

CABINET ITEM COVERING SHEET PROFORMA

AGENDA ITEM

REPORT TO CABINET

10 JANUARY 2013

**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 6 September 2012. This report is based on information until the end of September 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) should consider whether they have a personal interest in any item, as defined in paragraphs 9 and 11 of the Council's code of conduct and, if so, declare the existence and nature of that interest in accordance with and/or taking account of paragraphs 12 - 17 of the code.

Where a Member regards him/herself as having a personal interest, as described in paragraph 16 of the code, in any business of the Council he/she must then, in accordance with paragraph 18 of the code, 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 and the business:-

- affects the members financial position or the financial position of a person or body described in **paragraph 17** of the code, or
- relates to the determining of any approval, consent, licence, permission or registration in relation to the member or any person or body described in **paragraph 17** of the code.

A Member with a personal interest, as described in **paragraph 18** of the code, may attend the meeting but must not take part in the consideration and voting upon the relevant item of business. However, a member with such an interest may make representations, answer questions or give evidence relating to that business before the business is considered or voted on, provided the public are also allowed to attend the meeting for the same purpose whether under a statutory right or otherwise (**paragraph 19** of the code)

Members may participate in any discussion and vote on a matter in which they have an interest, as described in **paragraph 18** of the code, where that interest relates to functions of the Council detailed in **paragraph 20** of the code.

Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

It is a criminal offence for a member to participate in any discussion or vote on a matter in which he/she has a disclosable pecuniary interest (and where an appropriate dispensation has not been granted) **paragraph 21** of the code.

