

CABINET ITEM COVERING SHEET PROFORMA

AGENDA ITEM

REPORT TO CABINET

16 DECEMBER 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 2 September 2010. This report is based on information until the end of September 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.

AGENDA ITEM

REPORT TO CABINET

16 DECEMBER 2010

**REPORT OF CORPORATE
MANAGEMENT TEAM**

CABINET DECISION

CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE WORKLOAD PRESSURES

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 2 September 2010. This report is based on information until the end of September 2010 (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.
2. Receive further update reports on a quarterly basis in order to continue to monitor the impact of these workload pressures.

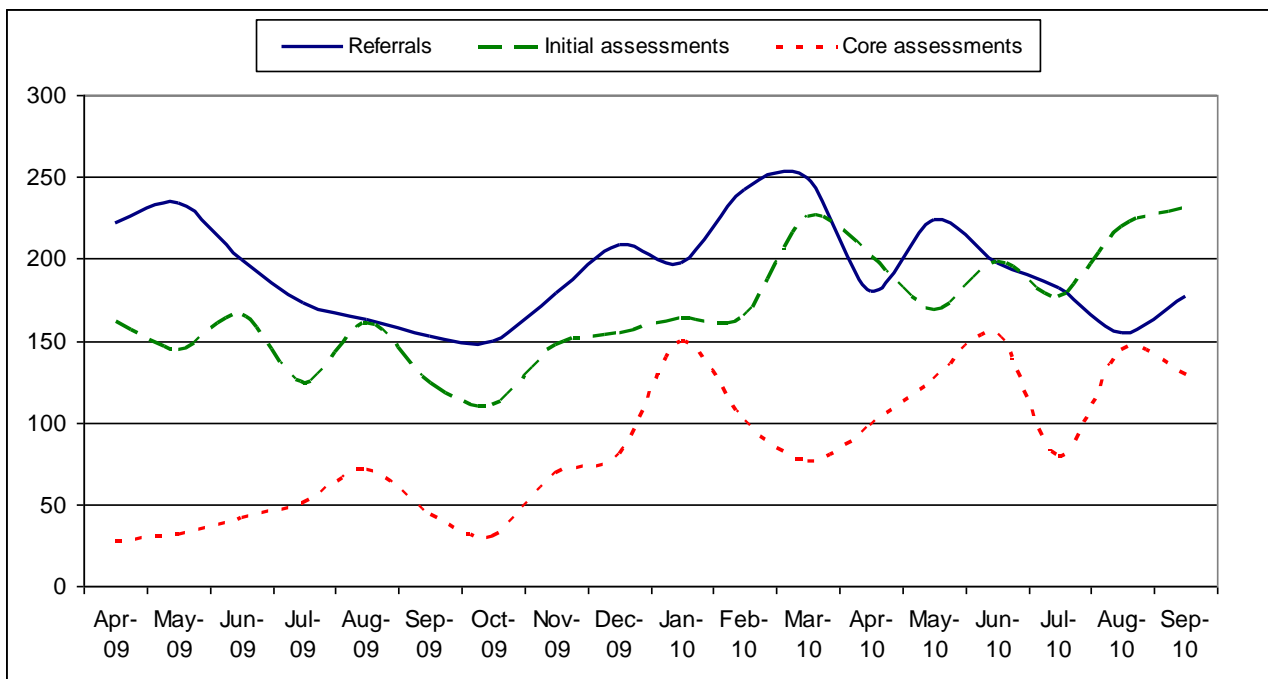
DETAIL

Referrals and Assessments

1. As illustrated by Table 1, the number of referrals received has continued to fall overall from the high point of 249 in March to 177 at the end of September.
2. The number of initial assessments remains high, however and the number of core assessments has fluctuated with no clear discernible trend.
3. This combined volume of work means that the service remains under substantial 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	180	201	98
May	224	169	126
June	197	198	154
July	182	177	79
August	155	220	144
September	177	231	129

