
SAFEGUARDING - CHILDREN'S SOCIAL WORK SERVICES

Children and Young People Portfolio

Responsible Director – Murray Rose, Director of Children's Services

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To seek Member approval to:
 - (a) Support the identified action taken to address pressures within the Children's Social Work Service and the support provided by Legal Services.
 - (b) Note additional proposed resources of £229,097, per annum which have been built into the Medium Term Financial Plan.

Summary

2. The media attention (November 2008) following Peter Connolly's tragic death, led to an immediate increase in child care referrals to the Children's Social Work Service. Darlington Borough Council put immediate measures in place to monitor the impact of these referrals to assess both short and long term impact. Following a year of regular monitoring it has become apparent that a prolonged increase in workloads has been maintained for 12 months and shows no signs of a decrease. The actions outlined in the body of the report, are the minimum requirements needed to ensure an acceptable level of caseloads and practise supervision with longer term actions to secure a competent level of service and retention of staff.

Recommendations

3. Members are asked to:-
 - (a) Support the identified action taken to address pressures within the Children's Social Work Service and Legal Services.
 - (b) Note additional proposed resources of £229,097, increasing per annum which have been built into the proposed Medium Term Financial Plan.

Reasons

4. The recommendations are supported as this proposal will ensure that the minimum requirements needed to ensure an acceptable level of caseloads and practise supervision is in place.

**Murray Rose,
Director of Children's Services**

Background Papers

No Background papers were used in the preparation of this report.

Jenni Cooke Extension 2861

S17 Crime and Disorder	The programme will support children in Darlington who may otherwise be at risk.
Health and Well Being	The work of the programme will safeguard children and families within Darlington.
Sustainability	This programme will have no effect on sustainability.
Diversity	This programme will have no effect on diversity.
Wards Affected	This report will be beneficial for children from all wards, however is not a change to core service provision.
Groups Affected	Children and Young People resident within Darlington
Budget and Policy Framework	The cost of the actions detailed in this report has been included in the draft MTFP for 2010/14, which is scheduled to be considered by Council on 26 February 2010
Key Decision	This is not a key decision.
Urgent Decision	This is not an urgent decision.
One Darlington: Perfectly Placed	The programme is consistent with Aspiring Darlington.
Efficiency	The actions detailed will deliver essential improvements to this key service and involve increases in costs as detailed in the report.

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

5. The media attention (November 2008) following Peter Connolly's tragic death, led to an immediate increase in child care referrals to the Children's Social Work Service. The situation has been monitored at regular intervals, as the long term impact on the service has been uncertain and unclear.
6. It has been a year since the reporting of Baby Peter's death and it is clear that two interlinked issues have emerged resulting in a demanding time currently for children's social care. This consists of an increase in workload and service performance/quality issues.
7. The workload has increased for a number of reasons:-
 - (a) A change in practise of other agencies and service areas, leading to an increase in referrals. This is in part a response to events and also to significant changes in the Inspection regime which have safeguarding as a focus e.g. Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS); Police.
 - (b) There has been an increase in referrals from families and friends following the media focus on child abuse.
 - (c) Government increased requirements for reporting and monitoring leading to additional pressures on the operational workforce e.g. Integrated Children's System (ICS) computer process.
 - (d) The Common Assessment Framework and developing early intervention through integrated teams will initially increase referrals to social work teams as more issues are revealed. This is the picture nationally and regionally. Where this work is embedded, however the longer term (2/3yrs plus) effect is to reduce those referrals.
8. The increase in referrals itself is to be welcomed, as it leads to assessment and interventions in cases which had previously not been known, however there is an impact on the workforce in terms of ability to respond in a timely and appropriate manner.
9. Work has been continuing to ensure the accuracy of the data base, and to address individual performance issues before establishing and addressing service pressures. In relation to performance issues the following action has taken place:-
 - (a) Individual performance issues have emerged, these have now been progressed with HR support .
 - (b) The new unannounced inspection framework for 'front door' services led by Ofsted. To date three inspections have taken place in the North East, but national outcomes have been collated, and as a result the Duty team in Darlington has been reviewed to reinforce the focus on assessment and timescales. Performance measures now show steady improvement, in this area.

