

## CABINET ITEM COVERING SHEET PROFORMA

**AGENDA ITEM**

**REPORT TO CABINET**

**14 JUNE 2012**

**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 March 2012. This report is based on information until the end of March 2012 (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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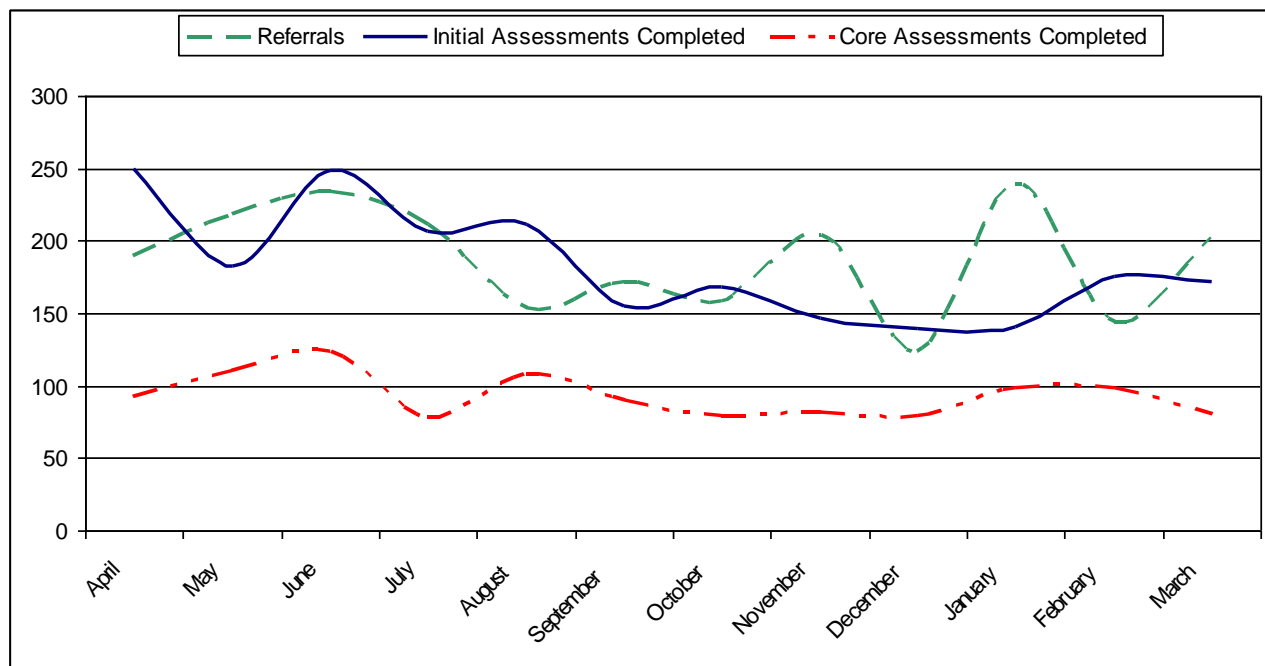
## DETAIL

### Referrals and Assessments

1. There was a significant upsurge in referrals during the quarter, with January being the busiest month of the year so far with 239 referrals being received.
2. Although the number of referrals dipped slightly in February (144), there was a high level of initial assessment activity during the month (175) as the referrals received in January were processed. This level of activity also continued into March (172).
3. The level of core assessment activity has remained high but comparatively steady. This will be likely to further increase in the following quarter as the high numbers of initial assessments work their way through the system.

<b>Month</b>	<b>Referrals</b>	<b>Initial Assessments</b>	<b>Core Assessments</b>
April	190	250	93
May	218	182	111
June	234	249	124
July	211	207	78
August	154	211	108
September	172	155	90
October	158	168	79
November	204	146	82
December	124	139	79
January	239	141	99
February	144	175	98
March	202	172	81