Members are required to comply with any procedural rule adopted by the Council which requires a member to leave the meeting room whilst the meeting is discussing a matter in which that member has a disclosable pecuniary interest (**paragraph 22** of the code).

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SUMMARY

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RECOMMENDATIONS

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1. Note the continued workload pressures within the social care system and the associated impact this is having on caseloads, performance and budget.
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DETAIL

Format of Reports

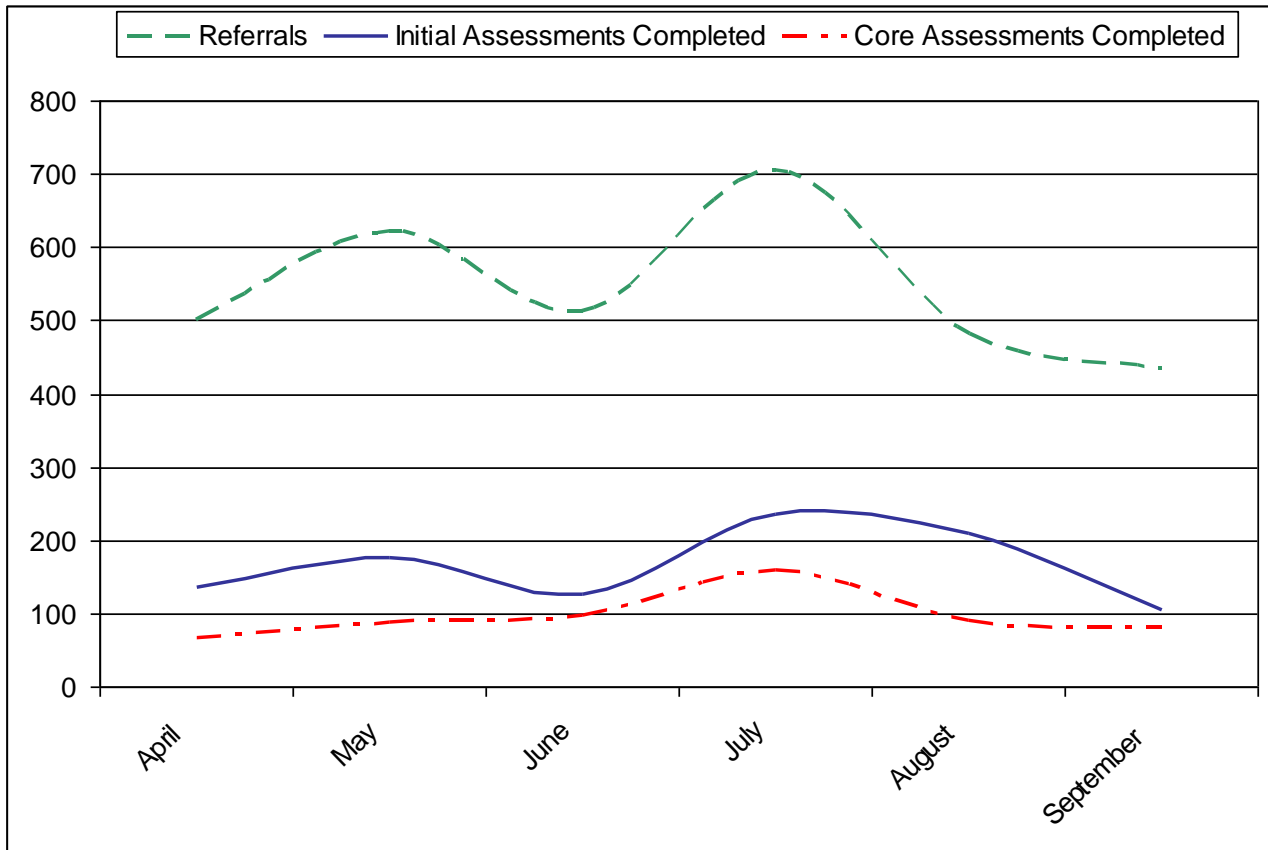
1. Given that Cabinet has been receiving children's social care workload pressures reports for over three years, it was considered timely to review the format for these reports to ensure that the information presented provides an accurate overview of the issues affecting the service at any given time.
2. As a result, this report is presented in a slightly different format, which has been backdated to the beginning of 2012/13 to enable future trend analysis and comparisons to be made more effectively.
3. The first change is that the number of referrals is now based on the total number of referrals received by First Contact whereas previously this was calculated on the basis of only those referrals which progressed through the system. It is thought that that the total figure is a better proxy for the pressures being faced by First Contact and the Referral and Assessment Team, as even referrals which do not proceed will require a significant amount of staff time before this point is reached. This impacts on the calculation of the conversion rates (percentages decrease).
4. The second change, in response to a specific request made by Cabinet previously, is that the number of children referred are now included so that a comparison can be made with the actual number of referrals.

