

CABINET ITEM COVERING SHEET PROFORMA

AGENDA ITEM

REPORT TO CABINET

1 DECEMBER 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 8 September 2011. This report is based on information until the end of September 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. Endorse the proposed approach to the EIT review of children's social care.

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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SUMMARY

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RECOMMENDATIONS

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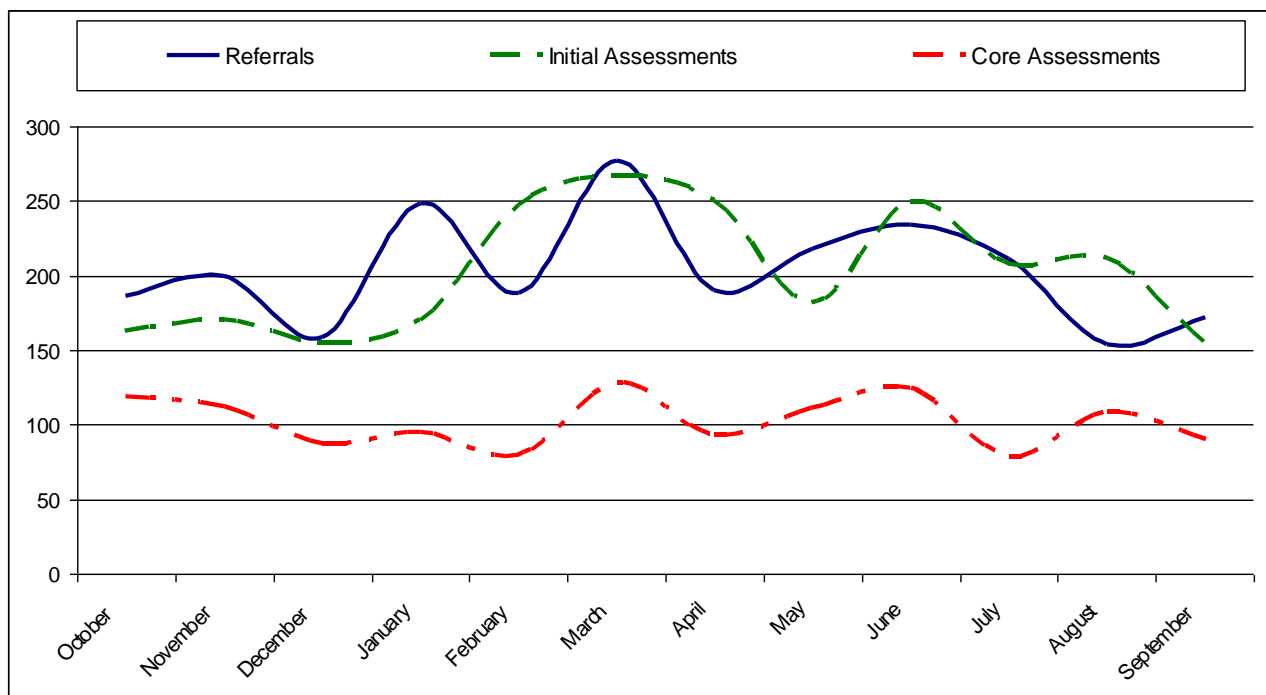
DETAIL

Referrals and Assessments

1. Although the number of referrals remained high in July (211), there was a significant decrease in August (154). The numbers of referrals then rose slightly in September (172).
2. The number of initial assessments decreased significantly in September (155), reflecting the reduction in referrals received during August.
3. There was also a corresponding reduction in core assessment activity during the quarter, with 78 core assessments being completed in June and 90 in September.
4. Overall this represents an easing of the workload pressures which is likely to be largely attributable to a seasonal dip.

Month	Referrals	Initial Assessments	Core Assessments
April	190	250	93
May	218	182	111
June	234	249	124
July	211	207	78
August	154	211	108
September	172	155	90