**Figure 1: Referral and Assessment Trends**



### Child Protection

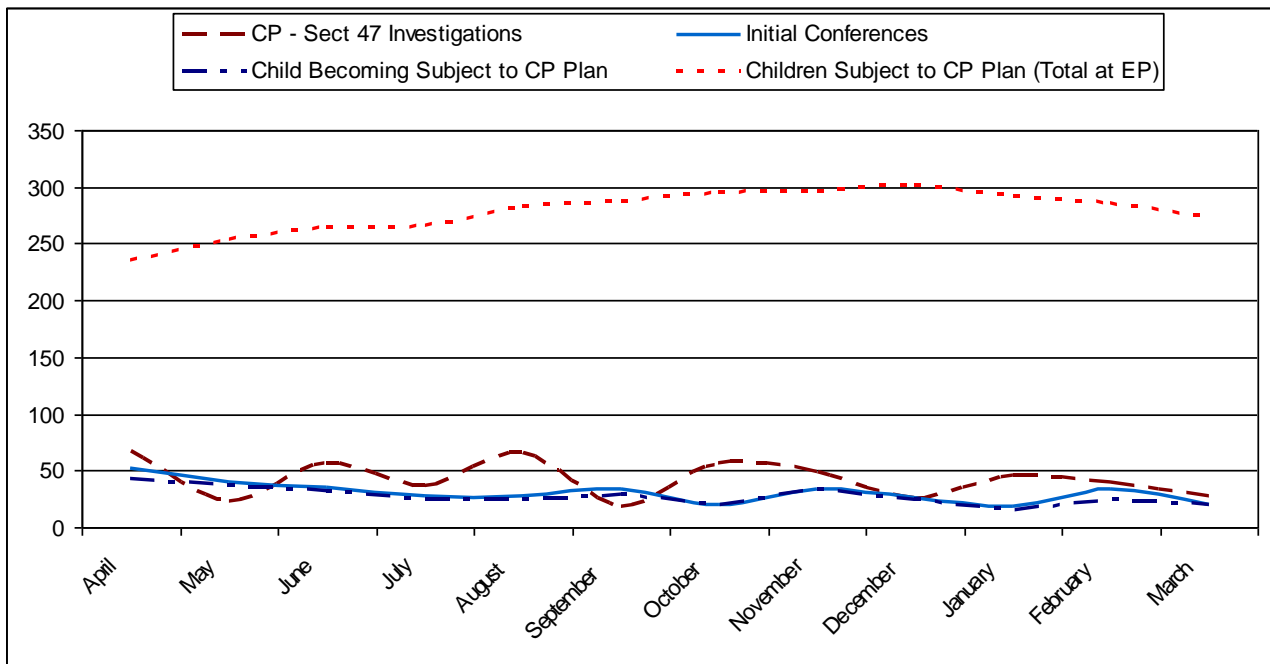
4. The overall number of children who are subject to a child protection plan has steadily declined during the quarter reaching 273 in March. This reverses the upward trend seen throughout the year up to this point.
5. There was a high number of section 47 investigations in January, reflecting the increase in referrals during the month, but overall the numbers of child protection conferences and children becoming subject to a child protection plan has reflected the downward trend in child protection activity.
6. The 'conversion rate' ie the percentage of referrals that subsequently led to a child protection plan for January to March was 3.8% compared with 5.8% for October to December. This is the subject of ongoing monitoring and scrutiny by the Children's Social Care Performance Clinic and any significant themes arising from this work will be included in future reports to Cabinet.

<b>Table 2: Child Protection Activity 2011/12</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	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
October	57	20	N – 12 P – 7 S – 1	20	295
November	49	34	E – 1 N – 16 N&P – 1 N&S – 3 P – 12	33	296
December	26	26	E – 3 N – 9 N&P – 2 P – 7 S – 3	24	301

January	46	18	N – 7 P – 6 S – 2	15	292
February	39	33	E – 4 N – 12 N&S – 1 P – 6 S – 1	24	286
March	28	20	E – 2 N – 12 P – 4 S – 2	20	273

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**

- The overall number of looked after children has continued to rise, reaching an all time high of 348 in February, before dipping slightly to 342 in March.
- Conversely, the numbers of new admissions to the looked after system fell during the quarter reflecting the decline in referral and assessment activity evident in the previous quarter.
- 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 was 5.8% for January to March compared with 3.9% for October to December. 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.

