

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

**DATE:** 13 January 2014

**REPORTING OFFICER:** Strategic Director, Children and Enterprise

**PORTFOLIO:** Children, Young People and Families

**SUBJECT:** Overview of Child in Need and Child Protection

**WARD (S):** All

## **1.0. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

The purpose of the report is to update members on issues impacting on performance within the Children in Need service (CIN) on a six monthly basis. This report covers Qtrs. 1 and 2 of 2013/4.

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.

The CIN service provides contact and referral, assessment and services to children in need and children in need of protection.

## **2.0 RECOMMENDATION**

**1) Members note the work of the service and the improved outcomes for children in need and in need of protection**

**2) A further report is provided in 6 months.**

## **3.0 ANALYSIS**

3.1 It is important for members to note that since 2 September 2013, all contacts and referrals are now managed by one central team, the Contact and Referral Team (CART). This team consists of a Principal Manager, 4 social workers and 2 administrative staff whose role is to gather all necessary information to inform whether to progress a contact to a referral and subsequently an assessment, or to provide advice to the referrer and signpost to other services. Since 3 December, staff from the Integrated Working Support Team (IWSWT), who support agencies to respond at Level 2 of the Levels of Need framework via the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) have also been co-located alongside CART. This means that agencies now have one point of contact rather than 2.

3.2 All contacts and referrals are reviewed on a weekly basis by all the managers in this service, overseen by the Divisional Manager. This allows for quality assurance of the recording and decision-making of this critical part of the service.

### **3.3 Contacts**

Contacts are where the threshold at Level 3 of Halton's Level of Need framework is not met or are requests for information from other agencies, Referrers are given advice and guidance and if a response at Level 2 would support the child's needs, the IWSWT service will follow up.

3.4 Recording of contacts has changed since the last report, with all contacts with social care recorded, regardless of whether they progress to a referral and assessment. This makes comparisons with earlier reports difficult but contacts numbers have increased and will fluctuate dependant on the time of year – there were peaks in May (583) and July (420) which coincided with school holidays for example. August was the lowest in this period (293). The police still have the highest contacts, but this reduced in the second Qtr to 29%. The percentage of contacts which did not meet the threshold under Level 3 was 24% in Qtr 1 with a slight increase to 26% in Qtr 2. Neglect, followed by domestic violence were the highest presenting reasons for contact.

### 3.5 **Referrals**

Referral rates have generally stabilised but are still higher than in previous years. April, May June and September were fairly static with an average of 140 referrals per month but there was a spike in July and August of 191 and 152. Police were the highest referrers with 30% of all referrals. Neglect (32%) and domestic violence (25%) were the highest presenting reasons at referral. Re-referrals within 12 months remain at 13% which is in line with the NW average and significantly below our statistical neighbours average rate of 21%.

3.6 94.1% of referrals led to an assessment

### 3.7 **Assessments**

During this period, Halton has introduced the Single Assessment to replace the Initial and Core assessments. This is in line with Working Together 2013, and all Local Authorities are expected to have implemented this by 1 April 2014. Halton is one of the first regionally to have implemented this in full.

3.8 Prior to the implementation of the Single Assessment, (which has a guided timescale of 45 working days), both the number of Initial Assessments and Core Assessments had increased significantly in line with the peaks outlined above. In Qtr 2 for example, 485 IAs and 296 CAs were undertaken compared to 185 and 108 respectively for the same period last year. This increase in demand has had an impact in recorded timeliness of completion, with a reduction to 47% for both IAs and CAs. However, it is important to note that with the introduction of the Single Assessment, all assessments to date have been completed within 45 working days; more detailed reporting on this will be in the next report.

### 3.9 **Child in Need/Child Protection/Children in Care**

There were 770 children in need during this period which is a reduction. During this period, a review of all CIN children open for 12 months or longer was undertaken to ensure that children were at the right level of support. This has resulted in a number of children being stepped down into Level 2.

