

CABINET ITEM COVERING SHEET PROFORMA

AGENDA ITEM

REPORT TO CABINET

8 SEPTEMBER 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 June 2011. This report is based on information until the end of June 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.

AGENDA ITEM

REPORT TO CABINET

8 SEPTEMBER 2011

**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 16 June 2011. This report is based on information until the end of June 2011 (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.

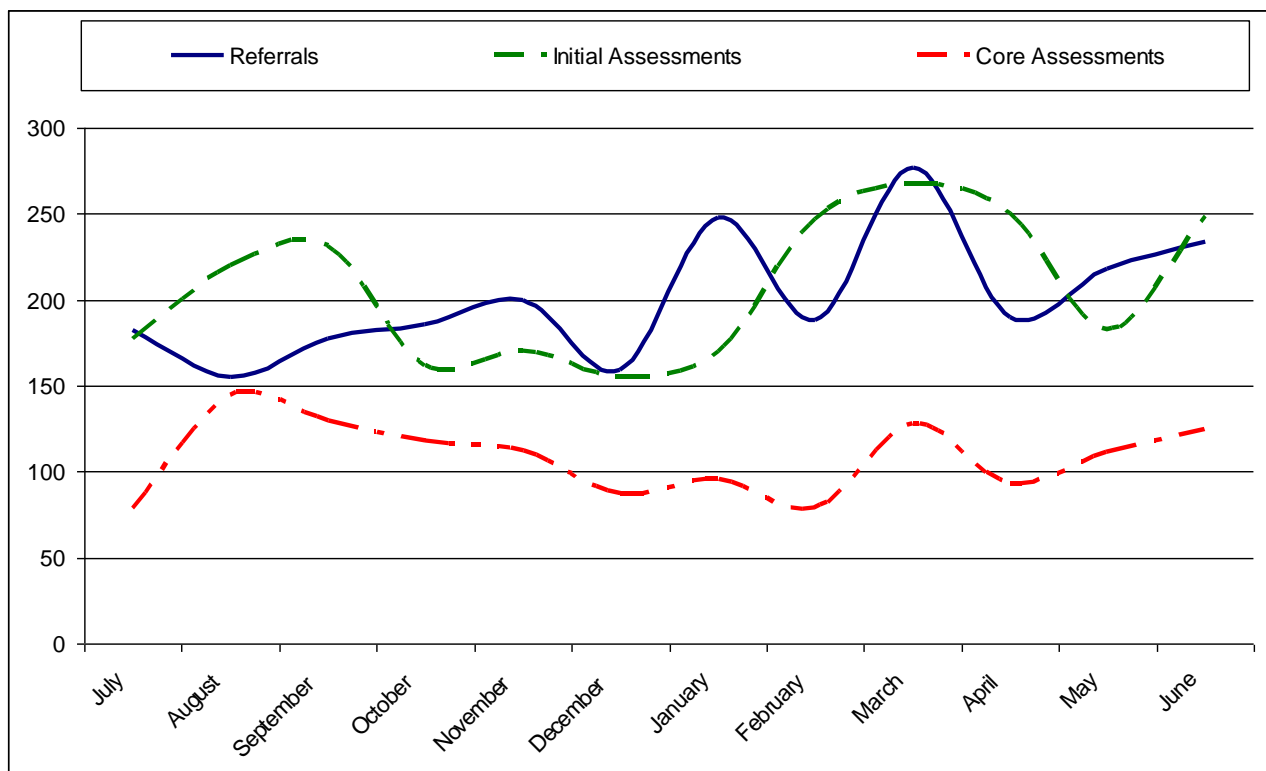
DETAIL

Referrals and Assessments

1. Following the all time high point in March 2011 of 277, as illustrated by Table 1, the number of referrals dropped significantly in April (190) before beginning to rise again in May (218) and June (234).
2. Although there was a slight dip in May (182), as a result of the reduced number of referrals in April, the number of initial assessments remained high in April (250) and June (249), which continues to place the service under substantial pressure.
3. The numbers of core assessments also dipped in April (93), but rose again in May (111) and June (124) reflecting the high volume of referrals received in March.
4. This sustained volume of work means that the service continues to be placed under extreme pressure and this workload is continuing to have a significant impact on key performance indicators relating to initial and core assessment timescales.

