

REPORT TO:	Children, Young People and Families Policy and Performance Board
DATE:	3 rd September 2012
REPORTING OFFICER:	Strategic Director – Children & Young People
PORTFOLIO:	Children and Young People
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 end of year data for 2011/12
- 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.
- 1.3 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, including those Children with a disability who require a social worker. 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 14+. The fostering team and adoption team undertake family finding and recruitment of carers.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That

- (1) Policy and Performance board continues to scrutinise and support the work of the Children's Trust in relation to the development of Team around the Family and early help services.
- (2) An update report on first two quarters performance (2012/13) is presented to the board in Six months to include action taken following the efficiency review and the impact on reducing Social Workers Caseloads.

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 1132 referrals during 2011 /12, a reduction on the number for the previous year of approximately 19% (1395 referrals 2010/11)
- Police generated 401 referrals or (35%) through the Police CAVA system.
- The main reasons for referral continue to be Family Dysfunction (48%), Domestic Abuse (16%) and Neglect (13%).
- There has been a further increase in the numbers of referrals in relation to sexual abuse, in total there were 88 referrals related to sexual abuse during the year compared to 17 the previous year. Some of this increase is attributable to adults accessing child pornography.

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 1372 contacts during the year which is a similar number to the previous year.
- 255 or 18% of these contacts were generated by Police CAVAS, this is a reduction of 4% compared to last year.

3.3 Completion of Assessments

The performance in relation to the completion of Initial and Core Assessments within timescales for the year is 75% for Initial Assessments within 10 days, a reduction of 13% compared to the previous year and 85% for Core Assessments a reduction of 5%. There have been a number of factors that have contributed to this which will be referenced throughout this report and include;

- The move to Carefirst 6 as workers familiarise themselves with a new system whilst completing work already started on the old system. For example 139 assessments were completed by day 15 which is likely to be a recording issue.
- Management Capacity
- Social Worker capacity including high case loads.

- Despite reduction in referrals number of CiN open cases has remained high.
- Impact of the 15% increase in referrals the previous year
- Focus on improving the quality of assessments
- 44% Increase in children entering care from 36 in 2009/10 to 64 in 11/12 the majority of these cases will be care proceedings.
- Unreliability of IT systems.

Approximately 58% of initial assessments progressed to core assessment; this is an increase of 14% from the previous year. This conversion rate is one indication 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.

The Safeguarding unit has developed a system for the independent review of CiN cases similar to the challenge and the overview 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.

3.4 Caseloads and Social Work Capacity

The total number of open CiN cases as of 31st March 2012 was 706 an increase of 7% on last year.

There are currently 2 social worker vacancies within the CiN service and 1 social work vacancy in the integrated Working Support Team. These vacancies have been recruited to although the workers are not yet in post. Additionally there have been a number of long term vacancies within the service due to maternity leave, sickness etc, this alongside workers with reduced hours means that in reality the service even when fully staffed has reduced capacity of approximately 20%.

Social worker caseloads within CiN are high and this was identified by OFSTED during the Unannounced Inspection of Contact, Referral and Assessment. It should be noted that caseloads in the Runcorn team are particularly high, this is due to two vacancies and one long term absence which equates to an additional 75 to 80 cases being absorbed by workers. Some social workers have caseloads in excess of 30 children.

Although some caseloads appear smaller this reflects complexity of cases and where people are up to in their development, i.e. in their first year of practice.

The Widnes team currently has three social workers on maternity leave, most on their return request a reduction in hours. Covering maternity leave with temporary or agency staff is problematic as the quality of agency staff is often poor.

3.5 Child Protection Plans and S47 / Child Protection Enquiries

Child Protection Plan numbers have seen some fluctuation over the past year with a high of 118 reducing to 83 at the end of the year. During the year 260 individuals were subject to a Section 47 Enquiry, of which approximately 70% led to an Initial Child Protection Conference. This is an increase of 33% on the number in the previous year.

3.6 Work Flow

During the year approximately 1600 Initial assessments and Core Assessments were completed. Each one of these assessments will have been typed onto a Carefirst 6 document by a social worker and authorised by a manager, it will then be printed and circulated via post to those involved.

