

CABINET ITEM COVERING SHEET PROFORMA

AGENDA ITEM

REPORT TO CABINET

16 JUNE 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 17 March 2011. This report is based on information until the end of March 2011 (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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RECOMMENDATIONS

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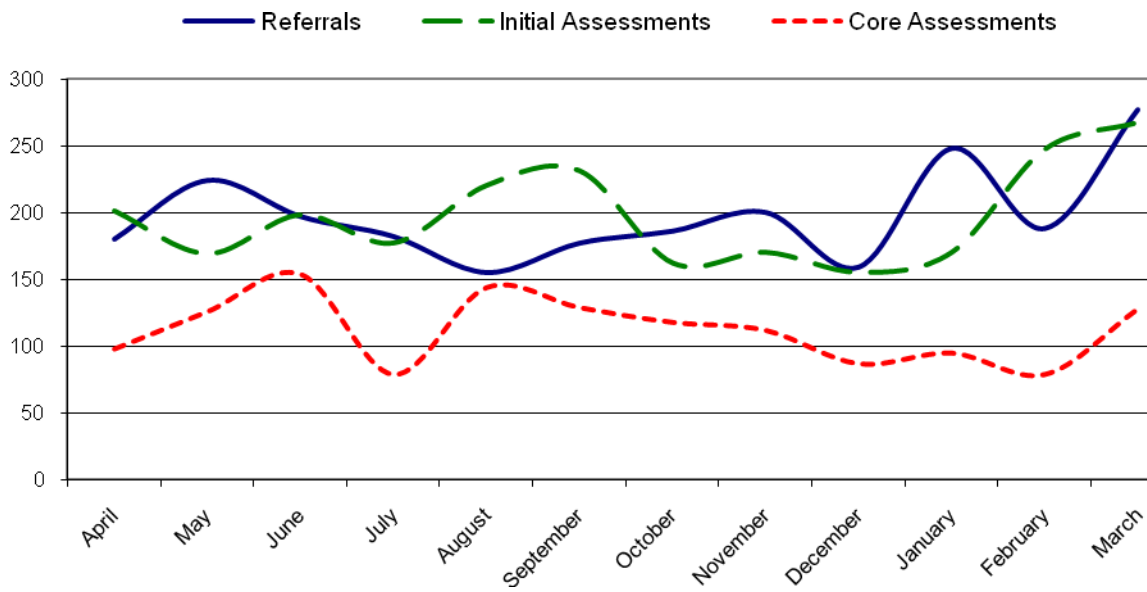
DETAIL

Referrals and Assessments

1. As illustrated by Table 1, the final quarter of 2010/11 has been an exceptionally busy period in terms of the numbers of referrals received. In March 2011, 277 referrals were received which is the busiest month on record.
2. This is reflected in the numbers of initial assessments undertaken, with February 2011 (247) and then March 2011 (267) being the busiest months on record.
3. As always there is a slight time lag before the numbers of referrals and initial assessments translates into core assessments, and the numbers in January and February actually decreased. On the basis of the number in March 2011 (128), it appears that this is now beginning to rise and it is likely that this will continue into 2011/12.
4. This volume of work means that the service is under extreme pressure and this workload will continue 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
January	248	170	95
February	188	247	79
March	277	267	128

