

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

**DATE:** 2 September 2013

**REPORTING OFFICER:** Strategic Director – Children & Enterprise

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

**SUBJECT:** Child in Need Analysis

**WARDS:** Borough Wide

## **1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

The purpose of this 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 Quarters 3 and 4 of the year 2012/3.

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 Local Safeguarding Children's Boards (LSCBs) and elected representatives for failing to scrutinise safeguarding practices and having a poor understanding of issues impacting on performance.

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 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- i) Members note the contents of the report and the levels of activity in the service.*
- ii) Members support the establishment of the Investing in Halton's Children and Young People Board and the action plan to deliver continued improvements in the service*
- iii) A further report is presented in 6 months on Children in Need Service activity, and the outcomes from the board.*

## **3.0 ANALYSIS**

### **3.1 Contacts**

A contact is a request for a service that does not meet the threshold for a referral and assessment in line with the Levels of Need Framework; it also records requests for information received from other agencies.

There were 513 contacts received during this period which is a continued reduction, and a total of 1100 contacts were received during the year. In looking at Runcorn and Widnes performance compared to the previous year, Widnes had a monthly average of 41 contacts a month (a reduction of 20%) and Runcorn a monthly average of 45 (a reduction of 28%). This downward trend is now established and can be confidently linked to the improved co-ordination of support and services now in place through the IWST service.

Contacts from the police reduced significantly during this period, largely as a result of the improved communication pathway for CAVAs (domestic violence reports) in place with the IWST service.

### **3.2 Referrals**

A referral is where a request for a service and advice has been accepted by children's social care and should proceed to an assessment. There were 462 referrals in this period, with a significant increase in Quarter 4 in particular; Runcorn had 62 in February and Widnes had 47 in March, both above their usual average of 42 and 31 for Runcorn and Widnes respectively.

There was a significant increase in referrals where domestic violence was the main presenting issue in Quarters 3 & 4, increasing to 52 and 60 referrals compared to 37 and 34 in the previous 2 quarters. There was also a significant increase in neglect, sexual abuse and physical abuse in Quarters 3 & 4 as presenting reasons compared to Quarters 1 & 2.

There is more evidence of CAF activity prior to referrals being made.

The percentage of referrals proceeding to Initial Assessment is showing at end Qtr4 as 84%, a decline from the previous year of 88% for the same quarter. The end of year outturn for 2011/12 was 91.7%. This is an area in need of monitoring as an indicator of how effective the contact and referral process is, and how well thresholds are understood by partners and applied by social care. The revised Levels of Need Framework from April 2013 should assist with improving this, alongside changes social care will be making to its front-door service.

Following an audit of contacts undertaken by the Operational Director in February 2013, the current duty process has been revised, as there was concern at the level and detail of history-taking, checks being undertaken and

the level of analysis and risk that was being recorded to inform a decision about progressing to a referral. There was concern at the consistency of the decision-making and the role of the managers in recording their rationale for a decision to progress or not progress to a referral and assessment.

The interim arrangements have revised the recording and the authorisation by managers which is now enforced by the CareFirst workflow. 2 dedicated Practice Managers in Runcorn and Widnes are in place to drive improvements in the quality of the recording of social worker activity on contacts and to improve the evidence of showing “the working out” that leads to a recommendation to the Principal Manager. Administration support has also been re-aligned to support the duty function more consistently.

Children’s Social Care will be moving to one dedicated team to respond to all contacts and referrals to children’s social care on a borough-wide basis by 30 September 2013. This team will also be the point where consultations are undertaken; this is currently undertaken by the Integrated Working Service Teams (IWST) in Runcorn and Widnes. This will ensure a consistent response across the authority by having one point of access and one team, and will also enable improved analysis and performance monitoring of a key point in the child’s journey. The aim should be that 95%-98% of referrals proceed to an assessment if thresholds are clearly understood and there is effective triaging at the point of access to social care. There will also be a basis to explore with partners whether this service should ultimately become a multi-agency service along the lines of the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub model and should be an area of exploration for Halton Safeguarding Childrens Board.

### **3.3 Completion of Assessments**

There was an increase in both initial and core assessments completed within this period which reflect the increase in referrals in Qtr4 particularly and also the complexity of the presenting issues with more core assessments being completed. While the timeliness of Initial Assessments improved to 73%, the timeliness for core assessments reduced to 70% from 90% but the overall number of both initial and core assessments has increased.

Working Together 2013 has dispensed with timescales for assessments from April 2103, to be replaced by a Single Assessment process with the aim of being completed by 45 working days, and monitoring of reasons why assessments take longer than 45 days; timescales for seeing the child are not specified. Halton are currently still using the initial and core assessment model.

Halton will be using the North West Region Social Work Planning and Assessment Model that has been endorsed by the NW Directors. Review points are built into in this model, and Halton will be implementing the Single Assessment by 1 September 2013 and publishing its Assessment Protocol. There are redesign issues with CareFirst that means this cannot be

implemented sooner, and staff are still completing initial and core assessments currently.

### **3.4 Child Protection Plans and S47 Enquiries**

There has been a reported decrease in s47 activity and numbers of children with a Child Protection Plan during this period. At the end of Qtr4, 81 children had a plan, compared to 106 at the end of Qtr2. 17 of these children however, have subsequently come into care.

