

REPORT TO: Children, Young People and Families Policy and Performance Board

DATE: 25th February 2013

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director – Children & Enterprise

PORTFOLIO: Children, Young People and Families

SUBJECT: Child in Need Contact, Referral and Assessment Analysis

WARDS: 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 provide an update on issues impacting on current performance within the Children in Need (CiN) service. This report focuses on the performance in relation to the Quarters 1 and 2 of 2012/13.
- 1.2 It is important that Members have a good understanding of this performance and are satisfied that adequate strategies are in place to ensure that the children of Halton are safeguarded. Ofsted Inspections of Contact, Referral and Assessment processes in other Local authorities have criticised the failure to scrutinise safeguarding practices and the poor understanding of issues impacting on performance.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That

- (1) An update report on year end performance (2012/13) is presented to the board in Six months.
- (2) That board supports the steps being taken to reduce social workers caseloads and monitors progress and impact of these.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 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.

- There have been 443 referrals during the first two quarters, a reduction of approximately 22.4 % compared to the same period last year. Although it is too early to suggest this is a trend as referrals fluctuate throughout the year, this is in addition to an overall reduction in

referrals of 19% last year. This may be an indicator of the impact of Early Help.

- Police generated 162 referrals or 36% (a similar number to the previous year) through the Police CAVA system.
- The main reasons for referral are Family Dysfunction (41%), Domestic Abuse (16%) and physical abuse (12.6%). For the first time in many years Neglect has fallen from 3rd highest category to 5th behind physical and sexual abuse. Again this could be an indicator of the impact of Early Help with more neglect cases being supported through the Team around the Family model.

3.2 Contacts

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

- There were additionally 543 contacts during the period which is a 26% reduction in the same period last year. It is too early to say whether this is a downward trend as it is the first time a reduction has been reported. However this could also be an indicator of the impact of Early Help with more agencies contacting the IWST service in the first instance.
- 127 or 23% of these contacts were generated by Police CAVAS, this is an increase of 5%. It is unclear if this is an upward trend, however, if this continues then a review of the CAVA pathways maybe needed.

3.3 Completion of Assessments

The provisional performance in relation to the completion of Initial and Core Assessments within timescales for the period is 82% for Initial Assessments within 10 days, and 72% for Core Assessments. This is good performance in relation to Initial Assessment but Core Assessment performance should be stronger and this will be explored with Principal Managers.

On a positive note the number of Core Assessments being completed is increasing. This is one indicator of appropriateness of referrals, i.e. if referrals are appropriate then it is likely that children and families will need a sustained intervention. The distinction between Initial and Core Assessments will be removed once the recommendations from the Munro review are implemented next year.

It is expected that performance in relation to assessment completion will reduce over the year especially initial assessment. The Department of Education has recently issued a change which will have a significant impact for Halton children's social care. It has changed the end date of an assessment from Effective End Date to Authorisation Date, e.g. the date the assessment is authorised by a manager on CareFirst. Halton had previously had the end date of the assessment as the date the manager authorised it as

complete rather than the date it was authorised on the system. This method of authorising has been ratified through three Ofsted inspections. It has been agreed that this will be implemented from 1st September as guidance was issued 30th August 12. This change does appear to conflict with the Munro recommendations and a move to locally agreed assessment timescales

The Safeguarding unit has developed a system for the independent review of CiN cases similar to the challenge and the over view that is provided for Children subject to Child Protection Plans and Children in Care. This has further strengthened the response to Children in Need and ensures that appropriate services are being provided at the appropriate level of need, including the completion of a Core Assessment when appropriate.

3.5 Child Protection Plans and S47 Enquiries

Child Protection Plan activity is again on the increase with 106 plans in place at the end of September. This is an indicator of the complexity of the cases despite reduced numbers over all. The move to Carefirst 6 has caused some recording issues in relation to s47 Enquiries this is being addressed and accurate data should be available for quarter 3.

3.6 Court Activity / Children in Care

The numbers of Children in Care are increasing and were 133 at the end of September. This is the highest for some time with entrants into the care system steadily increasing over the past three years. It is good performance that overall numbers of Children in Care are not escalating as this demonstrates good planning and children exiting care through Special Guardianship Orders, Adoption etc.

Court activity is also increasing; this element of work is becoming increasingly complex with social workers bearing the brunt of the work and responsibility. The pre – proceedings protocol has been put into place to reduce delay in the courts in relation to neglect. However in reality it masks the court delay by moving responsibility on to social workers to have all assessments completed, including any expert assessments, drugs testing, DNA testing, disclosures from other parties etc prior to issuing proceedings. Previously this would have been completed during the court process with support from other parties. This is a significant resource issue both financially and on social work capacity. There have been 10 sets of care proceedings issued during the period and a further six that are being progressed through the pre-proceedings stage.