Additionally approximately 2750 records of multi – agency meetings and care plans will have been produced by social workers and authorised by managers. Each one will have been printed out and circulated to an average of 10 participants

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, additionally older CiN 14yrs+ who are not part of a sibling group are transferred the Young People's Team. As this realignment only came into place on 1st April 2012 so it is too early to measure impact. The actual number of cases that will transfer are small however they do tend to be the complex cases within the court process.

3.7 Management Capacity

Management capacity has again become a significant issue within the Children in Need Service, with one Principal Manager Vacancy and two Practice Manager vacancies and one Practice Manager on maternity leave. This equates to a 50 % reduction in management capacity. Recruitment is again in process and several attempts to recruit to these posts have taken place. Recruitment of managers is a national issue, on the last occasion there was only one applicant for the Principal Manager vacancy and no applicants for the Practice Manager vacancies. The Local Agreement which involves enhanced payments has been agreed for Principal Managers for a further 12 months in order to ensure pay scales are competitive.

This lack of management capacity does impact on the teams significantly as management oversight is essential to ensuring that children are safeguarded and a statutory requirement of assessment processes, for example :-

Managers have to read and authorise each document 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.

3.8 Performance / Data

Carefirst 6 has been rolled out to all the CiN teams. As expected there have been some issues that have impacted on performance as practitioners familiarise themselves with a new system, though overall feedback about the processes within the system which enable social workers to carry out their role is generally positive.

Unfortunately there are a number of significant technical problems with the IT infrastructure and this has impacted on performance. This has included significant 'down time', lost work, the system running extremely slowly and also 'crashing' on a number of occasions. Whilst IT services are working hard with the provider to resolve the issue this is frustrating and placing additional pressures on frontline workers who are trying to complete assessments. A new server box is on order which should hopefully alleviate many of these problems.

Additionally the new system has impacted on how the Performance and Improvement team, extract and prepare data, therefore the data in this report will be subject to quality assurance processes. At present the team have to access and match data from the old and new system. This should become easier once all teams are on Carefirst and the system has been fully up and running for a reporting year.

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.

All staff have now been upgraded to windows 7 and have had the 'Lync' telephone system installed which has caused some disruption as workers familiarise themselves with these systems.

3.9 Efficiency Review

The CiN service is currently under review by the Efficiency Team. This was brought forward following the concerns raised by OFSTED in relation to high caseloads and has no target in terms of identifying savings. The team are in the process of producing an 'As is' report which will identify current issues. The team have identified many of the issues that have been highlighted in this report including high social work caseloads, management capacity and the need for increased administrative support to frontline teams. Increased administrative support would primarily focus on ensuring that Core Group minutes and Child Protection plans as well as Child in Need and Child in Care planning meetings were typed on behalf of workers and distributed in a timely manner, allowing them more time for direct work with children and ensuring quality and timely assessments are produced.

An interim report was recently presented to Chief Officers Management Team as social work caseloads and administrative support were identified as high priority. As a result of this, agreement was reached to create three additional social work posts to cover the 20% absence created by maternity leave and reduced hours. This will be funded through existing resources, these posts have been appointed to but the workers are not yet in post. Agreement was also reached to increase administrative support to the CiN service and work is currently underway with the Resources Directorate to explore what additional capacity is required and how this will be provided.

4. SUMMARY

There continues to be considerable pressure within the children in need teams and this has impacted on performance for the year 2011 – 12. The number of referrals has reduced however; it is unclear whether this will be a continuing trend as when this has happened in previous years there has been a significant spike in the following year. Additionally the number of open cases has not reduced and child protection enquiries / child protection plan activity and children entering care have seen significant increases during the year.

Working Together 2010 states that an assessment is complete when it has been written up, authorised by a manager and shared with the family. It is this aspect of performance that has proved challenging. In terms of safeguarding,

all children continue to be seen within 10 working days of referral and response in terms of s47 investigations remains safe and robust.

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

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

The key risks/opportunities associated with the proposed action and an outline of the key control measures proposed in relation to these risks should be included.

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

Any Equality and Diversity implications arising as a result of the proposed action should be included.

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