Figure 1: Referral and Assessment Trends



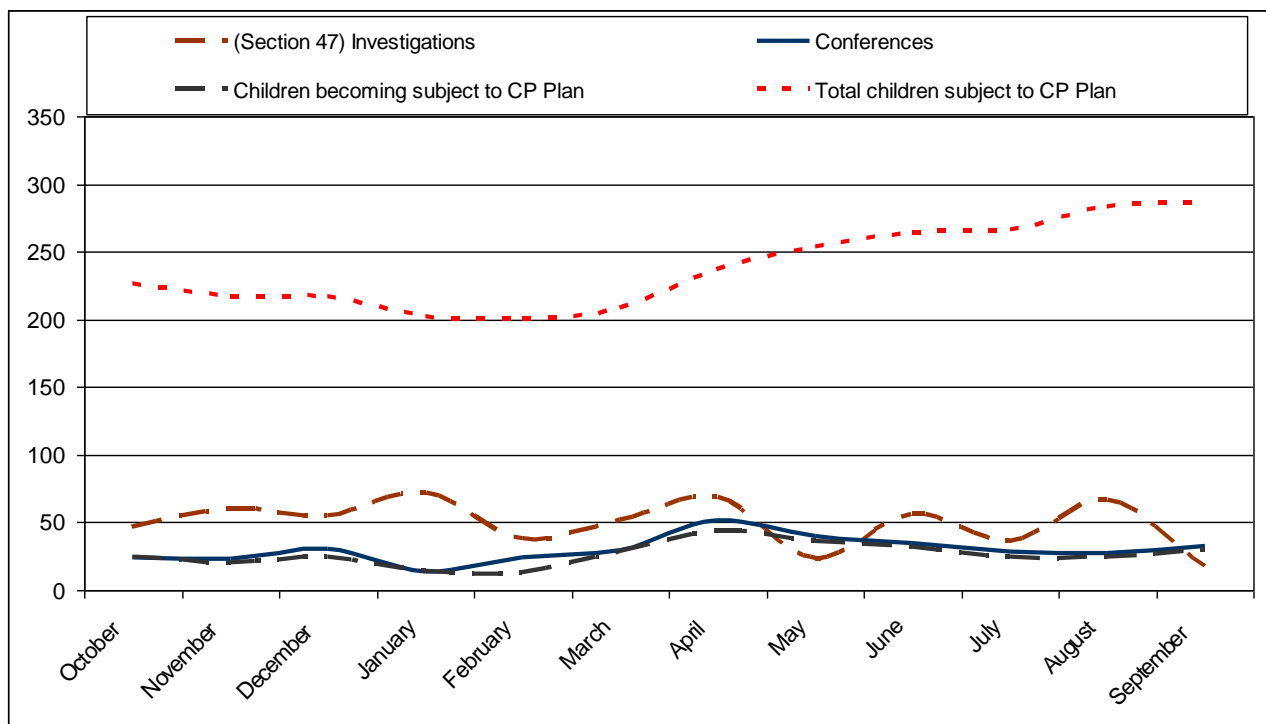
Child Protection

5. As can be seen from Table 2, the overall number of children who are subject to a child protection plan has continued on an upward trend, reaching an all time high point in September (287). This reflects the high volumes of referral and assessment activity earlier in the year.
6. The number of section 47 investigations remained high throughout July (36) and August (66) but decreased significantly in September (18), reflecting the reduction in referral and assessment activity during August and September.
7. The 'conversion rate' ie the percentage of referrals that subsequently led to a child protection plan for July to September 2011 was 11.3% compared with 8.9% for April to June 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
July	36	28	E – 1 N – 7 N&P - 1 N&S– 2 P – 8 P&E - 5	24	266
Aug	66	27	E – 6 N – 9 N & E - 1 N&P - 1 N&S– 2 P – 2 P&E - 3	24	283
September	18	33	N – 15 N&E - 1 N&P - 2 P – 3 P&E – 4 S - 4	29	287