Figure 1: Referral and Assessment Trends



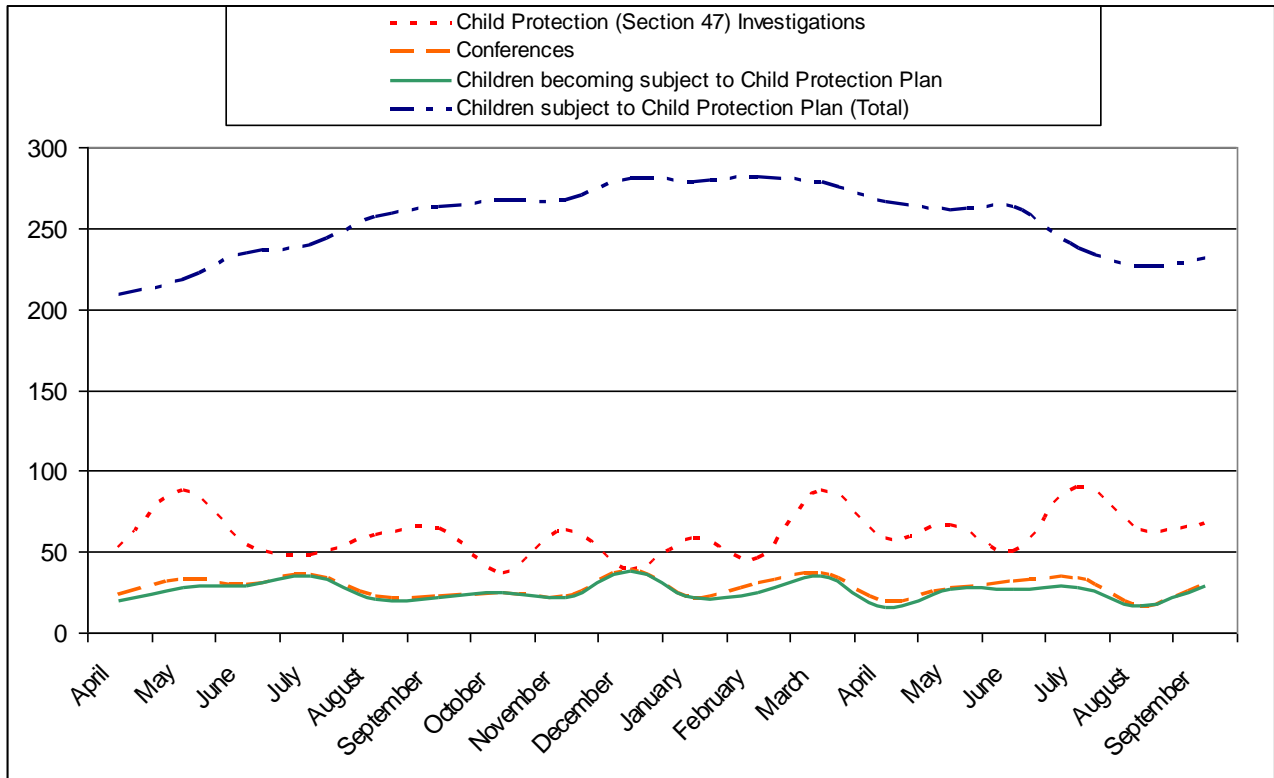
Child Protection

4. The overall number of children who are subject to a child protection plan has continued to reduce from the peak of 282 in February to 231 in September.
5. The numbers of section 47 investigations, child protection conferences and children becoming subject to a child protection plan remain high.
6. 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

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	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
July	90	34	E - 5 E&S - 1 N - 12 N&E - 4 P - 5 P&E - 1	28	238
August	63	16	E - 4 N - 3 P - 4 P&E - 5	16	226
September	68	30	E - 1 N - 13 N&P - 1 N&P&S - 1 P - 8 P&E - 5	29	231

