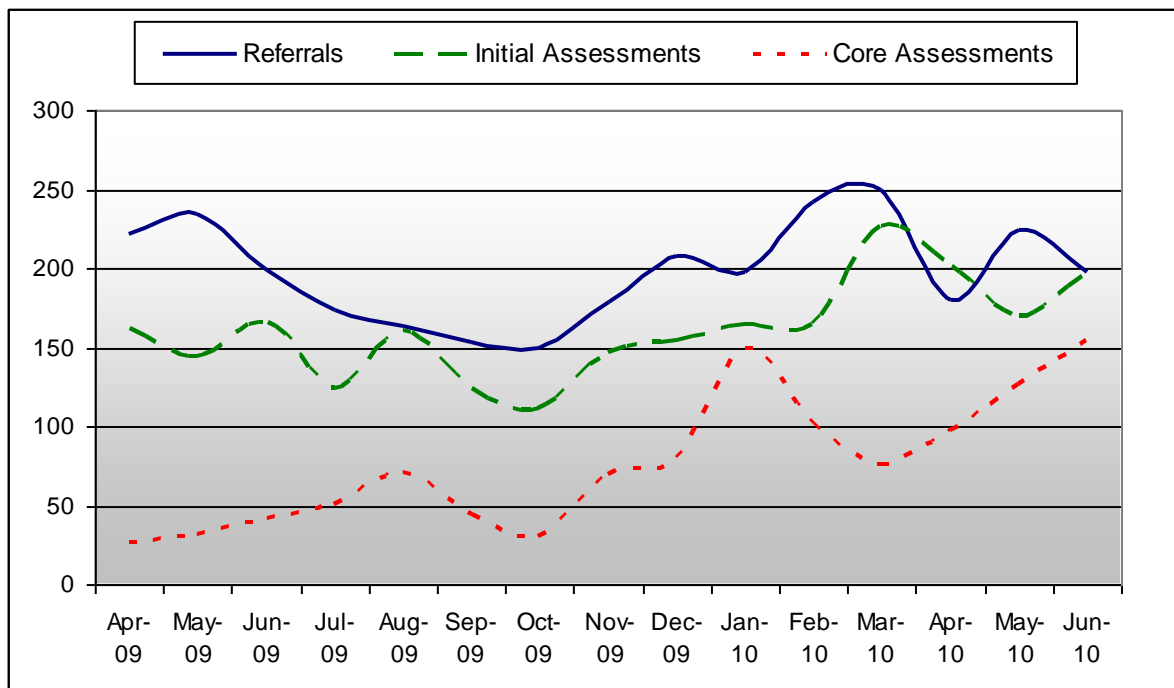
## DETAIL

### Referrals and Assessments

1. As illustrated by Table 1, the number of referrals has declined from the high point of 249 in March to 197 at the end of June.
2. The number of initial assessments remains high, however.
3. The number of core assessments has risen sharply, which is likely to reflect the extremely high numbers of initial assessments in March 2010.
4. This combined volume of work means that the service remains under extreme pressure, which continues to have a significant impact on key performance indicators relating to initial and core assessment timescales.

Table 1: Referral and Assessment Activity 2010/11			
Month	Referrals	Initial Assessments	Core Assessments
April 2010	180	201	98
May 2010	224	169	126
June 2010	197	198	154