Figure 1: Referral and Assessment Trends



Child Protection

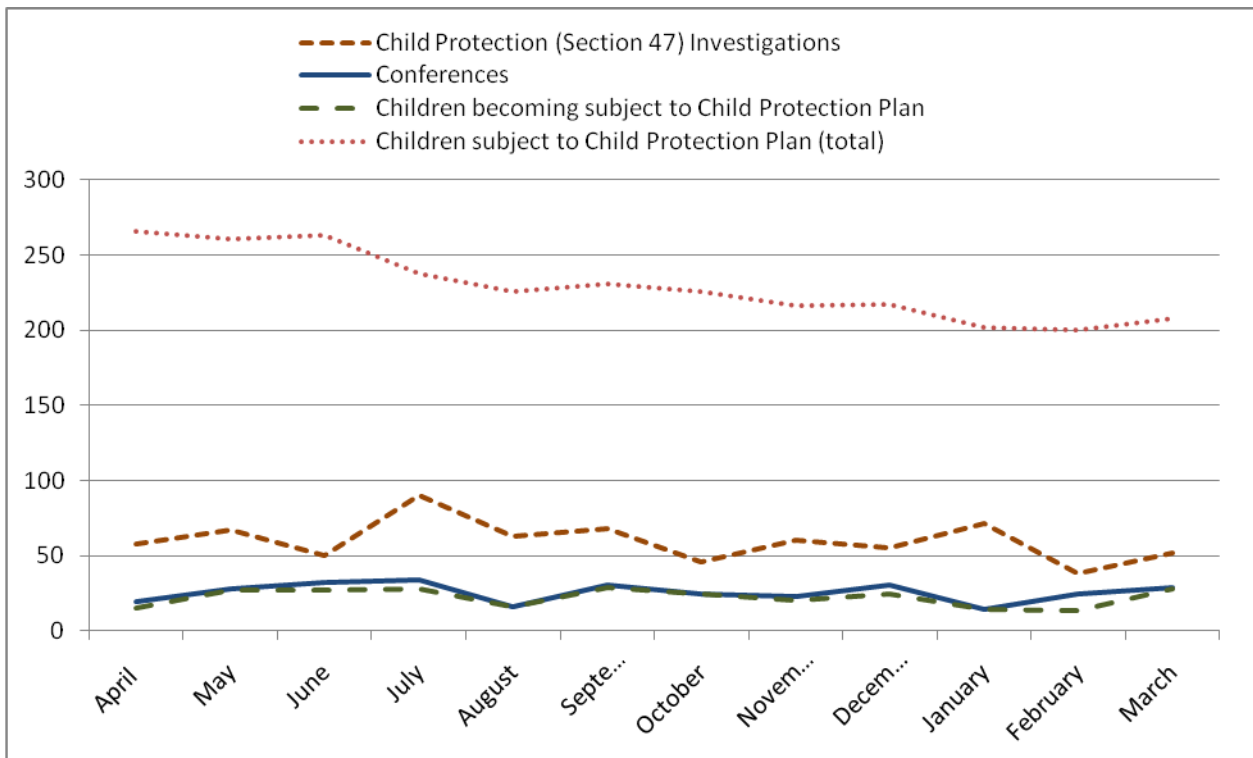
4. As can be seen from Table 2, the overall number of children who are subject to a child protection plan has continued to reduce from the peak of 282 in February 2010 to a low point of 200 in February 2011.
5. The number of section 47 investigations has fallen, although this does not appear to have impacted significantly on the number of child protection conferences and children becoming subject to a child protection plan.
6. The 'conversion rate' i.e the percentage of referrals that subsequently led to a child protection plan for January to March 2011 was 3.8% compared with 1.3% for October to December 2010. This is will continue to be followed up by the Social Care Performance Clinic and any significant outcomes from this work will be included in future reports to Cabinet.

Table 2: Child Protection Activity 2010/11					
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
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

January	71	14	N – 8 N&P - 1 P- 5	14	202
February	38	24	E – 1 N – 2 N&P - 1 P- 5 P&E –2 S - 2	13	200
March	52	29	N – 8 N&E - 2 N&S- 2 P - 9 P&E –7	28	208

