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| <b>1 February 2012</b>   |                             | <b>ITEM 5</b> |
| <b>Children's Services Overview &amp; Scrutiny Committee</b>   |                             |               |
| <b>SAFEGUARDING AND CHILD PROTECTION</b>   |                             |               |
| <b>Report of: Barbara Foster, Head of Care &amp; Targeted Outcomes</b>   |                             |               |
| <b>Wards and communities affected:</b><br>All  | <b>Key Decision:</b><br>Key |               |
| <b>Accountable Head of Service:</b> Barbara Foster, Head of Care & Targeted Outcomes                                       |                             |               |
| <b>Accountable Director:</b> Jo Olsson, Director of People Services  |                             |               |
| <b>This report is</b> Public   |                             |               |
| <b>Purpose of Report:</b> For Members to consider the Council's duties to safeguard children and lead on Child Protection. |                             |               |

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This report highlights the Council's statutory lead role in Child Protection. It describes in detail what the service must deliver and the unpredictable nature of the need. The report also shows the changing nature of the need both locally in Thurrock and nationally.

### **1. RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- 1.1 Members are asked to note the contents of the report; and
- 1.2 Members are asked to continue to monitor this service area

### **2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND:**

- 2.1 The Local Authority has a lead role as an investigating agency, statutory holder of cases for children who are subject of child protection plans and the agency responsible for initiating care proceedings whereby the court has considered the need for the Local Authority to share parental responsibility.
- 2.2 There are a number of essential child protection activities which the Council has responsibility for. These are listed below:
  - Child protection investigations (Section 47, C.A.1989)
  - Children who are subject of child protection plans

- The wider protective duties held within the Council – Education Welfare Service (EWS), children not attending school, the management allegations against professionals or those who work with children (Local Authority Designated Officer, known as LADO), Serious Case Reviews, input into Child Death Reviews
- The resources involved
- The user voice and quality assurance
- The Munro report and timetable for change.

2.3 In August 2010, Members were asked to note that the necessity to reduce expenditure would require that the service must focus on the most vulnerable children. This report evidences this and how there has also been increased need for statutory children’s services, including in Thurrock.

### **3. Child Protection Intervention**

3.1 Thurrock receives a high number of contacts to the Initial Response and other teams (projected number for 2011/12 is 8,422). These are screened as to whether they meet the threshold for Children’s Social Care involvement, leading to a referral to the service.

3.2 The number of cases which proceed from contacts to referral has traditionally been higher than the national average; however since the decision to implement thresholds to accept only those children at the very highest category of need, Thurrock’s referral activity is now lower than the national average. The following table shows the rate in Thurrock, nationally and a comparison with Thurrock’s statistical neighbours, per 10,000 child population.

| <b>Year</b>                            | <b>March 2008</b> | <b>March 2009</b> | <b>March 2010</b> | <b>March 2011</b> | <b>Projected March 2012</b> |
|--|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------|
| National Rate per 10,000               | 490               | 497               | 548               | 555               | Not available               |
| Statistical neighbours rate Per 10,000 | 427               | 525               | 560               | 550               | Not available               |
| Thurrock rate per 10,000               | 528               | 1046              | 671               | 416               | 348                         |
| Actual Number of Referrals in Thurrock | 1901              | 3, 805            | 2,477             | 1554              | 1284                        |