Current Position

10. There has been an increase in the number of cases held by the 'core' social work teams (Duty, Care Planning, and Looked After). The initial pressures mainly felt by the Duty Team, are now experienced in the Care Planning Team and over the next year, it is reasonable to expect an increase in children looked after and those subject to protection plans, as the number of cases overall increases. (Other Authorities are also experiencing this currently.)
11. The total number of social workers in the 'core' social work areas, is 21, however this has been increased on a temporary basis, over the summer, to 22 to relieve some pressure in the Duty Team. The total caseload for the 'core' area is 656 cases (individual children) giving an average caseload of 29 (data as of 30/10/09).
12. National data (collated by Social Work Taskforce) shows 15-20 cases as being the generally accepted level for a 'mixed caseload' reducing to 10-15 for a child protection case load. Regional work completed in October shows this to be the case across the 12 authorities.
13. The need to ensure effective supervision and monitoring of caseloads suggests that a manager should have approx. 130-150 cases within their management area at any one time to ensure effective case supervision. Currently the Care Planning Manager has 217. Vacancies for social workers have also occurred within this team and have been filled by newly qualified workers resulting in a need for closer supervision and management oversight of cases.
14. The current structure and number of posts is set up to manage workloads pre November 2008; therefore, there is no additional capacity to deal with the ongoing increase in workload levels post November 2008 without investment in additional staffing. It is also emerging, as Ofsted inspections are taking place, that the capacity issue (and for Darlington's residential services, the model of service) is a particular focus. Capacity has been cited in the completed 'unannounced inspections' to date, as a priority action for Councils.
15. Whilst socio-economic demography has some bearing on numbers of cases, there is not a clear causal relationship as child care neglect and abuse is not restricted to any one section of society.
16. For benchmarking purposes, a local comparator is Hartlepool, with a child population of 21,000 and 24 social workers in the equivalent teams, an internal comparator is Youth Offending Service where case loads are on average 15 per worker.
17. In response to the workload increases over the past months, activity has been taking place to alleviate the pressures:-
 - (a) Ensuring data is accurate to ensure we are able to quantify and monitor accurately the pressures.
 - (b) Reviewing the skill mix in teams, to ensure qualified social workers have a focus on cases and tasks where that level of qualification is required. However this work does not reduce the overall level of work, rather who undertakes it.

- (c) Increasing intensive support service to focus on families at the point of crisis and breakdown to reduce emergency admissions to care.
 - (d) Closer partnership working with other agencies and services regarding thresholds for referral
18. Recruitment and retention of qualified social workers is a significant issue locally and nationally. Experienced staff are leaving to work independently or for a non statutory service. Salary levels are a component in this, but case loads and levels of support are also significant in retention of these workers.
19. There has also been an increasing demand for help and assistance from Legal Services to support Children’s Social Work Services. The growth of the workload undertaken by Legal Services has been a significant and sustained, both in the pre proceeding stage and in the volume of child care proceedings that are commenced. See the table below:

Table of Child Care Cases (average numbers of open matters per month in Legal Services)

Date	Pre-proceeding	Proceedings
September 2008	9	15
October	9	15
November	11	16
December	9	15
February 2009	8	19
March	9	19
April	9	20
May	11	21
June	15	26
August	19	26
Oct	17	23

20. Not only has the legal workload increased but procedural changes required by the court in child care proceedings have also increased the work required. In April 2008 the Ministry of Justice introduced the Public Law Outline (PLO). This gives guidance on the case management of child care proceedings and requires the local authority carry out prescribed work with families prior to commencing proceedings, other than in emergencies. As a consequence there has been an increase in the amount of legal work required before proceeds are brought, including attendance and advising at meetings and the need to draft letters before action commences. The PLO has also increased the amount of documentation to be submitted to court once proceedings have been commenced.

Proposed Actions:

21. Due to the level of concern regarding the capacity some specific actions have been agreed with CMT, subject to the increase in budget being approved as part of the MTFP process.

Immediate

- (a) Recruitment of a Review and Development Manager (Safeguarding). This post will create a pressure of £33,000 (full year) as the current post holder has dual functions which now need to split and create a separate Local Authority Designated Officer role (LADO). The LADO post will be 3days per week.
- (b) Increase of three additional social worker posts to the establishment (salary level O-P) Given the turnover experienced in social work services, these posts will be constantly reviewed against level of need. The total cost for these posts is £ 36,729 each. (i.e. 3 x £36,729 = £110,187, full year costs including on costs).
- (c) Additional Practise Manager post (salary level Q). Total full year cost: £45,618 (including on costs).
- (d) Additional Lawyer post (salary level P). Total full year cost: £40,292 (including on costs).
- (e) The total budget pressure for 10/11 is £ 229,097, increasing by inflation thereafter.

Short-Medium Term Actions

- (f) Review of social work and management roles in line with Social Work Task Force recommendations (due December 2009) and Children’s Workforce Development Council (CWDC) guidance. This will include level of admin and business support to teams, and the use of Child Support Officers.
- (g) Recruitment and Retention:
This includes progressing the current work with:
 - (i) HR on advertising and career structure;
 - (ii) Regional and sub regional work looking at broader actions and solutions sub-regional work is being led by Darlington;
 - (iii) CWDC ‘pilots’ regarding newly qualified staff; advanced practitioners and graduate schemes, led by the workforce development manager.
- (h) Working with the Integrated Services Management Team regarding thresholds and early intervention.

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22. The media attention (November 2008) following Peter Connolly’s tragic death, led to an immediate increase in child care referrals to the Children’s Social Work Service. Darlington Borough Council put immediate measures in place to monitor the impact of these referrals to assess both short and long term impact. Following a year of regular monitoring it has become apparent that a prolonged increase in workloads has been maintained for 12 months and shows no signs of a decrease. The actions outlined above, are the minimum needed to ensure an acceptable level of caseloads and practise supervision

required with longer term actions to secure a competent level of service and retention of staff.