3.10 In addition, work was done with staff and managers and with the police in line with the revised Working Together 2013 to ensure that risk was being assessed and recorded in a timely and appropriate manner, and part of the CIN review also looked at whether children's cases should be escalated to Child Protection. As a result of this work, the number of children with a child protection plan increased from 64 at the end of May to 128 at the end of September. Children with a Child Protection Plan for a second or subsequent time remains low, and the main categories for a plan are emotional abuse and neglect.

3.11 The numbers of children coming into care has also increased to 179 at the end of September compared to 134 for the same period last year. The numbers of children 0-4 coming into care has remained fairly static, with an increase in older children 5-11 and 12-

15. This has to be seen in the context of the increasing number of referrals during this period but also increased recognition in cases of neglect that adequate improvements had not been made or sustained for older children. More applications have been made to the family court for interim and full care orders during this period.

#### **4. Performance**

4.1 Significant improvements have been made by our IT services to the ICS system CareFirst, including chronologies and case summaries with a staff user group now advising on further improvements. A suite of real-time management reports have also been designed and implemented, which is allowing increased oversight of performance in all areas of activity. Implementation of an Electronic Social Care Record (ESCR) to replace all paper files is now well advanced, with staff currently undergoing training with ESCR becoming operational by March 2014. This will reduce bureaucracy for social workers, standardise reports and formats for all case recording and increase the capacity of administrative staff to support social workers.

#### **4. Staffing and Caseload**

4.1 Work has continued with staff and managers to work towards more manageable caseloads and on average caseloads were reducing to an average of 25 during this period; however the demands on social workers have not lessened but increased because of the higher numbers of children with a child protection plan. The establishment of CART has been positively received by staff who now can concentrate on assessment and direct work with children. Runcorn has experienced some difficulties during this period with 7.5 staff on maternity leave; this has been initially covered by agency social workers but this does not provide the much needed stability for children and families as agency workers do not have the same commitment to the service as permanent staff do. We have also had a change of managers as 2 Principal Team Managers left to pursue developments elsewhere.

4.2 All children have been allocated and seen, and agency manager cover has been in place to provide support and supervision. Currently, we have 1 future social worker vacancy and 3 staff on maternity leave are due to return in the New Year. We have also appointed 3 of 4 social workers on 12 month contracts to reduce reliance on agency staff in future.

4.3 We have also appointed to all current Practice Manager vacancies. These posts have been hard to recruit to historically and it is excellent news that 3 of our staff feel they will be sufficiently supported and managed to make the step into this role. Their posts as social workers have been appointed to and all will take up their position in the New Year. In addition, we have appointed a Principal Team Manager externally and have had positive interest in the one remaining post.

4.4 Workshops have been held with staff in the last couple of months about the future of the service and how it needs to develop. Staff have had many constructive and positive suggestions, which will inform a formal consultation prior to implementation of any revised service from 1 April 2014.

### **5. IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES**

#### **5.1 Children and Young People in Halton**

The service needs to be sufficiently staffed and retain skilled and experienced workers to ensure that children's needs are recognised and supported, and timely and appropriate action taken to safeguard them.

## **5.2 Employment, Learning and Skills**

Children need be to be supported and safeguarded in order to achieve their full potential

## **5.3 A Healthy Halton**

Children and families are supported to recognised and meet their health needs

## **5.4 A Safer Halton**

Children are protected from likely and actual harm and are less vulnerable to exploitation and engagement in anti-social or offending behaviour

## **5.5 Halton's Urban Renewal**

No direct implication

## **6. RISK ANALYSIS**

6.1 This area of work is one of the most challenging areas of the council's business. Failure to consistently and actively support and protect children can lead to significant harm to individual children and risks the council receiving and inadequate judgment from Ofsted.

## **7. Equality and Diversity Issues**

Staff in all areas ensure that they listen to children in a way that's accessible and non-judgemental, and takes account of their ethnic and cultural background, and their level of disability and preferred method of communication, and their sexual orientation.

## **8. Background papers**

None under the meaning of the Act