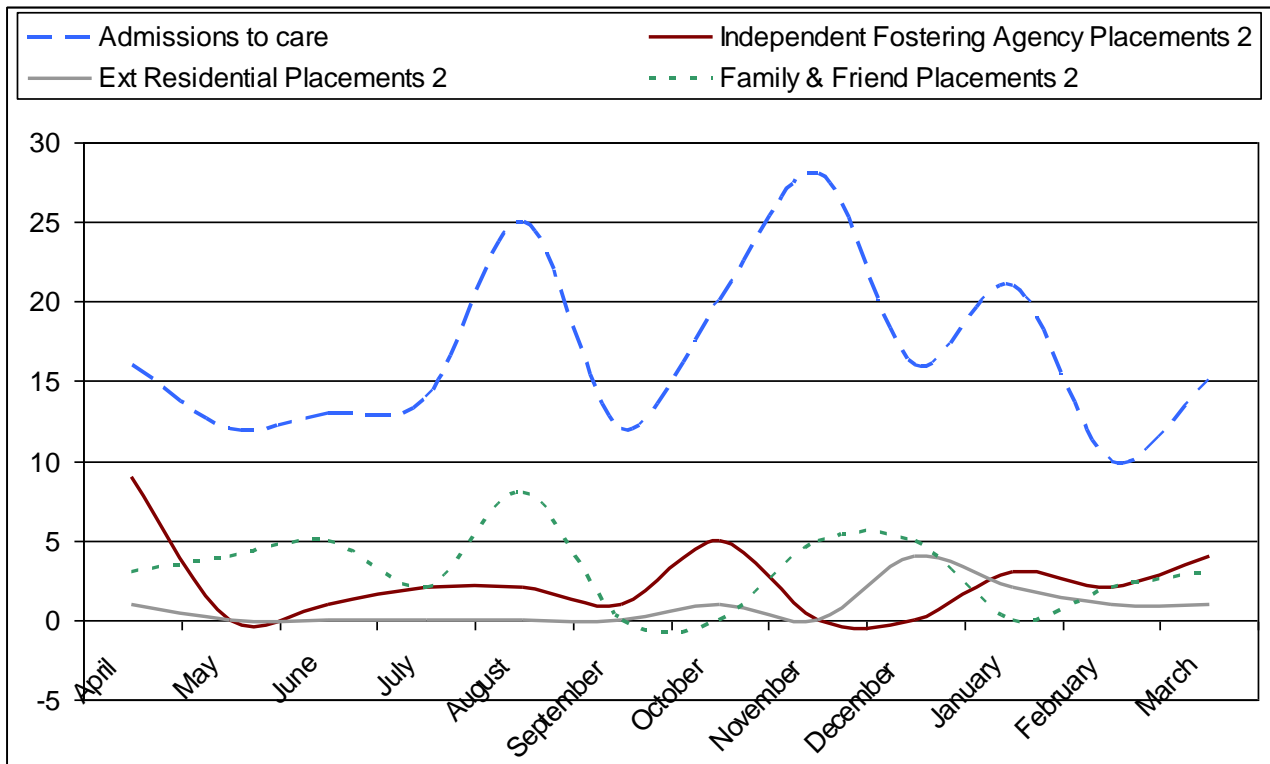
<b>Table 4: Looked After System Activity (2011/12)</b>						
<b>Month</b>	<b>Admissions</b>	<b>Reason for Admission</b>	<b>Overall LAC Population</b>	<b>Independent Fostering Agency Placements</b>	<b>External Residential Placements</b>	<b>Family and Friend Placements</b>
April	16	N1 – 9 N4 – 3 N5 – 4	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
October	20	N1 – 7 N2 – 1 N4 – 6 N5 – 2 N6 – 4	311	5	1	0
November	28	N1 – 21 N3 – 2 N5 – 4	325	0	0	5
December	16	N1 – 11 N3 – 1 N4 – 3 N5 - 1	336	0	4	5



January	21	N1 – 14 N2 - 1 N4 – 3 N6 – 3	346	3	2	0
February	10	N1 – 8 N5 – 1 N6 – 1	348	2	1	2
March	15	N1 – 12 N3 – 1 N5 – 1 N6 – 1	342	4	1	3

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. As previously reported, one Team Manager post remains vacant, although this is covered by an agency manager, which will be advertised as part of the implementation phase of the Efficiency, Improvement and Transformation (EIT) review of children's social care.
12. In terms of social work posts, as of the end of March 2012 there were no vacancies, reflecting the overall improvement in the recruitment and retention climate.
13. 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.
14. At the end of March, there were no unallocated child protection or children in need cases, but there were four looked after children and two private law cases awaiting allocation.
15. 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.
16. 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.
17. As a result of the increasing pressures and need to ensure cases are safely allocated and progressed in a timely manner, there were 4 supernumerary staff employed within the referral and assessment, specialist and targeted social work teams as of the end of March. 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**

18. These pressures continue to have an impact on the Children, Education and Social Care budget in a number of key areas.
19. Firstly the independent fostering agency budget, which was set at £3.265m for 2011/12. The actual outturn for 2011/12 was £3.372m, an overspend of £107k. This was £21k more than projected at December 2011. This overspend was a direct result of the increase in the number of placements during 2011/12. There was an average of 84 placements throughout 2011/12, with 90 in place at 31 March 2012.
20. Secondly the children's homes agency placements budget, which was set at £2.536m for 2011/12. The actual outturn was £3.621m, an overspend of £1.085m. This was £103k more than projected at December 2011. This overspend was also a direct result of the increase in the number of placements during 2011/12. There was an average of 28 placements throughout 2011/12, with 33 in place at 31 March 2012.
21. Thirdly the social work staffing outturn budget, which was set at £2.954m for 2011/12. The actual outturn was £3.243m, an overspend of £289k. This overspend is a direct result of the requirement for agency staff, although this has continued to reduce.

