

REPORT TO: Children, Young People and Families PPB

DATE: 20th February 2012

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 first two quarters of the year 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 16+. 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 end of year performance is presented to the board in Six months to include action taken and impact in 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 were 590 referrals received in the first two quarters which is a reduction of approximately 24% on the same two quarters last year.
- Police generated 215 or 36% of referrals through the police CAVA system.
- The main reasons for referral continue to be Family Dysfunction 47%, Domestic Abuse 17% and Neglect 17%
- There has been an increase in numbers of referrals in relation to sexual abuse. 39 in this period or approximately 15% of referrals, compared to 7 in the same quarter last year which equated to less than 1% of the number of referrals.

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 732 contacts during the period 164 or 22% of these contacts were generated by Police CAVAS, which did not meet the levels of needs at 3b to 4, it must be noted this is a reduction of 8% compared to the same period last year and early indications are that the CAVA pathway is proving to be more effective.

3.3 Completion of Assessments

The performance in relation to the completion of Initial and Core Assessments within timescales for the period to 79% for Initial Assessments within 10 days and 84 % for Core Assessments. There is still some data tidy up being completed and this figure is likely to increase. The move to Carefirst 6 has proved challenging as workers familiarise themselves with a new system whilst completing work already started on the old system.

The number of Initial Assessments that subsequently become Core Assessments has shown an increase in this period, to 58% an increase of 14% compared to end of year 2010/11. This conversion rate is one

indication of appropriate of referrals, i.e. if referrals are appropriate then it is likely that children and families will need a sustained intervention. A report on this issue was recently presented to Halton Safeguarding Children Board Scrutiny and Performance sub group, this report highlighted that there is a significantly higher conversion rate in the Widnes team and this is being addressed with the Runcorn Managers. 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 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.

3.4 Inspection of Contact Assessment and Referral

An unannounced inspection of initial contact, referral and assessment took place on 7th & 8th December. This two day inspection by Ofsted was undertaken alongside an inspection of the Police child protection unit, by Her Majesty Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC). This was part of a pilot of joint inspections and Halton was only the fourth area in the country where such pilots have been undertaken.

It was a very thorough and challenging inspection. Ofsted identified a number of strengths where the service was exceeding statutory requirements, and highlighted eleven areas where statutory requirements were being met. There were no aspects of the service which required priority action. However inspectors confirmed that some social workers caseloads were too high and this was impacting on the completion of initial assessments and this has been identified in previous inspections. Proposals to realign the children in need and children in care services to reduce workloads are currently being consulted on with staff. An action plan to address the areas where improvements are needed has been drawn up. Overall the outcome of the inspection was extremely positive.

3.5 Caseloads and Social Work Capacity

The total number of open CiN cases as of 30th September was 667 (currently 705).

- Social worker caseloads within CiN do vary on a day to day basis in terms of complexity and numbers. The average caseload within the CiN service is around 30 but this will vary according to experience and complexity. National guidance would suggest that caseload should be

around 20. A Caseload management tool has been developed to aid discussion in supervision about caseloads and assist in understanding the workload for individual workers.

- There is currently only one vacancy in the service which is a very recent development and it is not anticipated that there will be difficulties in filling the post. This is as a result of the Recruitment and Retention Strategy and success of 'Grow your own' schemes

However,

- At any one time capacity is reduced by approximately 20 % due to maternity leave and long term absence issues as well as flexible working arrangements, (reduced hours).

3.6 Management Capacity

- Management capacity has again become an issue within the Children in Need Service, with one Principal Manager Vacancy and two Practice Manager Vacancies, (although one of these is being covered by a temporary arrangement). A second round of external recruitment has commenced, however it must be noted that we have been out to external recruitment recently and did not shortlist.
- These Manager vacancies create pressure in terms of supervision points, authorising assessments and other critical reports and documentation, the chairing of key meetings including Core Groups and CiC planning meetings and the duty manager rota. Additionally the practice managers currently in post are new to management and as such require additional support and mentoring which places additional pressure on Principal Managers.
- Working Together 2010 states that an assessment is deemed completed "... once the assessment has been discussed with the child and the family and the team manager has viewed and authorised the assessment". This in effect means that managers have to be available to authorise assessments on a daily basis and are spending increasing time in front of computers. The Munro review of Child Protection will have an impact in extending the timescales for assessment with increased emphasis on quality and less on process and timescales
- 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.
- The Divisional Manager CiN continues to meet regularly with Principal Managers to focus on performance issues.

3.7 Child Protection Plans and S47 Inquiries

The vast majority of cases are managed on a CiN basis. However Child Protection Plan numbers have increased significantly to 115 during this period and continue to rise. This is the highest they have been for a number of years.

There has also been a significant increase of 25% in the number of s47 Inquiries being undertaken in this period compared to the same period last year. Whilst referral numbers are lower, the referrals appear to be coming in at an acute level, with little evidence of early help and support being offered to children and their families. This could also be an indication that with increased emphasis on Early Help and Support more children are being identified in acute need and this will increase initially before settling down to more usual levels.

3.8 Work Flow.

Court activity continues to impact on the work of the CiN teams. In Sept 11 there were 28 sets of Care proceedings. There is a drive by the court to reduce delays however there are currently 7 sets of proceedings or 25% that are in excess of the 40 weeks timescales prescribed by the public law outline.

Children's Social Care are currently reviewing structures and as part of this process transfer points between CiN and the Permanence team will be reconsidered, the with a view to cases transferring at an earlier point. Additionally older CiN 14yrs+ who are not part of a sibling group will be picked up by the Young People's Team. This rebalancing of the work is being progressed and happening currently on a case by case basis , new processes will be formally in place by 1st April 2011.

3.9 Performance / Data

- Carefirst 6 has now 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 system and this has impacted on performance. This has included significant 'down time' with the system, lost work, the system running extremely slowly and '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.

- 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 will be 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.

3.10 Summary

There continues to be considerable pressure within the children in need teams. A report was presented to the board in September 11 which compliments this report and highlights what some of the issues of concern. The Executive Board has agreed Terms of Reference (below) and are commissioning a piece of research which will look at Referrals to Children's Social care and the child's journey.



HSCB Research
Revised Terms of Refi

The numbers of Children subject to a Child Protection Plan is increasing as well as the numbers of referrals leading to s47 Inquiry and this will need continuing scrutiny to ensure that there are appropriate and robust Early Help and Support Services in place for children and families.

The CAVA pathways are beginning to show improved joint working with the police and increased understanding of levels of needs with some children and families receiving an appropriate service through Team Around the Family Services.

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.

Some early work has been undertaken to look at the impact of the Munro review and how this will change Assessment processes, this will be reviewed and shared with the board once government guidance has been issued.

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

The teams have recently had their second Ofsted Unannounced Inspection which was very positive and will have an impact on the councils overall rating. It is important that the areas for development highlighted by inspectors especially in relation to high case loads are assessed. Whilst this report high lights 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	Grosvenor House	Vicky Buchanan
Halton safeguarding Board Child Protection procedures	Grosvenor House www.haltonsafeguarding.co.uk	Vicky Buchanan