Figure 1: Referral and Assessment Trends



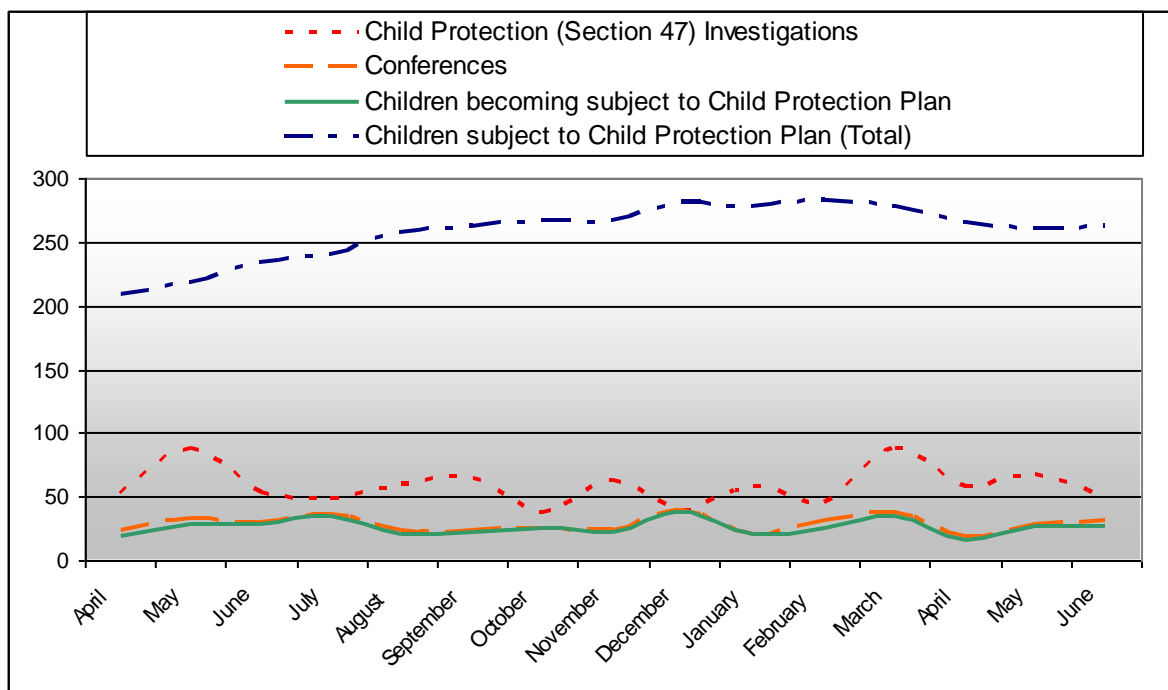
## Child Protection

5. The overall number of children who are subject to a child protection plan has reduced slightly from the peak of 282 in February to 263 in June.
6. The number of section 47 investigations remains high, although there has been a decrease from the peak of 88 in March to 50 in June. The numbers of child protection conferences and children becoming subject to a child protection plan also remain high.
7. The 'conversion rate' ie the percentage of referrals that subsequently led to a child protection plan for April to June was 3.3% compared with 5.8% between January and March.

<b>Table 2: Child Protection Activity 2010/11</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	58	19	E - 1 N - 4 P - 3 P&E - 4 P&S - 1 N&P - 2	15	266
May	67	28	E - 2 N - 9 P - 4 S - 1 P&E - 5 E&S - 3 N&E - 3	27	261
June	50	32	N - 6 N&E - 1 P - 5 P&E - 10 S - 3 E&S - 1 N&P - 1	27	263