Referrals and Assessments

5. There was a further significant upsurge in referrals during July, continuing the previous upward trend, before this subsided slightly August and September. This decrease is likely to be attributable to a seasonal dip linked to the school holidays period.
6. This is reflected in the numbers of initial and core assessments being undertaken, with July being a particularly busy month, with 235 initial and 158 core assessments being completed.
7. This sustained level of workload pressures places the service under great pressure, and is reflected in a negative impact on a variety of performance indicators relating to timeliness of assessment completion and also the allocation of cases, as addressed later in the report.

Month	Referrals	Number of Children	Initial Assessments	Core Assessments
April	501	469	136	67
May	623	591	175	89
June	512	490	125	97
July	706	653	235	158
August	482	452	210	90
September	435	418	104	80

Figure 1: Referral and Assessment Trends



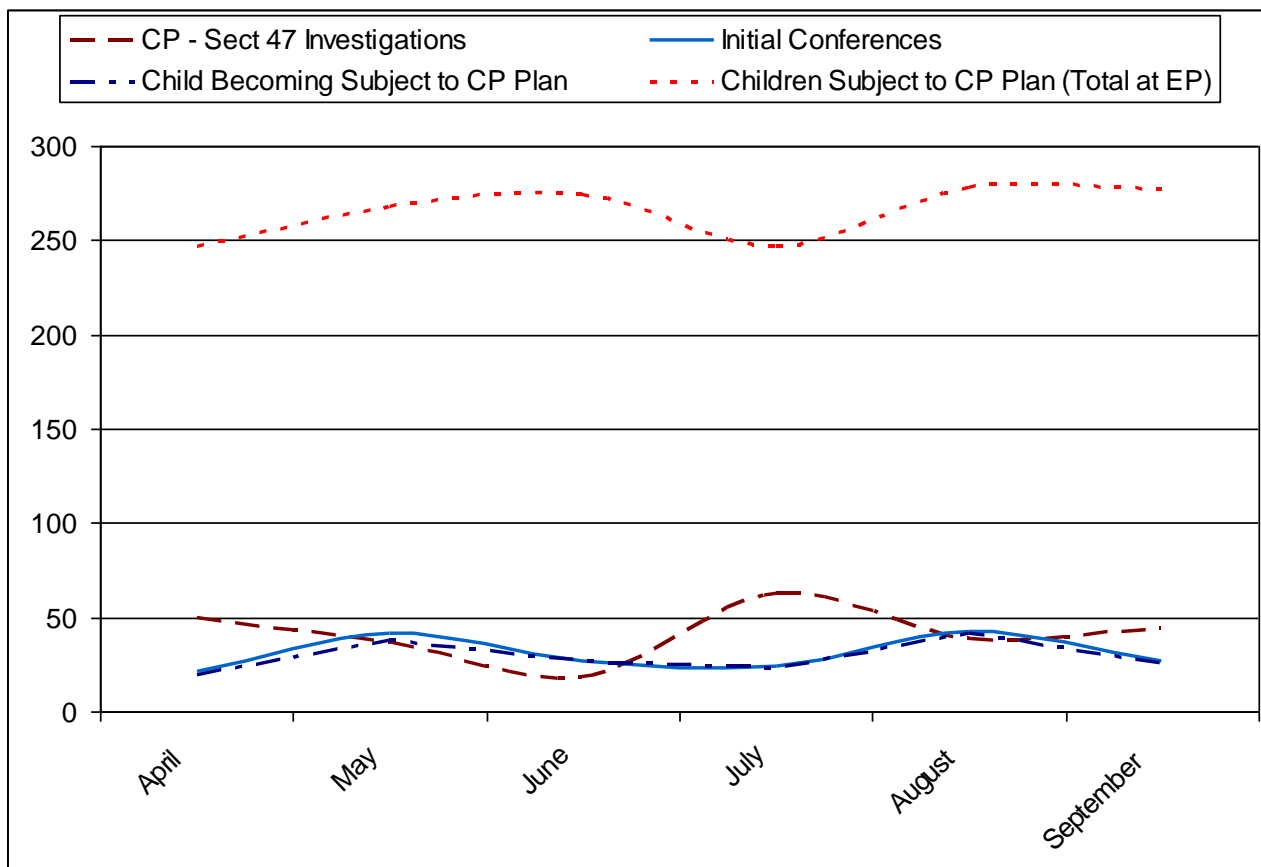
Child Protection

8. Despite dipping to 247 in July, the overall number of children who are subject to a child protection plan has continued on an overall upward trajectory, reaching 277 in September.
9. There was a relatively high level of activity in terms of section 47 investigations and child protection conferences during July and August, with a particularly high number of children becoming subject to as child protection plan during August.
10. The ‘conversion rate’ ie the percentage of referrals that subsequently led to a child protection plan for July to September was 3.4% (58 children) compared with 5.1% (85 children) for April to June. 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.

Table 2: Child Protection Activity 2012/13					
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	50	21	N – 7 P - 12	19	247
May	37	41	N – 31 P – 1 S - 6	38	268
June	18	27	E – 2 N – 12 P – 12 S - 1	27	274
July	63	24	E – 4 E&S – 1 N – 15 P – 2 S - 1	23	247
August	39	42	E – 6 N – 27 P - 8	41	278
September	44	27	E – 3 N – 10 P – 12 S - 1	26	277

