

## CABINET ITEM COVERING SHEET PROFORMA

**AGENDA ITEM**

**REPORT TO CABINET**

**17 MARCH 2011**

**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 16 December 2010. This report is based on information until the end of December 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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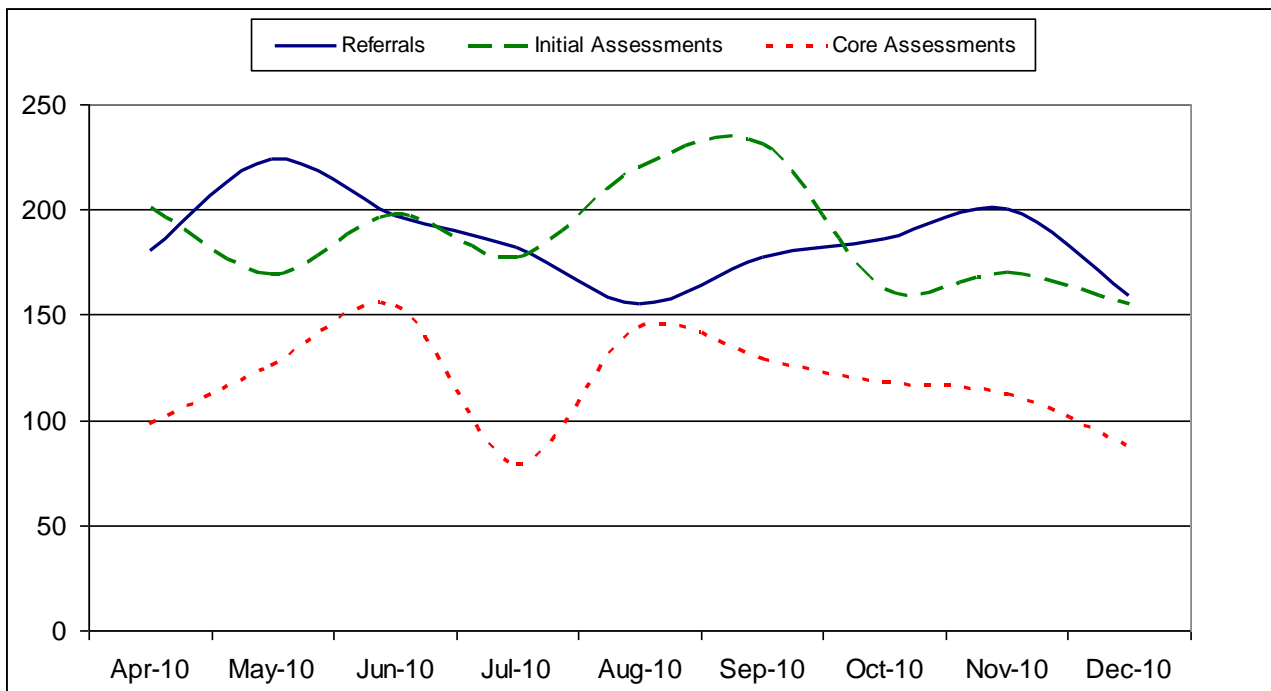
## DETAIL

### Referrals and Assessments

1. As illustrated by Table 1, the number of referrals remains high, with November being a particularly busy month with 200 referrals received.
2. The number of initial and core assessments remains high, although the overall numbers have fallen since the previous quarter.
3. The overall 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.

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
October	186	162	118
November	200	170	112
December	159	155	87