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

Figure 2: Child Protection Trends



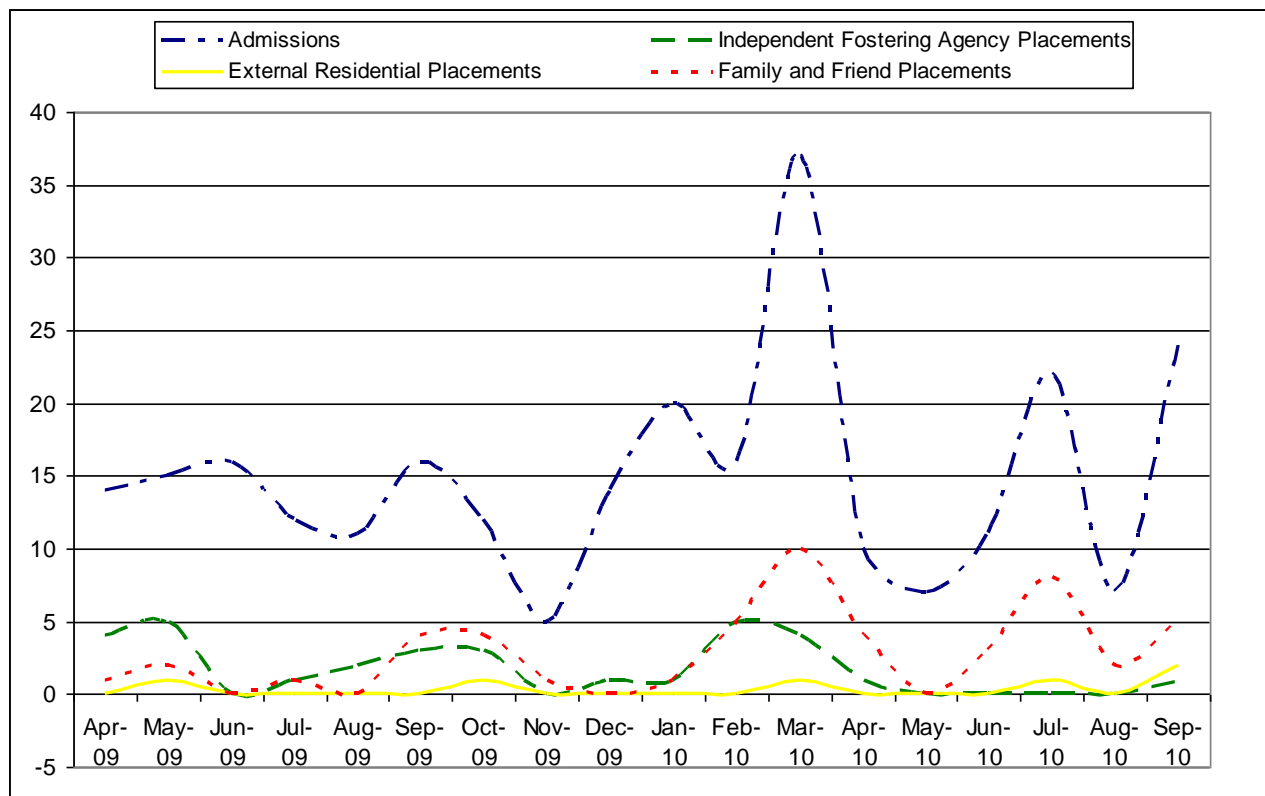
Looked After System

7. The overall number of looked after children has continued to increase, reaching a peak of 303 in September.
8. 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.
9. Due to the continued rise 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 in turn has significant budgetary implications which are addressed later in this report.
10. 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.