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

Figure 2: Child Protection Trends



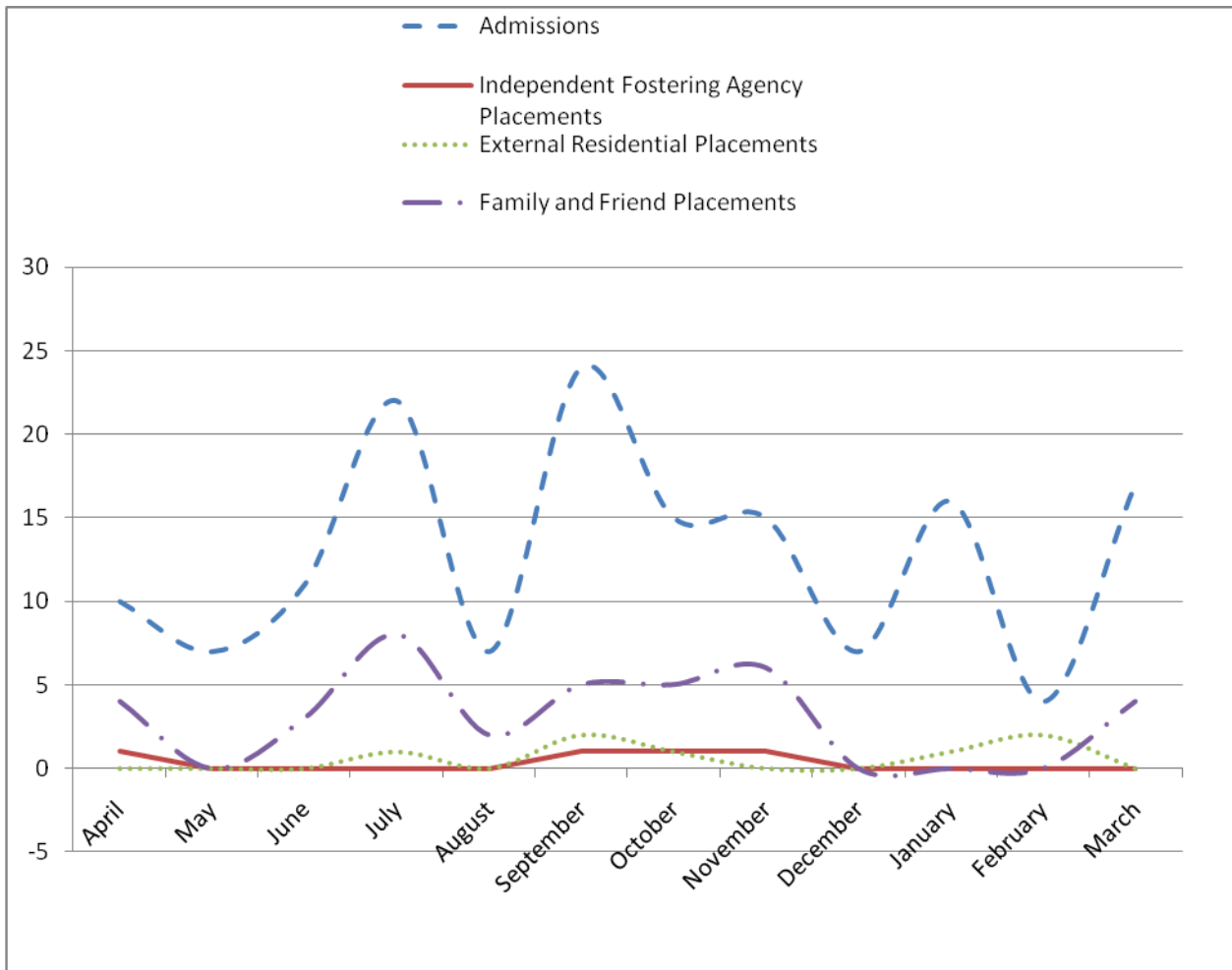
Looked After System

7. The overall number of looked after children remains very high, although this has dropped slightly from the peak of 303 in September 2010 to 292 in March 2011.
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. The 'conversion rate' ie the percentage of referrals that subsequently led to a child becoming looked after increased slightly to 1.4% for January to March 2011 compared with 0.9% for October to December 2010. This will continue to be monitored closely and investigated further should any significant trends become apparent.

