

STOCKTON-ON-TEES BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET RECOMMENDATIONS

PROFORMA

Cabinet Meeting13th June 2013

1. Title of Item/Report

Ofsted Inspection of Child Protection

2. Record of the Decision

Consideration was given to a report on the Ofsted Inspection of Child Protection. Ofsted undertook an unannounced child protection inspection in January 2013, which was the first inspection in the North East region under the new framework. The overall judgement was adequate.

A number of areas for further development were identified, particularly in relation to the Referral and Assessment Team, which reflected the Council's self assessment of the service at the time.

An action plan had been developed to respond to the recommendations arising from the inspection Work and this had been approved by Stockton-on-Tees Local Safeguarding Children Board (SLSCB).

In the course of the inspection the inspectors looked at over 100 cases and were satisfied that appropriate action had been taken to protect all children at risk of immediate harm. There were a number of areas for further development identified, particularly in relation to the Referral and Assessment Team (RAT), which reflected the Council's self assessment of the service at the time. The overall judgement was adequate.

The report, which was published on the Ofsted website on 15 February 2013, contained a number of recommendations, divided into three categories; those to be completed immediately, within 3 months and within 6 months.

Children Education and Social Care (CESC) and partner agencies had developed an Action Plan which was attached to the report and had been approved by Stockton-on-Tees Local Safeguarding Children Board (SLSCB).

As of 23 April 2013, 40 Local Authorities had received an unannounced child protection inspection. The outcomes of these inspections were as follows:-

- 4 Good (10%)
- 23 Adequate (57.5%)
- 13 Inadequate (32.5%)

Whilst there was a range of recommendations for children's social care services and partner agencies to consider, the inspectors were very clear that the primary area of concern related to the functioning of RAT.

Temporary arrangements had been put in place to address the recommendations requiring immediate action, whilst discussions had taken place regarding longer term options. A management development day involving the Corporate Director CESC, Head of Children and Young People's Services and key Service / Team Managers took place on 1 February 2013. Proposals arising from the day were subsequently shared with all children's social care staff for comment and debate. The proposals contained within the report were the result of these discussions.

The substantive staffing complement within RAT was as follows:-

- 1 x full time equivalent (FTE) Team Manager
- 1 x FTE Deputy Manager
- 10 x FTE Social Workers
- 1 x FTE Family Worker

In order to respond to the workload pressures which had been reported to Cabinet on a regular basis, additional temporary agency staff had been agreed by Corporate Director as follows:-

- 1 x FTE Deputy Manager
- 5 x FTE Social Workers

At any given time, RAT may also have Student Social Workers on placement with them. There were 3 at the time of writing.

Prior to the inspection, a number of concerns about the functioning of RAT had been identified through internal management and quality assurance systems and these were in the process of being addressed.

Every initial and core assessment had to be quality assured and agreed by a manager. This involved reading all of the documentation and making a decision as to the most appropriate way forward for the child concerned. This task had to be completed within a timely fashion as assessments were not regarded as being completed until the manager had made this decision and signed the necessary paperwork. The Team

Manager or Deputy Manager would also be required to chair a range of meetings such as planning meetings and strategy meetings in respect of individual children. In addition, the Team Manager was responsible for all aspects of the team's functions including work allocation, supervision of staff, workload review and performance management.

In the light of this, the team was not considered to be viable at its current size and so it was proposed to divide RAT into two separate teams, nominally divided on a geographical basis. This had the benefit of retaining a discrete focus on referral and assessment work, whilst ensuring the teams were maintained at a manageable size and aligning the teams more closely with Fieldwork teams.

Based on current workloads, the make up of the two teams would be as follows:-

- 1 x FTE Team Manager
- 1 x FTE Deputy Manager
- 7 x FTE Social Workers
- 1 x FTE Family Worker

Whilst Ofsted commented favourably on the functioning of First Contact, it was also intended to review the remit and parameters of the team. As part of this, it was proposed to pilot an enhanced social work presence within the team which could potentially prevent some inappropriate referrals entering the system and also reduce the need for some of the lower priority work to proceed to RAT, which would then allow RAT to focus on the higher priority children in need and child protection cases.

The remit of First Contact was also being considered as part of the Access to Services review.

In order to strengthen the working arrangements between First Contact and the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) Team and Family Support Team, these two teams would be moved into a newly reconfigured First Response service area. This also had the added benefit of helping to retain balanced service manager portfolios.

On 3 September 2012, at the launch of the new structure arising from the Efficiency, Improvement and Transformation (EIT) Review of Children's Social Care, there were 1194 children active to the Fieldwork service. This included Child Protection, Public Law Outline (PLO) [pre Care Proceedings]/Care Proceedings, Looked After Children (LAC) and Children in Need. There were no unallocated cases at this point.