22. These issues continue to be considered through the medium term financial plan (MFTP).

### **EIT Review of Child Placements**

23. The 'put yourself in the picture' marketing campaign continues to attract significant attention and we have had 268 enquiries with regards to fostering and 80 enquiries with regards to adoption since the start of the campaign in May 2011.
24. There are currently 12 applicants being invited to preparation training in June and 6 of these applicants can be directly linked with the campaign. In total, there are 8 fostering and 4 adoption assessments currently being undertaken which will be presented to panel for approval in due course.
25. Piper House children's home has now been registered by Ofsted and is formally open and fully occupied.
26. Ayton Place children's home is complete and ready to open as soon as Ofsted have completed the process of registering the home.
27. 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**

28. Further to approval by Cabinet on 8 March 2012, the recommendations arising from the review were subject to a formal consultation period which ended on 13 April 2012.
29. A relatively small number of queries were received, most of which related to the impact that the proposed changes are likely to have on individual posts and working arrangements. All queries were appropriately responded to.
30. The review has therefore now progressed into the implementation phase and is on track for implementation on 3 September 2012.

### **Adoption Scorecard**

31. Following the publication of the adoption scorecard on 11 May 2012, the Department for Education (DfE) requested to meet with representatives from Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council to explore the reasons behind the performance against the three new performance indicators.
32. The meeting subsequently took place on 23 May 2012, attended by Cabinet Member, Children and Young People, Chief Executive, Corporate Director, Children Education and Social Care (CESC) and a number of senior officers. The consensus was that this was a productive meeting, with opportunity being provided to share some of our concerns about the scorecard.

The key points we made to the DfE were as follows:

- The focus on adoption to the exclusion of other forms of permanence fails to take account of the significance and prevalence of special guardianship orders, residence orders and family and friend placements.

The emphasis on timeliness at the expense of other factors, most notably placement stability, is unhelpful because it puts process before outcome. This is particularly pertinent in Stockton-on-Tees as we believe we have a very strong track record of making successful and lasting adoption placements, which was highlighted by Ofsted in June 2011 to support the 'outstanding' judgement we received.

- The reductionist nature of the scorecard does not take account of a variety of factors which make it more difficult to place children, such as sibling groups, age profile (15/40 of our children were over 5), ethnicity, disability etc.
  - The scorecard appears to suggest that the process is completely under the control of the local authority when we know from experience that this is not the case. Even the performance indicator which measures time from placement order to the match with prospective adopters (A2) can still be at the mercy of the court process.
33. It is worth noting the small size of the cohort in Stockton-on-Tees - there were 18 children (12 cases) outside the threshold in relation to the A2 indicator. A summary of the reasons for the delay in each case was provided to DfE, with detailed discussions taking place in relation to some cases in order to ensure that DfE had a full understanding of the complexities of this area of social work practice. Crucially, it was shared that all 18 children have been successfully matched with adopters, where they remain to date.
34. The Children's Improvement Board (CIB) were also present at the meeting and shared details of a diagnostic assessment which is available to local authorities at no cost. This will now be considered alongside the possibility of a 'peer challenge' which we were already exploring prior to the publication of the scorecard. The crucial factor in determining which model to proceed with, will be that it is able to focus on the wider issue of permanence, rather than exclusively on adoption.
35. The DfE have since made contact to confirm that on the basis of this meeting they have no cause for concern as far as Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council is concerned and that they are 'entirely happy' with the progress we are making. There will be no further follow up by DfE in respect of this issue and it is solely our decision whether to proceed with the diagnostic assessment or continue with a 'peer challenge' as originally planned.

## **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

36. As outlined above these workload pressures are likely to continue to have a significant impact on the CESC budget into 2012/13. 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**

37. 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**

38. 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
39. 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**

40. 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.
41. The effective safeguarding of children and young people will also have a significant impact on the community safety agenda.

## **EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

42. 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**

43. For those children who are looked after, the Council has a responsibility as Corporate Parent to ensure that their needs are appropriately met.
44. 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**

45. 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.