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

**Figure 2: Child Protection Trends**



**Looked After System**

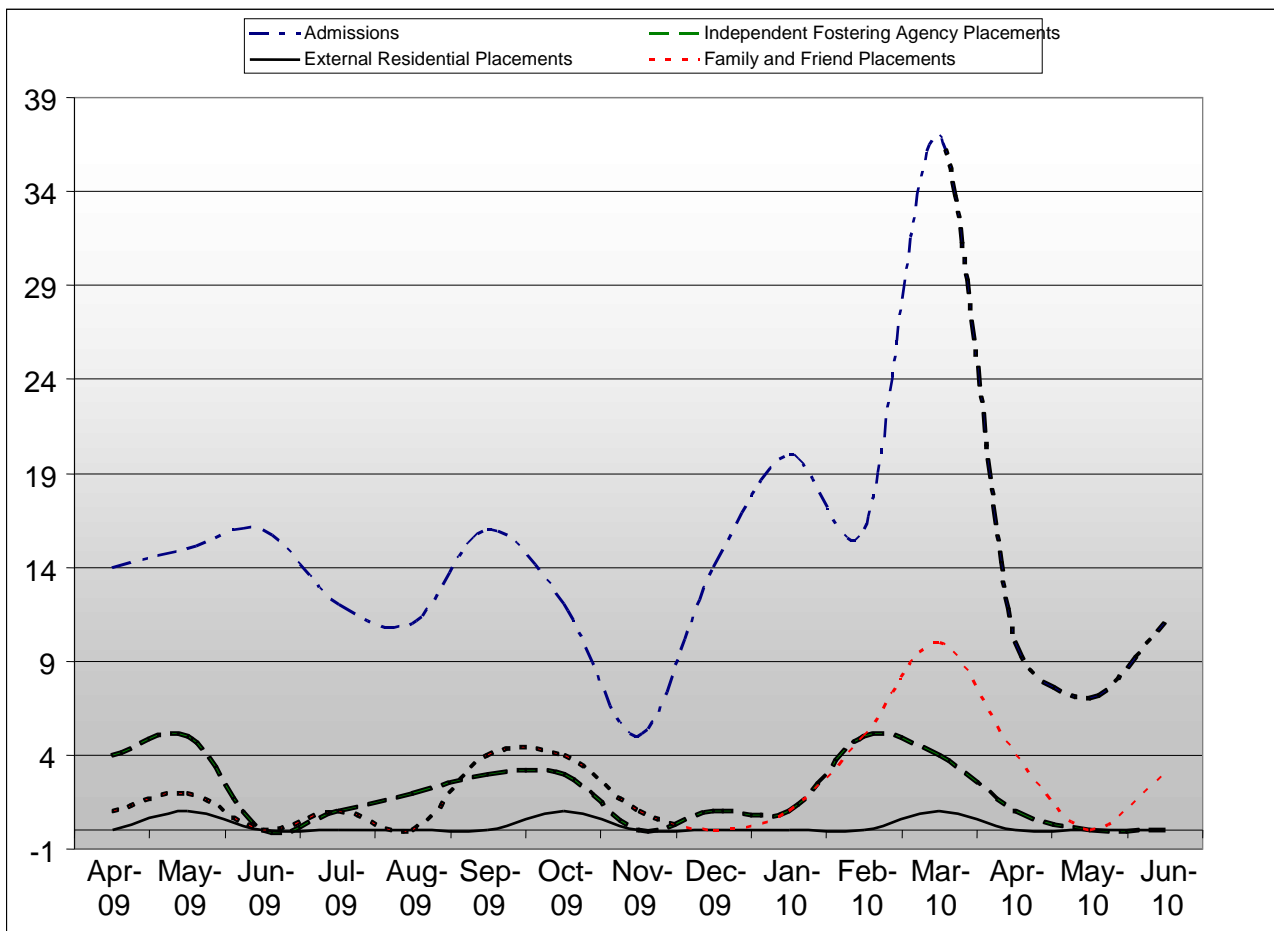
8. The overall number of looked after children has remained high, reaching a peak of 290 in April before reducing slightly to 285 in June.
9. The reason for the overwhelming majority of admissions to the looked after system continues to be ‘abuse or neglect’ which means that there is little option to these children entering the looked after system.
10. Due to the increase in the number of children entering the looked after system, it has not been possible to place all the children in ‘in house’ provision, which has led to a corresponding rise in the use of external placements. This is having significant budgetary implications which are addressed later in this report.
11. The ‘conversion rate’ ie the percentage of referrals that subsequently led to a child becoming looked after for April to June was 1% compared with 4.2% between January and March.