Month	Referrals	Initial Assessments	Core Assessments
April	190	250	93
May	218	182	111
June	234	249	124

Figure 1: Referral and Assessment Trends



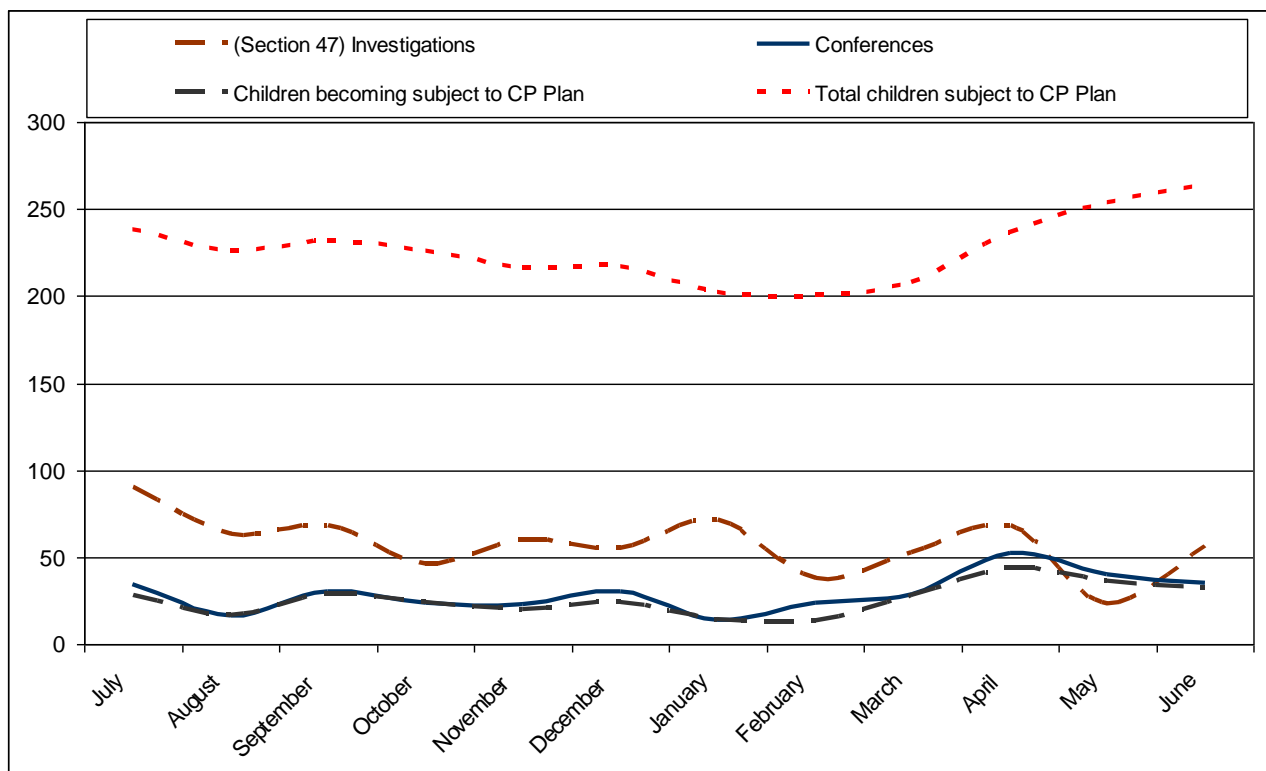
Child Protection

4. As can be seen from Table 2, the overall number of children who are subject to a child protection plan appears to be on an upward trend, reflecting the high volumes of referral and assessment activity. This is reflected in the number of children subject to a child protection plan in June 2011 (264) which is the highest number since April 2010 (266).
5. The number of section 47 investigations remains high but continues to fluctuate with no discernable trend.
6. The 'conversion rate' ie the percentage of referrals that subsequently led to a child protection plan for April to June 2011 was 8.9% compared with 3.8% for January to March 2011. This is will continue to be followed up by the Children's 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	68	52	E – 3 N – 21 N&P - 3 N&S– 4 P - 12	43	236
May	23	40	N – 20 N&E – 1 P - 11 P&E– 3 S - 1	36	253
June	56	35	E – 1 N – 11 N&P - 2 N&S– 4 P – 6 P&E - 8	32	264

