

REPORT TO: Children & Young People Policy & Performance Board

DATE: 24 May 10

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director – Children & Young People

SUBJECT: Children in Need Referral and Assessment Analysis

WARD(S) Borough-wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to afford Members the opportunity to scrutinise Referral and Assessment activity and advise of issues impacting on current performance within Children in Need (CiN) service.
- 1.2 The completion of Initial and Core Assessments within timescales stands at 76.2% for Initial Assessments and 80.3% for Core Assessments. This Data has not been quality assured and is currently subject to a 'data tidy' exercise.
- 1.3 It is important that Members have a good understanding of the reason for this performance and are satisfied that adequate strategies are in place to ensure that the children of Halton are safeguarded. Recent Ofsted inspections of Contact, Referral and Assessment processes in other Local authorities have looked at scrutiny of safeguarding practices.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That

- (1) the PPB note the contents of the report;**
- (2) Halton Safeguarding Children Board continues to scrutinise and support the work of the Children's Trust in relation to the development of Localities and the progress of the CAF Action Plan;**
- (3) Halton safeguarding Children Board scrutinises the response to Domestic Violence across the levels of need within Halton; and**
- (4) a further report is presented to PPB in six months.**

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 3.1 The recent CAF review highlighted issues on the role of early intervention and meeting the needs of children at the earliest possible point. This is within a context of increasing referrals to Children's Social Care (CSC).
- 3.2 The role of Team Around the Family (Locality Working) with emphasis on the CAF plus model and robust and early intervention should go some way to address some of these issues but it will be some time before there is an impact on referrals and caseloads within CiN.
- 3.3 Children's Social Care is made up of a number of services. The CiN service provides contact referral and assessment services to Children in need and those in need of protection. The Permanence team provides services to children in care who have a plan of permanence and the Young People's team provides services to care leavers and Children in Need who are 16+. The Children with Disability Team provides services for those children with complex needs. The fostering team and adoption team undertake family finding and recruitment of carers.

3.4 **Analysis**

Referrals

A referral is a request to Children's Social Care for a service or advice that is accepted by Children's Social Care for allocation for assessment.

- In the seven months June to January there was a total of 842 referrals. The total number of referrals for 08/09 was 1324.
- There appear to be peaks around main school holiday times, June July and August and again in December.
- Police generated 349 or 41.4 % of referrals via the CAVA notification process.
- The main reasons for referral were Family Dysfunction, 36%(303), Domestic Abuse 26%(221) and Neglect 16%(133).
- Only 7.2% or 61 of the 849, referrals received had previously had a CAF. This does not support the argument that the rise in referrals is due to improved identification of need.
- 138 of the 842 referrals to CSC closed within 3 months or 16.4%

3.5 Contacts

A contact is a request to Children’s Social Care for a service or advice that is not accepted for allocation for assessment as it does not meet the criteria for access to assessment at Levels 3a, 3b and 4 of Halton’s Level of Need Criteria.

- There were a further 408 contacts during the period. 160 of those contacts were notifications from organisations such as CAFCASS, probation, Ofsted etc, all generating work in terms of Carefirst checks, responding to enquiry and loading on the system.

3.6 Caseloads

- The total number of open cases in CiN as of 31st January 10 was 668
- The three additional social work posts agreed following the review of Safeguarding Services in light of Baby P in Haringay have now been appointed to and will shortly be in post.
- Below is a table of social worker case Loads within CiN as of 31st January 10. A Caseload management tool has been developed to aid discussion in supervision about caseloads and assist in understanding the workload for individual workers.

Team	Worker	CiC	CiN	CP	Total
CC1	SW 1	1	4	3	8
	SW 2	2	23	4	29
	SW 3	2	21	2	25
	SW 4	3	26	0	29
	SW 5	0	13	5	18
	SW 6	0	28	5	33
	CSWs	0	14 (3a)	0	14
	Pr M	0	1	0	1
	Team Total		8	130	19
CC2	SW 1	0	26	7	33
	SW 2	2	23	1	26
	SW 3	3	15	12	30
	SW 4	3	14	1	18
	SW 5	1	15	2	18
	SW 6	1	24	0	25
	SW 7	4	10	7	21
	SW 8	0	13	1	14
	Pr M	0	7	0	6
	CSWs		25 (3a)		
Team Total		14	172	31	217
CC3	SW 1	0	24	2	26
	SW 2	1	14	6	21
	SW 3	0	23	0	23

	SW 4	4	20	1	25
	SW 5	0	12	0	12
	SW 6	1	6	3	10
	SW 7	1	16	3	20
	SW 8	0	22	0	22
	SW 9	3	18	8	30
	SW 10	0	10	0	10
	SW 11	2	25	2	29
	CSWs	0	65 (3a)	0	65
	SSW	0	12	12	12
	Pr M	0	2	0	2
Team Total		12	257	25	294

- Despite the increase in Referrals the vast majority of cases are managed on a CiN basis and overall Child Protection (CP) Plan numbers and Children in Care (CiC) numbers have remained stable at 80 -85 and 155 respectively.