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

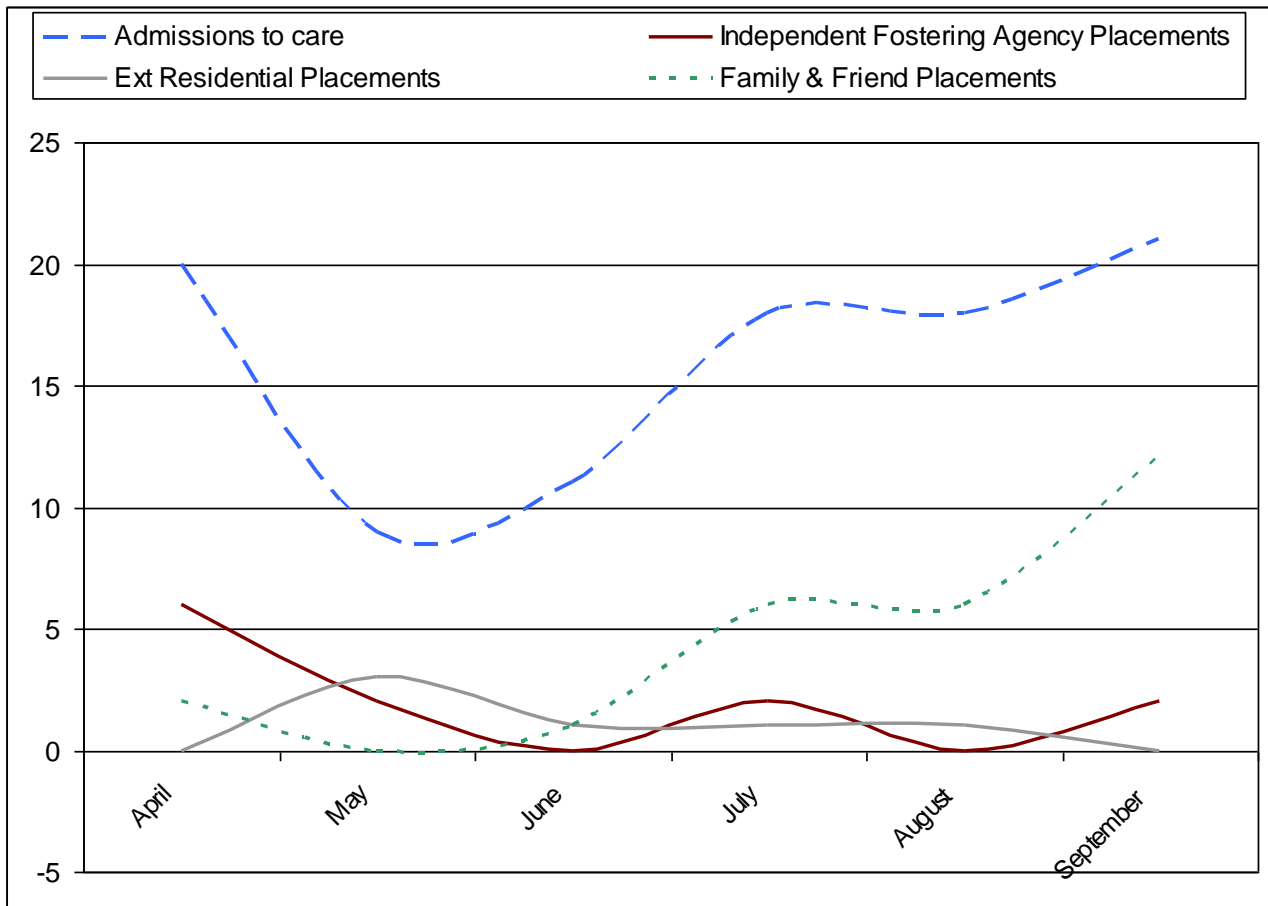
11. Despite the rise in incoming work, the overall number of looked after children remains relatively stable at 349 in September.
12. There were significant numbers of new admissions to the looked after system during the quarter, although the number of independent fostering agency (IFA) and external residential placements has been kept at a relatively low level due to the use of in house capacity and placements with family and friends.
13. 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.
14. The 'conversion rate' ie the percentage of referrals that subsequently led to a child becoming looked after was 1.1% (18 children) for July to September compared with 1.9% (32 children) for April to June. 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 (2012/13)						
Month	Admissions	Reason for Admission	Overall LAC Population	Independent Fostering Agency Placements	External Residential Placements	Family and Friend Placements
April	20	N1 – 14 N4 – 1 N5 – 4 N6 – 1	344	6	0	2
May	9	N1 – 3 N4 – 1 N5 – 2 N6 – 2 N8 – 1	342	2	3	0
June	11	N1 – 8 N4 – 3	337	0	1	1
July	18	N1 – 14 N2 – 1 N4 – 1 N5 – 1 N6 – 1	341	2	1	6
August	18	N1 – 12 N4 – 1 N5 – 2 N6 – 3	347	0	1	6
September	21	N1 – 19 N4 – 1 N8 – 1	349	2	0	12

April	20	N1 – 14 N4 – 1 N5 – 4 N6 - 1	344	6	0	2
May	9	N1 – 3 N4 – 1 N5 – 2 N6 – 2 N8 - 1	342	2	3	0
June	11	N1 – 8 N4 – 3	337	0	1	1

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

15. At the end of September, there were no team manager vacancies and 3.5 full time equivalent (FTE) social worker vacancies, continuing to reflect the overall improvement in the recruitment and retention climate.
16. 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.
17. At the end of September, there were no unallocated cases.
18. 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.
19. As a result of the increasing pressures and need to ensure cases are safely allocated and progressed in a timely manner, there was 2 supernumerary staff employed within the referral and assessment team as of the end of September. It should be noted that even with these additional posts in place there is still a number of cases awaiting allocation within the team which are progressed on a risk managed basis. 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.