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

Figure 2: Child Protection Trends



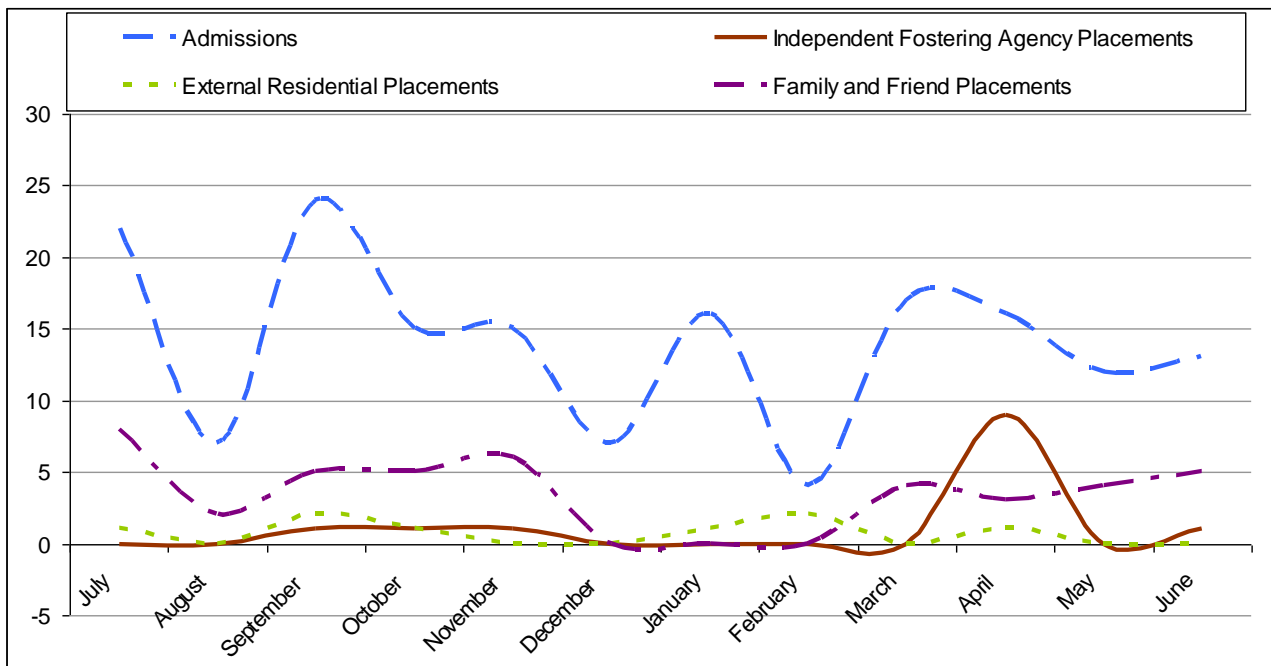
Looked After System

7. The overall number of looked after children has remained very high but stable throughout the quarter, April (301), May (300) and June (301).
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. It is worth noting the number of independent fostering agency placements made in April (9), which is the highest in any single month since workload pressures reporting to Cabinet commenced. This is a consequence of the extremely high number of referrals in March and the lack of suitable 'in house' foster carers and has resulted in a significant budgetary impact which is addressed later in the report.
10. Given the increasing number of looked after children placed in both external fostering and residential placements currently, an exercise has recently been undertaken, overseen by the Corporate Director and Head of Service, to scrutinise all children placed in such provision on a case by case basis. The conclusion reached was that all of these children were appropriately placed at the current time, although this will continue to be monitored closely.
11. The 'conversion rate' ie the percentage of referrals that subsequently led to a child becoming looked after was 1.9% for April to June 2011 compared with 1.4% for January to March 2011. This will continue to be monitored closely by the Children's Social Care Performance Clinic. Should any significant trends become apparent, these will be included in future reports to Cabinet.

