

STOCKTON-ON-TEES BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET RECOMMENDATIONS

PROFORMA

Cabinet Meeting8th October 2015

1. Title of Item/Report

Children's Social Care Activity and Performance

2. Record of the Decision

Consideration was given to a report on Children's Social Care Activity and Performance.

In light of the Ofsted inspection of child protection in January 2013, it had been decided to review the content and format of future children's social care 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.

As a way of achieving this, the use of a 'process model' was approved by Cabinet on 13 June 2013.

This report was based on the available data at the end of quarter 1 (30 June 2015).

This revised format for reporting to Cabinet attempted to show the range of key factors that impacted on the levels of activity, workload pressures and performance in children's social care.

An attached template data was designed to illustrate the key elements.

A summary of the available data at the end of quarter 1 (30 June 2015), along with a brief commentary highlighting the main issues raised from analysis of the information was attached to the report. Also attached was the data which informed the report.

In summary, the overall picture reflected in the attached analysis was as follows:-

- Inputs - contacts and referrals to social care have reduced slightly

during the quarter, although remain at relatively high levels compared to benchmark groups. The number of CAFs completed has increased but is short of the agreed 'stretched' target.

- Processes - good performance is being sustained with regard to the timeliness of assessments, initial child protection conferences and reviews which continues to indicate there is an efficient response to children in need of protection. The relatively high level of children at risk of significant harm continues to put pressure on support systems and services.
- Outputs - the number of children subject to a child protection plan and looked after remains high. The number of child protection plans lasting over two years remains adrift of the target and higher than the previous year so continues to be subject to close monitoring and scrutiny.

Performance continued to be monitored very closely via the monthly Children's Social Care Performance Clinic chaired by the Corporate Director and attended by the Head of Service and all senior managers with responsibility for children's social care. The meeting analysed a range of performance and activity data and agreed and monitored actions in response to any identified issues. This was underpinned by a range of performance clinics with operational managers across the service.

In addition there was a fortnightly Workload Pressures meeting chaired by the Corporate Director and attended by the Head of Service and key senior managers in children's social care. This meeting closely monitored staffing and allocation issues and any associated pressures across the service.

The improvement plan arising from the Northumberland 'critical friend' review and the Local Government Association (LGA) safeguarding practice diagnostic continued to be overseen by Stockton-on-Tees Local Safeguarding Children Board (SLSCB).

The previous report to Cabinet highlighted the lack of progress in relation to Common Assessment Framework (CAF) performance, particularly within North Tees and Hartlepool Foundation Trust (NTHFT) and Children's Centres during 2014/15.

Following the subsequent discussions at Cabinet, the Chief Executive of Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council had written to the Chief Executive of NTHFT to express concerns regarding the decline in CAF completion by NTHFT staff. The Chief Executive of NTHFT had since responded, acknowledging these concerns and setting out the measures being taken in order to address this.

The Chair of Stockton-on-Tees Local Safeguarding Children Board (SLSCB) had also written to the Chief Executive of NTHFT expressing concerns about the decline in performance and requesting that this be given priority attention.

There had been an encouraging increase in CAF completion during Q1 by the Stockton-on-Tees run Children's Centres, although performance within the externally commissioned Children's Centres remained a significant concern. As a result of this, the Corporate Director, Children, Education and Social Care (CESC) had met with the Chief Executives of The Big Life Group and 4Children in order to raise these concerns and sought assurances that this issue would be addressed as a matter of urgency.

It was hoped that taken together, these actions would bring about the necessary improvement in performance but progress would continue to be closely monitored by the CAF Board and SLSCB and updates would be included in future reports to Cabinet.

The Corporate Director of Children and Education and Social Care updated Members that the situation regarding the CAF performance was still unacceptable and that further escalated discussions / meetings would be taking place in the near future.

Following the Task and Finish Review of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE), it had been agreed to provide an update on activity within the Vulnerable, Exploited, Missing and Trafficked (VEMT) arrangements.

Between January and March 2015, there were 25 children considered under VEMT arrangements in Stockton-on-Tees. Of those, 23 were female and 2 were male and all were considered to be at risk of CSE. Of these, 9 were assessed as high risk and 16 medium risk.

There were no disclosures of CSE made by a child during the quarter.

These pressures had continued to have an impact on the Children, Education and Social Care budget in a number of key areas as follows.

Firstly the independent fostering agency budget, which was set at £5.51m for 2015/16. The projected outturn was £4.69m i.e. a saving of £820k. However, this budget included a provision for growth which was previously held centrally but was not expected to be spent. The projected outturn also included discounts totalling approximately £113k received from independent fostering agencies under the terms of the contract arrangements.

Secondly the children's homes agency placements budget, which was set at £5.018m for 2015/16. The projected outturn was £5.425m i.e. an overspend of £407k. This budget also included a provision for growth which was previously held centrally.

Thirdly the social work staffing budget, which was set at £3.722m for 2015/16. There was no significant variance projected at year end.

These issues continued to be considered through the medium term financial plan (MTFP).

RESOLVED that:-

1. The continued workload pressures and associated activity in the children's social care system and the consequent impact this is having on both performance and budget be noted.
2. Further update reports be received on a quarterly basis in order to continue to monitor children's social care activity and performance.

3. Reasons for the Decision

There are significant and continuing pressures in the children's social care system which could potentially impact on the Council's ability to effectively safeguard children, fulfil statutory duties and remain within allocated budget.

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 16th October 2015

Proper Officer
12 October 2015