3.8 Performance / Data

Carefirst 6 is now embedded in the CiN teams. There continue to be issues that have impacted on performance including lost work and ‘down – time’. A new server has recently been purchased and it is hoped that this will significantly improve this.

All staff have now been upgraded to windows 7 and have had the 'Lync' telephone system installed, this has led to a number of complaints from agencies about getting through to teams which we have worked with IT to resolve this issue and will monitor the impact of newly installed 'team numbers'

Electronic social care records are still some time off, however, a decision has been made to cease printing documents that are held on Carefirst 6 given that records will be on one system. All other documentation, letters, correspondence etc will be held on the paper file. This will reduce the burden on workers to maintain paper files as the primary record.

3.9 Social Work Capacity

Social worker caseloads within CiN remain higher than desirable, but this has continued to improve. This was identified by OFSTED during the Unannounced Inspection of Contact, Referral and Assessment in December 11. Although there is no definitive recommended number as complexity of cases can be variable it is generally accepted that 23 is a sensible average caseload for a social worker who has completed their Assessed Year in Social Work Employment. . Social Work Caseloads in the Child in Need Service are variable and average caseload is around 32 for a full time social worker.

3.10 Social Work Establishment

The Efficiency Review of the Child In Need Service identified that whilst social work vacancy rates and turnover is low there is a significant issue of reduced capacity within the service due to the demographic of the workforce. The workforce is predominantly female and maternity leave and reduced hours do impact. It was therefore agreed that three additional social work posts would be created, (two have been filled to date), in recognition of this reduction in capacity. Additionally Chief Officers Management Team have recently agreed to allow the service to further 'over – recruit' social workers to increase capacity and reduce caseloads in line with Ofsted recommendations. This will be achieved within existing budgets.

At 30th September 2012 the establishment of social workers within Children is need was 29 full time equivalent, this included 3 additional social work posts. This would average out to approximately 20 cases per social worker. In reality there were 2 vacancies, 4 on maternity leave, 1 long term sick, reduced hours and four social workers covering duty on a daily basis which equates to an average caseload of approximately 32.

3.11 Caseload Analysis

One of the difficulties of looking at caseloads from a purely numbers approach is that it does not differentiate between the complexity of cases and the different demands of cases.

The supervisory relationship is critical in determining caseloads, for example one SW has a planned hospital admission therefore her caseload is being reduced and reallocated in preparation for this so is artificially low. A worker who has only recently started is building up a case load is building up. Some workers will have more Initial Assessments, for example part time workers predominantly undertake duty and Initial Assessments.

Some of the difficulties in managing caseloads may be 'masked' by offering over time to social workers when they work on a Saturday and usually concentrate on case closures and outstanding assessments. Additionally most social workers work beyond their 37 hours per week and this is not captured by the flexi system as they are working at home in the evenings and at weekends.

Children's Social Care have realigned structures and as part of this process transfer points between CiN and the Permanence team have been reconsidered and cases now transfer at an earlier point, the actual number of cases that will transfer are small however they do tend to be the complex cases within the court process. Additionally older CiN 14yrs+ who are not part of a sibling group are transferred the Young People's Team, however the Young People's Team is currently experiencing capacity issues due to absences which is impacting on ability to transfer work.

3.12 Management Capacity

Management capacity continues to be a significant issue both within the Children in Need Service and across Children's social Care. In Children in Need the one Principal Manager Vacancy has recently been filled however there are two practice manager vacancies and one on maternity leave severely reducing management capacity across the service.

Recruitment is again in process however several attempts to recruit to these posts have taken place; therefore agreement has been given to try adverts in the National and Local press.

Recruitment of managers is a national issue, the Local Agreement which involves enhanced payments has been agreed for Principal Managers until 31st March 13, in order to ensure pay scales are competitive, however there is a reluctance to continue to support these payments which could result in further reduction in pay and for Principal Managers and difficulties recruiting and retaining.

The reduction in management capacity does impact significantly on the service,

- Managers have to read and authorise each documents produced by workers and it is not unusual to have in excess of a 100 documents awaiting management authorisation in each team every day.