**Figure 1: Referral and Assessment Trends**



## Child Protection

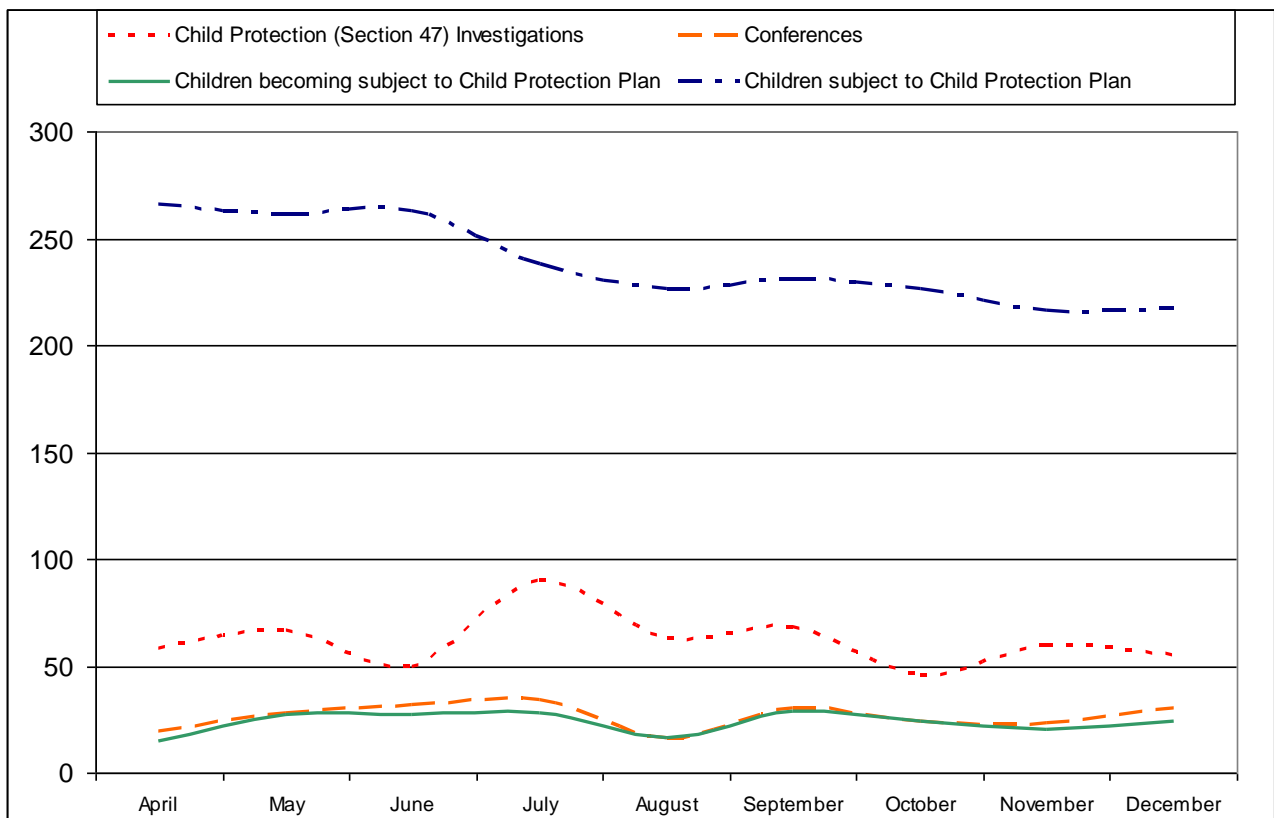
4. The overall number of children who are subject to a child protection plan has continued to reduce from the peak of 282 in February to 217 in December.
5. The number of section 47 investigations has fallen, although this does not appear to have impacted significantly on the number of child protection conferences and children becoming subject to a child protection plan.
6. The 'conversion rate' ie the percentage of referrals that subsequently led to a child protection plan for October to December was 1.3% compared with 2.9% between July and September. This decline could possibly indicate a change in thresholds being applied or a greater number of inappropriate referrals being received and so will be followed up by the Social Care Performance Clinic. Any significant outcomes from this work will be included in a future report to Cabinet.

<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
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
October	46	24	N - 5 P - 2 P&E - 4 S - 10	24	226
November	60	23	E - 4 N - 7 P - 1 P&E - 4 S - 4	20	216
December	55	30	N - 17 N&P - 1 P - 1 S - 5	24	217