Table 4: Looked After System Activity (2010/11)						
Month	Admissions	Reason for Admission	Overall LAC Population	Independent Fostering Agency Placements	External Residential Placements	Family and Friend Placements
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
July	22	N1 – 18 N4 – 2 N5 – 1 N6 – 1	303	0	1	8
August	7	N1 – 7	292	0	0	2
September	24	N1 – 16 N2 – 1 N3 – 1 N4 – 4 N6 – 2	303	1	2	5

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

11. The Referral and Assessment (Duty) Team Manager, Deputy Manager and First Contact Manager posts have now all been filled, although as these have all been internal appointments this creates resulting vacancies elsewhere. The Independent Reviewing Officer post has now also been filled with the appointment of an experienced external candidate.
12. Currently there are outstanding vacancies for the Emergency Duty Team Manager, First Contact Deputy Manager, one Specialist Team Manager and one Targeted Team Manager. All these posts are currently being advertised externally.
13. In terms of social work posts, the situation has continued to improve improved significantly from the two vacancies at the end of June following continued recruitment activity. As of the end of September all social work vacancies had been appointed to, although not all staff had taken up post and further vacancies were expected as a result of one member of staff leaving the authority and the internal appointments outlined above.
14. It should be borne in mind that there continues 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 staff recruited are newly qualified and inexperienced so it will take some time to reach full capacity. Notwithstanding these points, the above represents continued significant progress from the position reported at the end of June.

15. At the end of September, there were no unallocated child protection and children in need cases, although there were two 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.
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 continue to be 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 regular meetings are taking place involving the Corporate Director, Head of Service and Service Managers in order to review and update this.

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 £2,265m for 2010/11. The current projected outturn at year end is £3,240m ie an overspend of £975k. 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 £1,523m for 2010/11. The current projected outturn at year end is £2,614m ie an overspend of £1,091m. 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 £2,973m for 2010/11. The current projected outturn at year end is £3,258m ie an overspend of £285k. Given the reduced number of agency staff this pressure should now begin to stabilise.

Efficiency, Improvement and Transformation (EIT) Review of Child Placements

22. It is fully acknowledged that this level of budget pressures is not sustainable and following the EIT Review of Child Placements, work has been ongoing in relation to the agreed recommendations. It is worth highlighting two of these recommendations here which are specifically targeted to impact on the budget pressures outlined above.
23. One of the key recommendations arising from the review is that a marketing officer post be created as a two year fixed term contract on an 'invest to save' principle. The rationale behind this is that if more Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council approved foster carers can be recruited, this will 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.

24. The marketing officer post has now been created, advertised externally and an appointment has now been made. The successful candidate has a strong marketing background and it is expected that she will take up post in early 2011. If a net increase of two foster carers can be achieved, it is calculated that this post can achieve savings of £48,000 per annum which would be realised in 20011/12. If further net increases in the numbers of foster carers are subsequently achieved this would result in additional savings being made.
25. A further recommendation is that the viability of increasing Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council children's home capacity be explored. Given the numbers of children currently 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.
26. Work has been continuing in relation to this, and two potential options are currently being considered. Once the full costs of each option have been fully evaluated a recommendation will be brought forward for formal approval through the usual decision making processes. It is hoped that the decision making process will have been completed by February 2011 and work could then commence on the preferred option.
27. The potential savings identified in relation to this recommendation have been estimated to be £109,000 per annum (based on a three bed children's home). This figure is based on the average fees for external placements currently. The potential savings could rise to £203,000 if based on the upper range of fees paid. The actual savings achieved would depend on the fees being paid for the specific children concerned at the point it is assessed they are suitable to be moved to the new home.
28. Given the necessary lead in time involved in the opening of a new children's home, any savings ultimately achieved would only be partially realised in 20011/12 but would then be fully realised in future years.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

29. 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

30. 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

31. 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

32. 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

33. 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.
34. The effective safeguarding of children and young people will also have a significant impact on the community safety agenda.

EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT

35. 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

36. For those children who are looked after, the Council has a responsibility as Corporate Parent to ensure that their needs are appropriately met.
37. 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

38. No consultation has taken place in relation to this issue at this stage.

Name of Contact Officer: Shaun McLurg
Post Title: Head of Children and Young People's Operational Services
Telephone No. 01642 527049
Email Address: shaun.mclurg@stockton.gov.uk

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.