The issue about recording of S47 enquiries in CareFirst will shortly be resolved, with the number of forms reducing from three to one; this will lead to improved reporting on this indicator. Working Together 2013 has still maintained the timescale of 15 working days from the first strategy discussion to conference, which is contradictory to the principles of the single assessment.

### **3.5 Court Activity / Children in Care**

The numbers of children in care has continued to increase, with 142 children in care at the end of Qtr4. The Senior Leadership Team has undertaken detailed analysis of the reasons for this continued increase. This shows that the level of activity and court work in relation to younger children (under 10) is fairly consistent but there has been an increase in older children and an increasing use of s20 accommodation. During this period, 4 young people were placed in welfare secure because of their level of risk and vulnerability, and out of 55 children that entered care from October 2012 to May 13, 26 were over 10. There is further work to be done on understanding the context for the increase, and how effective services are at working together to intervene earlier with these children and safely and effectively divert them from care.

The Pre-Proceedings Protocol as part of the Family Justice Reforms will be implemented locally on 7 October 2013. The expectations of how to place children under the Pre-Proceedings Framework is now much clearer, as are the expectations of agencies in supporting the local authority in evidencing its application, assessment and plan for the court. This, together with the Single Assessment, has significant implications for the CIN teams in refocusing their approach to assessment and care planning.

### **3.6 Performance / Data**

The Performance and Policy Function returned to the Children and Enterprise Directorate in April 2013. Work is currently underway to refresh the reporting and performance management framework to provide systematic and scheduled reporting and analysis to the various audiences who require reports, and to reduce duplication. CareFirst is due to have a number of amendments to its design and structure to better support social workers over

the next few months which will improve compliance with the system and its management information reporting.

#### **4.0 Social Worker Capacity and Caseloads**

**4.1** Social Worker recruitment remains stable, with only one vacancy at the end of the year. However, we have a high number of staff who are on maternity leave and whose cases cannot be re-allocated; in addition, as is reflected above, there has been an increase in the complexity of casework and children coming in to care. In order to ensure caseloads are at a manageable level agency social workers have been recruited and there are currently 8 agency social workers in place. In addition, we have not been able to recruit to 2 vacant practice manager posts and those posts are covered by agency. We continue to advertise and have one applicant to interview. Caseloads are on average in the *mid-20s*.

**4.2** The social worker retention and recruitment strategy is in its final consultation stages before being launched in October.

#### **5.0 Practice Review**

**5.1** As part of the preparation for the new Ofsted inspection framework, Halton is sharing a peer practice review approach with Cheshire West and Chester. The new framework is going to be significantly more challenging, with the grades being inadequate, requiring improvement (to be good), good and outstanding. "Good" is the benchmark, and the inspection will cover all aspects of children's services, from early help to adoption. The bar has been significantly raised and it will be challenging to achieve an overall judgement of good. Inspections under this framework will begin from November 2013.

**5.2** The practice review adopted the principles of the new Ofsted methodology with 16 inspectors over 5 days in July. The review evidenced that Halton has many examples of good practice and numerous of areas of strengths. However, it also highlighted some critical areas for development which we need to respond to if we are to respond positively in the future inspection. These areas have informed an action plan (see Appendix 1). To drive the action plan, an Investing in Halton's Children and Young People Board, chaired by the Chief Executive David Parr, has been established to oversee the implementation of the actions. This board will meet fortnightly until the end of the year.

#### **6.0 SUMMARY**

There has been an increase in referrals in Qtrs 3 &4, with particular increases in domestic violence, sexual abuse, neglect and physical abuse. There are key changes underway in responding to contacts and referrals, the introduction of the Single Assessment Process and the Pre-Proceedings Protocol.

The number of children in care continues to increase, in particular for older children, which warrants a further examination of services, and how effective early intervention and support is with this age group.

An Investing in Halton's Children and Young People Board has been established to deliver continued improvements in the service as part of preparation for the new Ofsted Inspection framework.

## **7.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES**

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

This service is critically in ensuring that children and young people are safeguarded in Halton.

### **7.2 Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton**

Families who are affected by unemployment may be living in poverty, which has implications for children's health and well-being, and how they can be supported to meet their children's needs. The service works with partners and the parents to support families to mitigate the impact on children.

### **7.3 A Healthy Halton**

Parents whose children are referred to children and families services may have issues with drugs and alcohol, which can impact on their ability to parent. Children who are living in neglectful families may have issues with their health needs being met. The service works with partners and the parents to address the areas of need for children to improve their health outcomes.

### **7.4 A Safer Halton**

Children may be affected by physical violence in the home or their communities, may be exposed to anti-social behaviour and be affected by domestic violence. The service works with partners to reduce the risks and if needed, will take protective action to ensure a child is safeguarded.

### **7.5 Environment and Regeneration in Halton**

There are no immediate implications

## **8.0 RISK ANALYSIS**

The service provides critical intervention for children who may be or at risk of significant harm in line with statutory guidance and legislation. Failure to ensure the service has appropriate staffing and management, and that front-line staff have the necessary capacity to meet the needs of children would mean that children may be exposed to unnecessary risk, and would lead to a negative inspection outcome from the regulator Ofsted.

As outlined above, the service is taking the necessary and appropriate steps to ensure that the service is able to meet its duties and responsibilities.

## **9.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

The service has in place support services for families where there are equality and diversity needs, to ensure they are fully involved in their assessment and plans, with support from advocacy of required.

## **10.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

The service may incur additional costs with the use of agency staff.

## **11.0 BACK GROUND PAPERS**

None under the meaning of the Act.