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
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
January	16	N1 – 15 N5 – 1	296	0	1	0
February	4	N1 – 1 N4 – 1 N5 – 2	287	0	2	0
March	17	N1 – 13 N3 – 2 N5 – 1 N6 – 1	292	0	0	4

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

10. There is currently one Specialist Team Manager and one Targeted Team Manager post which remain vacant following three external advertisements, the most recent including the recruitment and retention scheme payments. Although these posts are both covered by agency managers currently it is considered crucial that these posts are appointed to on a substantive basis and both posts are to be readvertised shortly.
11. In terms of social work posts, as of the end of March 2011, there were no social work vacancies overall.
12. 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, a high proportion of staff remain relatively inexperienced so it will take some time to reach full capacity. Notwithstanding these points, the overall staffing situation remains very positive overall.
13. At the end of March 2011, there were no unallocated children in need cases, although there was one unallocated child protection case and one unallocated looked after children case. 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.
14. 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.
15. 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

16. These pressures have continued to have an impact on the Children, Education and Social Care budget in a number of key areas as follows.
17. Firstly the independent fostering agency budget, which was set at £2.265m for 2010/11. The final outturn for 2010/11 was £3.182m ie an overspend of £917k. This was a direct result of the increase in the number of independent fostering agency placements during 2010/11.
18. Secondly the children's homes agency placements budget, which was set at £1.523m for 2010/11. The final outturn was £2.588m ie an overspend of £1.065m. Similarly, this was a direct result of the increase in the number of external residential placements during 2010/11.
19. Thirdly the social work staffing outturn budget, which was £2.935m for 2010/11. The final outturn for 2010/11 was £3.246m ie an overspend of £311k. This is directly attributable to the use of agency staff. Although the use of agency staff has declined during the year, there are still a number of agency staff in within the service.
20. All of these issues have been fully considered during the budget setting process for 2011/12 as part of the overall Medium Term Financial Plan.

Unannounced Inspection

21. The second annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment services in Stockton-on-Tees was conducted by Ofsted on 10 and 11 May 2011.
22. The previous inspection, on 5 and 6 January 2010, had identified a number of areas for further development and two areas for priority action.
23. The outcome of the second inspection confirmed that significant progress has been made in addressing these issues, with the inspectors being satisfied that both priority actions and all but two of the areas for development had been satisfactorily addressed. The inspectors believed that further work was required on the outstanding two areas to fully address these. The inspectors also identified a small number of additional areas for further development.
24. An action plan will now be drawn up in response to these identified areas for development.
25. Whilst there is no room for complacency, this inspection highlighted the progress that has been made over the last 12-18 months in this area of service.
26. The letter was published on 9 June 2011 and a copy of this is attached as Appendix 1.

The Munro Review of Child Protection

27. It is worth noting the recent publication of *A Child-Centred System*, the final report by Eileen Munro, who was commissioned by Michael Gove, Secretary of State for Education to review the child protection system in England.
28. The report makes 15 recommendations which are summarised below:

Recommendation 1: The Government should revise both the statutory guidance, *Working Together to Safeguard Children* and *The Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families* and their associated policies.

This recommendation includes removing the distinction between initial and core assessments and the associated timescales in respect of these assessments and removing constraints to local innovation and professional judgment through nationally designed assessment forms, performance Indicators and prescribed approaches to IT systems.

Recommendation 2: The inspection framework should examine the effectiveness of the contributions of all local services, including health, education, police, probation and the justice system to the protection of children.

Recommendation 3: The new inspection framework should examine the child's journey from needing to receiving help, explore how the rights, wishes, feelings and experiences of children and young people inform and shape the provision of services, and look at the effectiveness of the help provided to children, young people and their families.

Recommendation 4: Local authorities and their partners should use a combination of nationally collected and locally published performance information to help benchmark performance, facilitate improvement and promote accountability. It is crucial that performance information is not treated as an unambiguous measure of good or bad performance as performance indicators tend to be.

Recommendation 5: The existing statutory requirements for each Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) to produce and publish an annual report for the Children's Trust Board should be amended, to require its submission instead to the Chief Executive and

Leader of the Council, and, subject to the passage of legislation, to the local Police and Crime Commissioner and the Chair of the health and wellbeing board.

Recommendation 6: The statutory guidance, *Working Together to Safeguard Children*, should be amended to state that when monitoring and evaluating local arrangements, LSCBs should, taking account of local need, include an assessment of the effectiveness of the help being provided to children and families (including the effectiveness and value for money of early help services, including early years provision), and the effectiveness of multi-agency training to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people.