In terms of average Social Worker caseloads across the 6 teams, this

equated to the following:-

North 1 - 19.9 children
North 2 - 31.1 children
North 3 - 31.1 children

South 1 - 26.3 children
South 2 - 29.3 children
South 3 - 23.1 children

As of 20 February 2013, the overall number of children active to the Fieldwork service had increased by a further 176 children to 1370. Of these, 76 children were unallocated.

In terms of average Social Worker caseloads across the 6 teams, this equates to the following:-

North 1 - 24.9 children
North 2 - 33.2 children
North 3 - 33.2 children

South 1 - 35.7 children
South 2 - 33.6 children
South 3 - 32.3 children

According to Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council's caseload management system, the optimum caseload for an experienced social worker would be in the region of 25 children.

The average caseloads across the North East region range from 21 to 32, with Stockton-on-Tees having the highest caseloads and approximately half of the authorities having caseloads under 25.

The situation was not sustainable and was placing social workers and managers under extreme pressure. It was also having a significant impact on key performance indicators as evidenced by the recent inspection and our own internal performance monitoring information. It would be extremely difficult to respond positively to the wider service issues raised by Ofsted in this climate. Notwithstanding this, staff morale remained reasonably strong and the workforce continued to display a high level of goodwill.

It was calculated that an additional 6 experienced Social Workers would be required in order to return caseloads to post EIT levels. This would result in average caseloads of approximately 25.

This would result in Team Managers in the Fieldwork service typically having responsibility for 8 Social Workers, a Senior Family Worker and a Family Worker i.e. 10 staff in total. Given the range of tasks outlined in section 11, this was considered to be the maximum safe span of control for Team Managers in this service area.

Whilst the Council continued to be able to recruit Social Workers, the overwhelming majority of applications received were from newly qualified practitioners. In order to be able to recruit more experienced Social Workers and retain a more balanced workforce profile, we would propose to reintroduce a 'golden hello' payment but restrict this to practitioners with significant post qualifying experience.

In the medium to long term, the development of, and investment in, a successful Early Help Strategy was seen as crucial in ultimately reducing the number of children and young people requiring intensive, and expensive, social care intervention.

As part of this overall strategy, one option would be to increase investment in family support services with a view to preventing some children moving across the continuum of need or 'windscreen' and therefore requiring specialist intervention.

An expansion of the newly created Family Support Team would be one possible way of achieving this. Given the number of staff in the team, this would require the creation of two teams working in parallel; either on a functional or geographical basis.

The existing Deputy Manager post could be converted to a Team Manager post and the creation of 4 additional Family Worker posts would result in two teams of 7 workers which would significantly enhance current capacity.

Whilst it was important to stress that this would not be a panacea for the workload pressures it would strengthen resources for those families who were already in the CAF arena and at risk of moving into the child protection or looked after systems. This could be initially considered as a time limited investment in order to test out whether this was likely to be an effective longer term strategic option.

In light of the inspection it had been decided to review the content and format of future children's social care workload pressures reports to Cabinet

In addition to a range of measures to illustrate the pressures experienced by the service, a number of performance indicators would also be included so that Cabinet could more closely monitor the impact of these pressures on performance and outcomes for children.

A suggested template was attached to the report. This revised format used a 'process model' as a way of illustrating:-

- the flow of business into children's social care (inputs)
- the efficiency and effectiveness of the service in managing the business (processes)
- the impact that these processes have on the children and young people involved (outputs)

Given the importance and profile of these issues it was proposed that the new activity and performance reports were brought to Cabinet on a bi monthly basis i.e. every alternate Cabinet meeting.

A decision had been made to commission an external research study in order to gain a deeper understanding of the reasons behind these ongoing workload pressures. Discussions were taking place with the Institute of Local Governance (ILG) in order to agree the focus of this research and any significant outcomes emerging from this be included in future reports to Cabinet.

RESOLVED:-

1. The Action Plan set out in Appendix 1 be endorsed.
2. Children and Young People Select Committee receive regular reports and updates so that progress can be monitored.
3. The additional staffing resources set out in Sections 13 – 33 of the report be agreed.
4. The proposed format for future children's social care activity and performance reports to Cabinet as outlined in Appendix 2 be approved.

3. Reasons for the Decision

The recent Ofsted child protection inspection has resulted in a number of recommendations which Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council is required to respond to.

4. Alternative Options Considered and Rejected
None
5. Declared (Cabinet Member) Conflicts of Interest
None
6. Details of any Dispensations
N/A
7. Date and Time by which Call In must be executed
Midnight on Friday, 21 June 2013

Proper Officer
17 June 2013