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	16	N1 – 9 N4 – 3 N5 – 4	301	9	1	3
May	12	N1 – 9 N3 – 1 N4 – 1 N5 – 1	300	0	0	4
June	13	N1 – 10 N3 – 1 N5 – 1 N6 – 1	301	1	0	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

12. Following recent interviews, an external appointment has been made to the post of Targeted Team Manager. The Specialist Team Manager post remains vacant following four external advertisements, although this post continues to be covered by an agency manager. Given the number of times this post has been advertised, it has now been decided not to readvertise this post pending the completion of the Efficiency, Improvement and Transformation (EIT) review of children's social care.
13. In terms of social work posts, as of the end of March 2011, there were 1.6 full time equivalent (fte) substantive vacancies.
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, 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.
15. At the end of June 2011, there were no unallocated child protection cases, although there were 2 unallocated looked after children cases and 12 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 continue to be distributed across all the social work teams as evenly as possible in order to spread the workload and there is no spare capacity within the system at the current time.
17. A series of regular workload pressures meetings led by the Corporate Director and Head of Service monitors and oversees the pressures relating to all aspects of children's social care services on an ongoing basis, and as part of this scrutinises the staffing and allocation situation.
18. As a result of the increasing pressures and need to ensure cases are safely allocated and progressed in a timely manner, 5 additional supernumerary agency staff have been employed within the referral and assessment and specialist social work teams on a strictly time limited basis. These posts are subject to ongoing monitoring and review by Corporate Director and Head of Service. The resulting impact on the agency staffing budget is addressed later in the report.

Budgetary Impact

19. These pressures have continued to have an impact on the Children, Education and Social Care budget in a number of key areas as follows.
20. Firstly the independent fostering agency budget, which is set at £3.265m for 2011/12. The current projected outturn at year end is £3.657m ie an overspend of £392k. 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. Secondly the children's homes agency placements budget, which is set at £2.536m for 2011/12. The current projected outturn at year end is £3.287m ie an overspend of £751k). 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.

22. Thirdly the social work staffing budget, which is set at £3.107m for 2011/12. The current projected outturn at year end is £3.187m ie an overspend of £80k.
23. These issues continue to be considered through the medium term financial plan (MFTP). As part of the budget setting process for 2011/12, Council approved an additional £2m funding for children's social care. It should be noted that this additional resource is included in the budget figures shown in paragraphs 18 - 20 above.

EIT Review of Child Placements

24. Further to the previous update to Cabinet in March 2011, the marketing officer is now in post and the 'Put yourself in the Picture' marketing campaign was launched in May 2011. The campaign has attracted significant media attention and has already resulted in an marked increase in the numbers of people expressing an interest in becoming foster carers and adopters. The key to the success of this campaign will be the number which actually go on become approved foster carers and adopters, but the early signs are extremely encouraging.
25. Work is progressing in relation to the two proposed new children's homes which is being overseen by a project team. Planning permission has now been secured in relation to the planned home in Redcar Road and the estimated opening date is January 2012. As regards Piper Knowle, the sale of the property is currently being finalised and the projected opening date is November 2011. In addition to the required building works on both properties the necessary preparation in terms of staff recruitment and training and registration of the homes with Ofsted is also being progressed in parallel in order to avoid any unnecessary delay.
26. Tees Valley Directors of Children's Services (DCS) are in the process of developing a joint work programme with North Eastern Purchasing Organisation (NEPO) which will identify the key priorities for the commissioning of children's placements across the Tees Valley. A key priority for this work would be to address some of the high cost placements where children are currently placed out of the area in either residential or residential school provision.

EIT Review of Children's Social Care

27. The scheduled EIT review of children's social care is scheduled to commence in autumn 2011 and will cover all aspects of the service apart from the child placement team which was previously addressed as part of EIT review of child placements.
28. This will provide an opportunity to review the current structure in the light of recent experience and linked EIT reviews and also consider best practice regionally and nationally in order to ensure that the service is operating efficiently and is appropriately equipped to respond to the ongoing workload pressures.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

29. 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

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.