- Managers supervise up to 10 staff on a monthly basis for approximately 2 hours per worker having oversight of approximately 200 – 250 cases.
- Managers chair approximately 10 - 15 multi- agency meetings per week which last on average 1- 1.5 hours.
- Managers also oversee the duty function on a daily basis ensuring decision making is sound and children adequately safeguarded through the appropriate level of response.

Managers increasingly have responsibility for functions that would have been supported in the past. These processes take managers away from operational issues and oversight of safeguarding issues. Whilst many of these processes are now electronic this in itself is challenging as there are numerous systems managers have to access and input into.

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. However it will be a number of years before this scheme realises actual managers.

3.13 Efficiency Review

The Efficiency Review team are currently looking at the 'to be' options for the CiN service, prioritising social work caseloads and Management Capacity. As a result of the Review it has recently been agreed that four additional admin support workers will be brought into the service to specifically work alongside social workers and provide typing and minutes support to ensure that social workers have capacity to work directly with children and families. These posts have started in January/February 2013 and will be regularly reviewed to ensure effectiveness and impact on social worker capacity.

3.14 Climbe Visits

Lord Laming's Inquiry into the death of Victoria Climbe recommended that; Chief Executives of local authorities with social services responsibilities must make arrangements for senior managers and councillors to regularly visit intake teams in their children's services department, and to report their findings to the Chief Executive and social services committee. This recommendation remains 'best practice' and is still considered as part of any Ofsted Inspection.

The purpose of the Climbe Visit is to;

- Ensure that staffing levels are appropriate
- Check that workloads of individual workers are appropriate
- Ensure that referral management processes are sound and secure
- Check on the performance of the Duty Teams

- Track the progress of implementation of Integrated Children's System (ICS)

Climbie visits have continued to take place quarterly to both the Runcorn and Widnes Child in Need Teams. On completion of the visit a report is sent to the Divisional Manager for Child Protection and Children in Need and any issues raised are responded to. Commitment to these visits remains good and a rota has been established for 2013.

Members talk directly to social workers without managers present. Issues and themes identified by members are similar to those highlighted in this report and include:

- Capacity due to maternity leave impact on social work caseloads, one member queried whether 30 cases is too many as social workers reporting that this is an acceptable number.
- Office environment – both teams have subsequently moved to improved office accommodation.
- IT issues, lost work, impact of new Lync telephone system – new server purchased and dedicated team numbers installed.
- Impact of paperwork and lack of admin support – more admin support secured.
- Truly dedicated workers in teams, good team morale, supportive environment.

3.15 Climbie Training

Climbie Training was offered earlier this year to all members, however take up was very low and the sessions were cancelled. A number of members have agreed to be part of the rota for next year who have not previously undertaken the visits and a 1:1 session with the Divisional Manager has been offered to support them in this role, additionally most visits are undertaken by two members and where possible new visitors will be paired up with experienced visitors to assist this process.

3.16 SUMMARY

There appears to be some indicators that Early Help is beginning to impact on the work of the CiN service with reduced referrals and contacts and indications that more Neglect cases are being dealt with at the Early Help stage. It would be useful to explore this further especially if these trends continue.

The number of Children in Need cases appears to be reducing, however Child Protection plans, and entrants into care and care proceedings remain high.

The performance in relation to Initial Assessments will be carefully monitored but it is likely that Initial Assessment performance will reduce over the second half of the year.

Social work caseloads and management capacity within the Children in Need service remain challenging with similar problems across Children's social care in relation to management capacity. Focussing on caseload numbers whilst a good indicator does not tell the whole story and the supervisory relationship is critical when managing caseloads.

Recruitment of social workers is prioritised and retention is generally good, the majority of social work vacancies are due to growth and promotions.

The recruitment of frontline managers remains a priority and the impact of vacancies will be continually reviewed to ensure that the service remains safe and focussed on the core business of protecting children.

The Recruitment and Retention Strategy needs to be reviewed and refreshed to ensure it addresses current need; this will be completed in consultation with workforce development.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The work of the Child in Need teams is underpinned by Working Together 2010. The main purpose is 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

It is important that the areas for development highlighted by OFSTED inspectors in relation to high case loads are assessed. 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 and 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 and 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

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 overall rating of the council.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

The teams provide services to the most vulnerable children in the borough. The service is available to all children and their families who meet the criteria at level 3b / 4 of Halton's Level of need. This includes all protected characteristics as defined by the Equality Act 2010

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

Document	Place of Inspection	Contact Officer
Working Together to Safeguard Children 2010	Rutland House	Vicky Buchanan
Halton safeguarding Board Child Protection procedures	Rutland House www.haltonsafeguarding.co.uk	Vicky Buchanan