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

**Figure 2: Child Protection Trends**



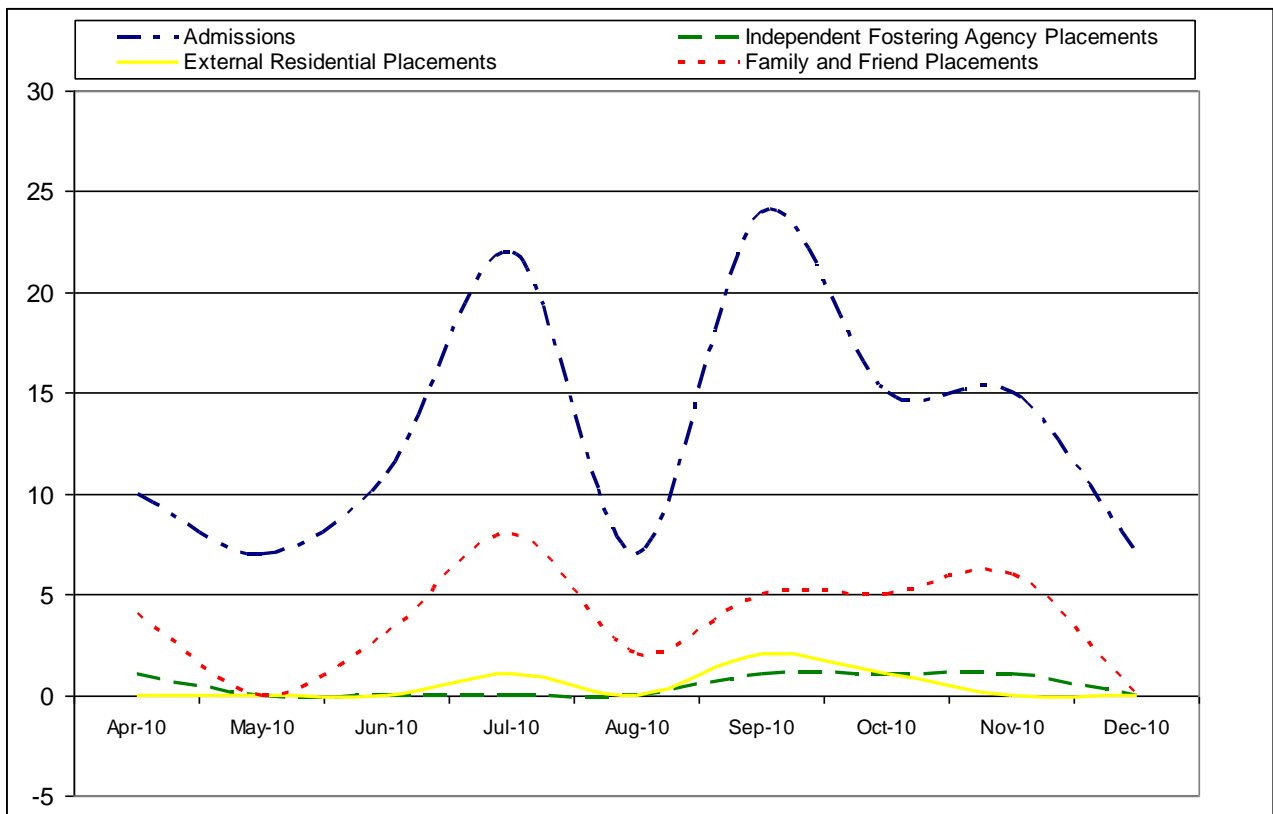
## Looked After System

7. The overall number of looked after children remains very high, although this has dropped slightly from the peak of 303 in September to 292 in December.
8. The number of admissions has declined significantly in comparison with the previous quarter, which has been reflected in the number of external placements that have been made. This has a positive budgetary impact which is addressed later in the report.
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. The 'conversion rate' ie the percentage of referrals that subsequently led to a child becoming looked after for October to December was 0.9% compared with 2% between July and September. This will continue to be monitored closely and investigated further should any significant trends become apparent.

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
October	15	N1 – 9 N2 – 2 N4 – 3 N5 – 1	302	1	1	5
November	15	N1 – 10 N2 – 1 N4 – 1 N5 – 3	302	1	0	6
December	7	N1 – 5 N3 – 1 N5 – 1	292	0	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

Figure 3 Looked After System Trends





## **Staffing and Allocations**

11. The Emergency Duty Team Manager and First Contact Deputy Manager vacancies have now been filled, by external appointment and internal secondment respectively.
12. This leaves one Specialist Team Manager and one Targeted Team Manager post which remain vacant following two external advertisements. A decision has therefore been taken by the Corporate Director, Children Education and Social Care in conjunction with the Head of Human Resources that these posts will now qualify for inclusion in the retention payments scheme. These posts are currently being readvertised on this basis.
13. In terms of social work posts, as of the end of December there were 2.4 social work vacancies overall. This is a slight deterioration from the situation in September due to two staff members leaving the authority for personal reasons and one internal promotion.
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 majority of staff recently recruited are newly qualified and inexperienced so it will take some time to reach full capacity. Notwithstanding these points, the overall staffing situation represents continued progress.
15. At the end of December there were no unallocated cases.
16. Regular workload pressures meetings covering a range of issues relating to staffing and allocations continue to take place on a bi-monthly basis involving the Corporate Director, Head of Service and Service Managers.