3.7 Court Activity

Court activity also impacts significantly on the work of the CiN teams. In January 10 there were 25 sets of Care proceedings compared to the usual average of 16 -17. This is not due to an increase in issuing of proceedings but reflects the difficulties in the courts at the present time. The average length of proceedings during this period was 49 weeks.

3.8 Capacity

- Management capacity for CiN Service has been an issue. We will shortly have four Practice Managers and one Principal Manager vacancy. As well as pressure in terms of supervision points this also creates pressure in respect of authorising of assessments and other critical reports and documentation and the chairing of key meetings including Core Groups and CiC planning meetings.
- In order to address this shortfall, appropriate measures have been put in place.
- The Recruitment and Retention strategy has recently been reviewed and revised with increased focus on management capacity. We have recently advertised and recruited to vacant management posts with both internal and external appointments. This will mean that providing all posts are accepted, we will only have on vacant Practice Manager post in Children in Need. This round of recruitment has been successful due to the positive outcome of the recent Job

Evaluation appeal and agreement that Principal and Practice Managers salaries will attract a market supplement to ensure that Halton remain competitive with neighbouring authorities. This shortage of management capacity reflects the national picture.

- Halton is committed to developing a 'grow your own' traineeship for social workers who are aspiring managers, building on the success of social work traineeship and student intake scheme. The Children's workforce Development Council is developing management programs which Halton have signed up to.
- The recruitment and retention of social workers remains good in Halton.
- The Divisional Manager CiN is meeting with Principal Managers fortnightly to focus on performance issues.

3.8 Performance / Data

- Considerable time is currently spent on 'data tidy up'. This is exacerbated by the three systems that Social workers currently have to operate, Carefirst, Integrated Children's System (ICS) and paper files. Most information has to be inputted at least twice on two separate systems.
- Carefirst 6 and Electronic Social Care Records should help to resolve these issues but they are some way off. Social Workers are involved in the design of Carefirst 6 and whilst it is important that this is progressed speedily this needs to be balanced against ensuring we get it right.
- It would be helpful to bring forward the roll out of mobile working (lap tops with 3 G cards) for all social workers to provide greater flexibility around completion of assessments.

3.9 Summary

Whilst there is considerable pressure within the children in need teams, it must be emphasised that whilst there may be problems and delays in the recording of assessment processes, all children are seen within seven days of referral . Assessments are generally of a high standard and this has been confirmed through the Case File Audit Process.

The numbers of Children in Care and Children subject to a Child Protection Plan remain stable and there is evidence of robust safeguarding and care planning processes. There are no

unallocated cases.

The roll out of Team around the Family (Locality working : see separate report) with an emphasis on CAF plus model should help to reduce the number of referrals to Children's Social Care. There is a commitment to providing experienced social workers for the Locality Teams to establish a 'Triage' approach to referrals.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The work of the Children in Need teams is underpinned by Working Together 2010, the main purpose to provide services to the most vulnerable children including those in need of protection. This is a statutory function that is measured through a series of national Indicators. The performance of these teams impacts on all aspects of Children's Social Care and it is essential that we ensure that our safeguarding processes through the duty referral and assessment process remain robust.

5.0 OTHER IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The CiN teams have just experienced their first Ofsted Unannounced inspection, which can have an impact on the Council's overall rating. Whilst this report highlights some of the current difficulties and constraints it is important to emphasise that in Halton we have very high standards in respect of safeguarding children and robust responses to Child Protection issues.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 Children & Young People in Halton

All Children in need are subject to regulated services which will be inspected by Ofsted. It is important that members have a good understanding of the work of the front line teams and are assured that Contact, Referral and Assessment processes are robust and safeguard children.

6.2 Employment, Learning & Skills in Halton

If children and young people are not safeguarded from harm they will have poorer outcomes and less likely to achieve economic well being

6.3 A Healthy Halton

If children and young people are not safeguarded from harm they will have poorer outcomes and less likely to thrive and be healthy

6.4 A Safer Halton

The performance of the Council's children services contact, referral

and assessments teams is critical to keeping the most vulnerable children and young people in the borough safe

6.5 **Halton's Urban Renewal**
None

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

7.1 If Contact Referral and Assessment processes are not robust and do not ensure that children are safeguarded and protected from harm, then children will remain vulnerable to poor outcomes and the service will receive poor Inspection outcomes which will impact on the over all rating of the council.

8.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

8.1

Document	Place of Inspection	Contact Officer
Working Together to Safeguard Children	Grosvenor House	Vicky Buchanan
Halton safeguarding Board Child Protection procedures	Grosvenor House www.haltonsafeguarding.co.uk	Vicky Buchanan