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

Figure 2: Child Protection Trends



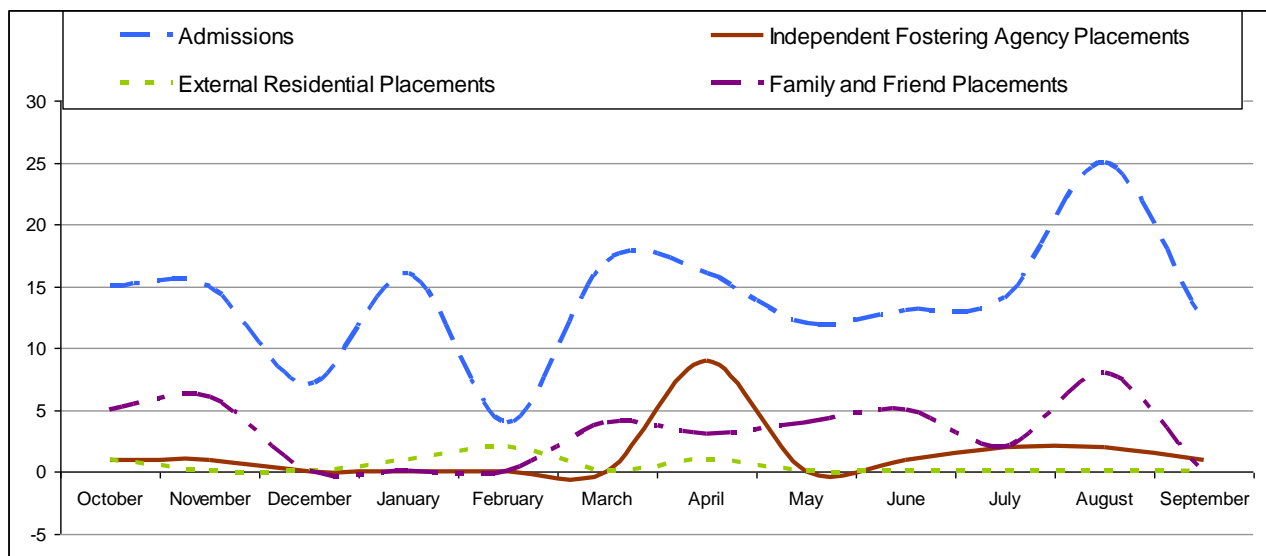
Looked After System

8. The overall number of looked after children has risen from the previous quarter, reaching a peak of 314 in August 2011.
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. Despite the very high number of admissions to the looked after system in August (25), there has been a reduction in the use of independent fostering agency placements and no external residential placements were made throughout the quarter, reflecting the overall reduction in referral and assessment activity during August and September.
11. The 'conversion rate' ie the percentage of referrals that subsequently led to a child becoming looked after was 4.6% for July to September 2011 compared with 1.9% for April to June 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
July	14	N1 – 6 N5 – 6 N8 – 2	306	2	0	2
August	25	N1 – 19 N2 – 2 N3 – 1 N4 – 1 N5 – 1 N8 – 1	314	2	0	8
September	12	N1 – 7 N4 – 3 N5 – 2	311	1	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

12. The Specialist Team Manager post remains vacant following four external advertisements, although is covered by an agency manager. The post will be readvertised following 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 September 2011, there were no 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 positive overall.
15. At the end of September 2011, there were no unallocated child protection or looked after children cases, although there were 10 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 which are 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, there were 6 additional supernumerary staff employed within the referral and assessment, specialist and targeted social work teams as of the end of September. These posts are agreed on a strictly time limited basis and are subject to ongoing monitoring and review by Corporate Director and Head of Service. The resulting impact on the social work 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 £3.388m ie an overspend of £123k. 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 £3.389m ie an overspend of £853k. 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 £2.955m for 2011/12. The current projected outturn at year end is £3.162m ie an overspend of £207k.
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 19 - 22 above.

EIT Review of Child Placements

24. The 'Put yourself in the Picture' fostering and adoption marketing campaign has continued and continues to attract significant media attention. There has been a specific focus on attracting potential adopters to coincide with national adoption week, which ran from 31 October to 6 November 2011. Three prospective foster carers and one prospective adopter attracted as a result of the campaign are currently undergoing assessment. A fuller progress report will be brought back to Cabinet in due course in relation to this.
25. Work is progressing in relation to the two proposed new children's homes. Piper Knowle is now nearing completion and due to open in December 2011. Unfortunately some building issues have been encountered with Redcar Road which will result in a slight delay in this opening. This is therefore now scheduled for completion in February 2012.
26. Tees Valley Directors of Children's Services (DCS) are continuing to explore commissioning opportunities linked to residential or residential school placements for children with complex needs across the Tees Valley in partnership with the North Eastern Purchasing Organisation (NEPO). Updates on progress in relation to this work will be included in future workload pressures reports to Cabinet.

EIT Review of Children's Social Care

27. The EIT review of children's social care is now underway and the scoping document was agreed by Arts, Leisure and Culture (ALC) Select Committee on 26 October 2011.
28. Given the tight timescale and the wide range of services covered by the review, a number of key questions have been identified to ensure the review focuses on the most important issues affecting the service in the context of the ongoing work pressures. These questions were approved by ALC Select Committee on 26 October 2011 and are attached as appendix 1.
29. In order to ensure the widest possible participation in the review, a development day involving a cross section of staff from across the service was held on 18 November 2011. This was a productive day which has established a clear direction of travel for the review in relation to a number of the identified key questions.
30. A discussion document is currently being prepared based on the work carried out on the day to be shared amongst all staff for comments before decisions are made on options to be presented to ALC Select Committee on 15 February 2012. The final report will be presented to Cabinet for approval on 8 March 2012.

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.