## **Budgetary Impact**

17. 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.
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19. Firstly the independent fostering agency budget, which is set at £2.265m for 2010/11. The current projected outturn at year end is £3.170m ie an overspend of £905k. This estimated overspend has reduced by circa £70k since September due to the reduction in the number of placements. However, 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. This estimated overspend has not changed since September. 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 £3.201m ie an overspend of £228k. This estimated overspend has reduced by circa £57k since September as predicted due to a reduced reliance on agency staff.

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

21. In line with the recommendations arising from the above EIT Review previously approved by Cabinet, the marketing officer took up post on 10 January 2011 and agreement has been secured from Corporate Management Team for the development of two additional children's homes. Further updates on progress will be included in future Cabinet reports.

## The Munro Review of Child Protection

22. It is worth noting the recent publication of *The Child's Journey*, the interim report by Eileen Munro, who was commissioned by Michael Gove, Secretary of State for Education to review the child protection system in England.

23. The key elements of the report are as follows:

- **Inspection**

The report suggests that the excessive burdens of announced inspections are removed in favour of unannounced inspections and that inspections should focus on the quality of outcome rather than compliance to process and procedure. It is also proposed that inspections should have a much broader remit looking at all agencies working with children rather than focusing on the activities of the local authority.

- **Serious Case Reviews (SCRs)**

It is proposed that SCRs should be more focused on systems theory and learning and noted that a more consistent approach could be taken with a pool of appropriately trained, experienced and authoritative SCR authors to secure consistency in approach and learning. It also appears likely that Ofsted's role in evaluating SCRs will cease.

- **Guidance and procedures**

The report concludes that the current statutory guidance *Working Together to Safeguard Children* is too big, and needs to return to a 'much shorter manual in which core principles and rules are clear for all professionals'.

- **Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs)**

It appears that the review is minded to strengthen the role and function of LSCBs in monitoring the impact of practice, training and learning on outcomes as well as identifying and addressing emerging problems.

- **Leadership and Accountability**

The post of Director of Children's Services is noted as the key point of local accountability for child protection within the local authority, and it appears likely that the review will recommend it is important that this is maintained.

- **Relationships**

Whilst the importance of collecting data and information is acknowledged, the report suggests that of greater importance is the building of the relationship with the child, their family and other professionals.

- **Supervision and management oversight**

The review identifies the interplay between workers and the work environment as the most productive way of improving standards and reducing errors and highlights the importance of supervision as a safe place to consider, challenge, reflect and think about decisions and how the worker has reached those decisions. The review questions whether social work can realistically cover all the current expectations of the profession and whether the current career structure is fit for purpose. These aspects will be explored in more detail in the final report.

- **Performance data**

The review is considering a minimum data set for child protection made up of a twin core of nationally collected data and recommended standardised local data. The report argues that data must show the child's journey as opposed to compliance to timeliness and prescription.

Crucially the report notes that it is now important to rethink the relationship with IT, and look at how IT can support rather than impede practice. The report goes on to identify that the Integrated Children's System (ICS) in its current form actually makes practice less safe as it embodies all that is wrong with the current system ie a prescription led response to situations rather than allowing and supporting workers' discretion in their professional decision making.

- **Role of universal and preventative services**

The importance of universal services in identifying children whose needs are not being adequately met is highlighted, whilst acknowledging the problem of identifying issues and then not being able to get consent from these families to work with them. In response to this, the review notes that for this system to work successfully there must be channels through which practitioners from different agencies can discuss concerns safely and with the support of experienced practitioners. Although it is not explicit within the report, there appears to be strong support for the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) as the preferred means of assessing and supporting families.

- **Perception in the media**

The review identifies the need to promote a greater understanding of social work.

24. The final report with recommendations for Government is due to be published in April 2011 and could have far reaching implications for the future of social work in this country. Details of the report and the implications of this for services in Stockton-on-Tees will be reported to Cabinet following publication.

## **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 continue to 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.