<b>Table 4: Looked After System Activity (2010/11)</b>						
<b>Month</b>	<b>Admissions</b>	<b>Reason for Admission</b>	<b>Overall LAC Population</b>	<b>Independent Fostering Agency Placements</b>	<b>External Residential Placements</b>	<b>Family and Friend Placements</b>
April	10	N1 – 9 N5 – 1	290	1	0	4
May	7	N1 – 5 N3 – 1 N4 – 1	285	0	0	0
June	11	N1 – 8 N4 – 2 N8 – 1	285	0	0	3



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

**Figure 3 Looked After System Trends**



### Staffing and Allocations

12. The Duty Team Manager and Independent Reviewing Officer posts both remain vacant despite now being advertised on four separate occasions. An enhanced recruitment and retention payment has now been agreed for the Duty Team Manager post and this is currently being readvertised.
13. The two vacancies in the Operational Management Group (third tier management team); Service Manager, Referral and Assessment and Service Manager, Fieldwork have now both been appointed to following recent interviews. Although there were external applications for both posts, the successful candidates were existing Stockton Borough



Council employees. Their appointments will therefore create two additional Team Manager vacancies which will need to be recruited to.

14. In terms of social work posts, the situation has improved significantly from the 7.5 vacancies at the end of March following extensive recruitment activity. As of the end of June there were only 2 remaining social work vacancies, although it should be borne in mind that there continue to be a number of workers absent at any given time for a variety of reasons such as maternity leave, secondment and sickness. In addition the vast majority of the staff recruited are newly qualified and inexperienced so will take some time to reach full capacity. Notwithstanding these points, this represents positive progress.
15. At the end of June, there were 2 child protection and 5 looked after children cases which were unallocated. There were no unallocated children in need cases. 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.
16. Clearly all cases should be appropriately allocated to a named social worker, 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 continues to be little or no spare capacity within the system.
17. Given the current difficulties, a workload pressures action plan has been drawn up, covering a range of issues relating to staffing and allocations, and monthly meetings are taking place involving the Corporate Director, Head of Service and Service Managers in order to review and update this on a regular basis.

### **Budgetary Impact**

18. 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.
19. Firstly the independent fostering agency budget, which is set at £2,265,187 for 2010/11. The current projected outturn at year end is £3,140,187 ie an overspend of £875,000. Given that the number of placements has already exceeded the estimated number for the purposes of budgetary projections, there are no additional placements built into this figure.
20. Secondly the children's homes agency placements budget, which is set at £1,522,818 for 2010/11. The current projected outturn at year end is £2,234,368 ie an overspend of £711,550. Given that the number of placements has already exceeded the estimated number for the purposes of budgetary projections, there are no additional placements built into this figure.
21. Thirdly the social work staffing budget, which is set at £3,064,674 for 2010/11. The current projected outturn at year end is £3,428,911 ie an overspend of £364,237.

### **Regional Work**

22. Work has been undertaken by the Vulnerable Children's Safeguarding Network (VCSN) to collate information relating to workloads and staffing across the region. This is attached at Appendix 1 for information. This information confirms that these pressures are being experienced across the region, and also that there are a number of local authorities who have been more significantly affected than Stockton.

23. It is worth noting that Stockton is above average for the percentage of initial assessments conducted and significantly above average for the percentage of core assessments conducted which suggests that Stockton may be operating a lower threshold than some other local authorities in the region.
24. Work is currently being undertaken by Stockton Local Safeguarding Children Board (SLSCB) to develop a continuum of need and response. The purpose of this is to clarify and agree thresholds across all agencies working in Stockton which will ensure that there is a consistent and safe level of response to all referrals for social care intervention.

## **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

25. As outlined above these workload pressures continue to have a significant impact on the Children, Education and Social Care budget for 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.

## **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

26. 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**

27. 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
28. These risks will continue to be monitored at Children's Trust Management Team (CTMT) and the risk scores amended as appropriate. Any resulting changes will be fed into the corporate risk register and highlighted in future reports to Cabinet.

## **SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY IMPLICATIONS**

29. 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.
30. The effective safeguarding of children and young people will also have a significant impact on the community safety agenda.

## **EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

31. 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**

32. For those children who are looked after, the Council has a responsibility as Corporate Parent to ensure that their needs are appropriately met.
33. 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**

34. 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.