

**STOCKTON-ON-TEES BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**CABINET RECOMMENDATIONS**

**PROFORMA**

Cabinet Meeting .....20th December 2010

1. Title of Item/Report

Children's Social Care Workload Pressures

2. Record of the Decision

Cabinet considered a report relating to Children's Social Care Workload Pressures.

The purpose of the report was to continue to keep Cabinet updated on these pressures further to the previous report on 2nd September 2010. The report was based on information until the end of September 2010.

The number of referrals received had continued to fall overall from the high point of 249 in March to 177 at the end of September.

The number of initial assessments remained high, however and the number of core assessments had fluctuated with no clear discernible trend.

This combined volume of work meant that the service remained under substantial pressure, which continued to have a significant impact on key performance indicators relating to initial and core assessment timescales.

The overall number of children who were subject to a child protection plan had continued to reduce from the peak of 282 in February to 231 in September.

The numbers of section 47 investigations, child protection conferences and children becoming subject to a child protection plan remained high.

The 'conversion rate' ie the percentage of referrals that subsequently led to a child protection plan for July to September was 2.9% compared with 3.3% between April and June.

The overall number of looked after children had continued to increase, reaching a peak of 303 in September.

The reason for the overwhelming majority of admissions to the looked after system continued to be 'abuse or neglect' which meant that there was little option to these children entering the looked after system.

Due to the continued rise in the number of children entering the looked after system, it had not been possible to place all the children in 'in house' provision, which had led to a corresponding rise in the use of external placements. This in turn had significant budgetary implications which were addressed in the report.

The 'conversion rate' ie the percentage of referrals that subsequently led to a child becoming looked after for July to September was 2% compared with 1% between April and June.

Members noted that given the difficulties, a workload pressures action plan had been drawn up, covering a range of issues relating to staffing and allocations, and regular meetings were taking place involving the Corporate Director, Head of Service and Service Managers in order to review and update this.

The pressures continued to have an impact on the Children, Education and Social Care budget in a number of key areas which had projected overspends:-

- Independent fostering agency - projected overspend of £975k.
- Children's homes agency placements - projected overspend of £1,091m.
- Social work staffing projected overspend of £285k.

This was being considered as part of the overall Medium Term Financial Plan position.

It was fully acknowledged that this level of budget pressures was not sustainable and following the EIT Review of Child Placements, work had been ongoing in relation to the agreed recommendations. Two of the recommendations were highlighted to Members, which were specifically targeted to impact on the budget pressures.

One of the key recommendations arising from the review was that a marketing officer post be created as a two year fixed term contract on an "invest to save" principle. The rationale behind this was that if more Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council approved foster carers could be recruited, this would enable more children to be placed "in house" as opposed to more expensive independent fostering agency (IFA) placements resulting in financial savings to the authority. The marketing

officer post had been created, advertised externally and an appointment had been made.

A further recommendation was that the viability of increasing Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council children's home capacity be explored. Given the numbers of children in external residential placements, the extremely strong track record of the current "in house" children's homes and the significant potential cost savings this was considered to be high priority.

RESOLVED that:-

1. the continued workload pressures within the social care system and the associated impact this was having on caseloads, performance and budget be noted.

2. further update reports on a quarterly basis be received in order to continue to monitor the impact of these workload pressures.

3. Reasons for the Decision

There was 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. Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

None

5. Declared (Cabinet Member) Conflicts of Interest

None

6. Details of any Dispensations

Not applicable

7. Date and Time by which Call In must be executed

Midnight on 30 December 2010

Proper Officer  
22 December 2010