Recommendation 7: Local authorities should give due consideration to protecting the discrete roles and responsibilities of a Director of Children's Services and Lead Member for Children's Services before allocating any additional functions to individuals occupying such roles. The importance, as envisaged in the Children Act 2004, of appointing individuals to positions where they have specific responsibilities for children's services should not be undermined. The Government should amend the statutory guidance issued in relation to such roles and establish the principle that, given the importance of individuals in senior positions being responsible for children's services, it should not be considered appropriate to give additional functions (that do not relate to children's services) to Directors of Children's Services and Lead Members for Children's Services unless exceptional circumstances arise.

Recommendation 8: The Government should work collaboratively with the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, the Royal College of General Practitioners, local authorities and others to research the impact of health reorganisation on effective partnership arrangements and the ability to provide effective help for children who are suffering, or likely to suffer, significant harm.

Recommendation 9: The Government should require LSCBs to use systems methodology when undertaking Serious Case Reviews (SCRs) and, over the coming year, work with the sector to develop national resources to:

- provide accredited, skilled and independent reviewers to jointly work with LSCBs on each SCR
- promote the development of a variety of systems-based methodologies to learn from practice
- initiate the development of a typology of the problems that contribute to adverse outcomes to facilitate national learning
- disseminate learning nationally to improve practice and inform the work of the Chief Social Worker (see chapter 7)
- in the meantime, Ofsted's evaluation of SCRs should end.

Recommendation 10: The Government should place a duty on local authorities and statutory partners to secure the sufficient provision of local early help services for children, young people and families. The arrangements setting out how they will do this should:

- specify the range of professional help available to local children, young people and families, through statutory, voluntary and community services, against the local profile of need set out in the local Joint Strategic Needs Analysis (JSNA)
- specify how they will identify children who are suffering or who are likely to suffer significant harm, including the availability of social work expertise to all professionals working with children, young people and families who are not being supported by children's social care services and specify the training available locally to support professionals working at the frontline of universal services
- set out the local resourcing of the early help services for children, young people and families; and, most importantly
- lead to the identification of the early help that is needed by a particular child and their family, and to the provision of an "early help offer" where their needs do not meet the criteria for receiving children's social care services.

Recommendation 11: The Social Work Reform Board's Professional Capabilities Framework should incorporate capabilities necessary for child and family social work. This framework should explicitly inform social work qualification training, postgraduate professional development and performance appraisal.

Recommendation 12: Employers and higher education institutions (HEIs) should work together so that social work students are prepared for the challenges of child protection work. In particular, the review considers that HEIs and employing agencies should work together so that:

- practice placements are of the highest quality and – in time – only in designated Approved Practice Settings
- employers are able to apply for special 'teaching organisation' status, awarded by the College of Social Work
- the merits of 'student units', which are headed up by a senior social worker are considered
- placements are of sufficiently high quality, and both employers and HEIs consider if their relationship is working well.

Recommendation 13: Local authorities and their partners should start an ongoing process to review and redesign the ways in which child and family social work is delivered, drawing on evidence of effectiveness of helping methods where appropriate and supporting practice that can implement evidence based ways of working with children and families.

Recommendation 14: Local authorities should designate a Principal Child and Family Social Worker, who is a senior manager with lead responsibility for practice in the local authority and who is still actively involved in frontline practice and who can report the views and experiences of the front line to all levels of management.

Recommendation 15: A Chief Social Worker should be created in Government, whose duties should include advising the Government on social work practice and informing the Secretary of State's annual report to Parliament on the working of the Children Act 1989.

29. It is currently understood that the Government is considering its response to these recommendations and this is likely to be published later in the year.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

30. As outlined above these workload pressures are likely to continue to have a significant impact on the Children, Education and Social Care budget for 2011/12. 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

31. 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

32. 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
33. 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

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

EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT

36. 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

37. For those children who are looked after, the Council has a responsibility as Corporate Parent to ensure that their needs are appropriately met.
38. 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

39. 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.