Budgetary Impact

20. These pressures have continued to have an impact on the Children, Education and Social Care budget in a number of key areas as follows.
21. Firstly the independent fostering agency budget, which is set at £3.319m for 2012/13. The current projected outturn at year end is £4.244m ie an overspend of £925k. 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. Secondly the children's homes agency placements budget, which is set at £2.353m for 2012/13. The current projected outturn at year end is £4.637m ie an overspend of £2.28m. 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.
23. Thirdly, the social work staffing budget, which has been reconfigured as a result of the EIT review of children's social care. The implementation of the recommendations arising from the review will result in some transitional expenditure during this financial year. The current projected outturn is £3.4m, which is an overspend of £322k.
24. These issues continue to be considered through the medium term financial plan (MFTP).

EIT Review of Child Placements

25. The 'put yourself in the picture' marketing campaign continues to attract significant attention and there have been 395 fostering and 117 adoption enquiries since the beginning of the campaign in May 2011.
26. Since the start of the campaign there has been 17 new foster carer approvals and a further 12 foster carer assessments are currently being undertaken.

27. Since the start of the campaign there has been 15 new prospective adopter approvals and a further 4 prospective adopter assessments are currently being undertaken.
28. Following a slight delay in registering Ayton Place children's home with Ofsted, it is now open and fully occupied.

EIT Review of Children's Social Care

29. All recommendations arising from the review were fully implemented on schedule on, or before, 3 September 2012.
30. Although the review inevitably resulted in a degree of upheaval, early reports from managers and staff regarding the impact of the changes have been positive.

Permanence Diagnostic

31. Prior to the publication of the first adoption scorecard in March 2012, a decision had been made to undertake a peer review in relation to permanence planning, triggered by the relatively low numbers of children being adopted in Stockton-on-Tees in comparison with the rest of the North East region.
32. Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council was identified as being in the lowest 25% nationally as far as the adoption scorecard performance indicators are concerned which resulted in a visit from the Department for Education (DfE). Although the DfE were entirely satisfied with the response received, we were given the option of taking part in a voluntary diagnostic exercise with Outcomes UK and the British Association of Adoption and Fostering (BAAF).
33. Following further discussion, it was agreed to proceed with the diagnostic exercise as an alternative to a peer review and this took place during the week commencing 15 October 2012.
34. This was a productive experience and one which staff enthusiastically engaged with. The review team commented on a number of strengths, including:
 - Positive outcomes for children and adopters
 - Political stability and member engagement
 - Vision, leadership and strategy
 - Case allocation and reporting system
 - Influence of 'Let's Take Action' group (Children in Care Council)
35. A number of areas for further consideration were also identified as follows:
 - Raise the profile of adoption and ensure this is properly considered at an early stage
 - Review and strengthen the role of the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) in monitoring implementation of plans and quality assurance
 - Consider review of current structure of child placement team and roles and responsibilities
 - Strengthen 'twin tracking' of plans for children
 - Value of targeted recruitment of foster carers/adoptive families

36. An action plan has been developed and discussed at Corporate Management Team (CMT) and the Children's Programme Board and this will now be progressed in order to ensure that the outcomes from the diagnostic exercise contribute to continuous improvement in this service area.
37. Work is currently underway to analyse and interpret the recently published data from the second adoption scorecard and relevant information will be included in future workload pressures reports to Cabinet as appropriate.

Ofsted Child Protection Inspection

38. The new round of transitional child protection inspections is currently underway with a number of inspection letters having recently been published. It appears that a higher standard has been set with only one local authority being graded above adequate to date (Redbridge) and a number of authorities previously deemed to be adequate being downgraded to inadequate.
39. Given our previous grading of adequate in relation to safeguarding in our safeguarding and looked after children (SLAC) inspection in September 2010, it is possible that we will receive an inspection between now and March 2013. If this is not the case, then it is likely we will receive an inspection under the new multi inspectorate approach early in the 2013/14 round of inspections.
40. Work is underway on a self assessment against the new inspection criteria and every effort continues to be made to ensure social work practice in Stockton-on-Tees conforms to current legislative and policy and procedural requirements.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

41. As outlined above these workload pressures are continuing to have a significant impact on the CESC budget in 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

42. 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

43. 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
44. 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

45. 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.
46. The effective safeguarding of children and young people will also have a significant impact on the community safety agenda.

EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT

47. 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

48. For those children who are looked after, the Council has a responsibility as Corporate Parent to ensure that their needs are appropriately met.
49. 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

50. 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.