- 3.3 New referrals require a management decision within 24 hours as to whether further intervention is required. Thurrock's performance is 100% for this critical performance indicator. Cases requiring further intervention via an Initial Assessment currently stands at a projected figure 321 per 10,000 of the population, the national average is 398. The expectation is that the young person will be seen and an initial assessment will be completed within 7 working days. Thurrock's performance in this area is 79% completed within timescale, against a national average of 64%. The outcome of the assessment will determine whether further intervention/services are required. For those cases assessed as in need of further intervention a core assessment will be commissioned. This involves further visits within 35 working days. Thurrock currently commissions 301 Core Assessments Per 10,000 of the population, the national average is 167. A Core Assessment must always take place in a child protection investigation and in wider circumstances of concern about children.
- 3.4 The number of referrals which lead to a child protection investigation (s.47) stands at 129 per 10,000 of the population, the national average is 101. The actual projected number of investigations in Thurrock for 2011/12 is 480, averaging 40 per month. This would account for some of the higher than average numbers of Core Assessments being completed. At every stage of this work, risks to children must be carefully analysed. In the last year, all social care staff have received training in the same practice model – the Victoria Risk Assessment Model. Also, there have been mutual visits across the different duty desks between police, health and social workers.
- 3.5 This work was last inspected by OFSTED in November 2011 as part of the Annual Inspection of Contact, Referral and Assessment Services. This has previously been reported to Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The inspection gave a strong result for Thurrock but made four recommendations:
- To ensure issues of diversity, equality and identity are fully addressed and used to design and deliver service improvement
  - To establish consistent thresholds with partner agencies and in the service to reduce the unnecessary escalation of statutory intrusion into childrens and families lives
  - To improve referral information from partner agencies and in particular introduce an effective protocol to screen incidents of domestic abuse
  - To improve the use of audit finding to inform service improvement.
- 3.6 It is anticipated that Thurrock will be among the local authorities who will receive the 14 day inspection of Safeguarding and Looked After Children which Ofsted has committed to undertaking across the country this year. Preparation for the inspection has confirmed our strong partnership arrangements in practice and through the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB). The LSCB has undertaken a new style of Social Care Institute of Excellence review into a local family where a child died of natural causes. There is important learning from this review which is in the process of being finalised for dissemination.

- 3.7 Since the Inspection, further development work has been undertaken. A new protocol with Essex Police has been drawn up in order to streamline the processing of referrals of domestic abuse and minimising duplication. This is by far the largest referral category. The Council's excellent staff training programme continues to cover all aspects of child protection and diversity but we remain a department with a high level of statutory intervention in family life. The development of a comprehensive Quality Assurance Framework, launched in September 2011, is beginning to help to understand the effectiveness of the Council's intervention both from a qualitative and quantitative perspective.
- 3.8 An externally commissioned audit of assessments of referrals was undertaken in December 2011 by Mott MacDonald Health and Social Care, funded by a grant from the Children's Workforce Development Council in Social Work Improvement Fund. This audit described the service as being on a firm foundation but recommended further exploration and learning for staff by means of critical reflection and explores how the Council can further involve children and families in order to achieve more of their cooperation and participation.
- 3.9 Critical attention must be paid to the caseload required to be held by each individual social worker. The safe capacity is for there to be a maximum 20 for each practitioner, dependent on individual experience and the duty to limit the caseload of newly qualified social workers. Thurrock caseloads are kept within these limits as far as possible and are regularly monitored by the Service Managers and Head of Service. As at December 2011, figures are an average of 18 children per social worker.

#### 4. CHILD PROTECTION PLANS

- 4.1 The Thurrock numbers of children subject to child protection plans remains high (actual number of children is 193, which is 55.7 per 10,000 of the population, the national average is 43.9 per 10,000) Numbers have risen even faster than in other parts of the country, with a particular emphasis on an increased percentage of neglect cases. This year has seen an increase in the number of children who are transferring to Thurrock on child Protection Plans which have been made in other authorities (12 children in November and December as compared with numbers less than 5 per year until now) Comparisons across the country are as follows:

|                  | Neglect      | Physical Abuse | Sexual Abuse | Emotional Abuse | Multiple <sup>5</sup> |
|------------------|--------------|----------------|--------------|-----------------|-----------------------|
| 2010/11 National | <b>43.9%</b> | <b>10.6%</b>   | <b>5.4%</b>  | <b>28.2%</b>    | <b>11.8%</b>          |
| 2010/11 Thurrock | 63.3%        | 2.6%           | 3.5%         | 23.6%           | 7.0%                  |
| 2009/10 Thurrock | 55.8%        | 9.1%           | 5.1%         | 22.3%           | 7.6%                  |
| 2008/9 Thurrock  | 42%          | 18%            | 16%          | 12%             | 13%                   |

4.2 Together with a high rate of Section 47 Child Protection Investigations, these high numbers of children subject to child protection plans show that there is a need for intensive intervention in child protection work in Thurrock where it is recognised that there are areas of poverty and deprivation and a high number of larger than average families. During this year 176 Child Protection Plans have been ended and the number of children subject of a plan stands at 193 at the time of writing. This number includes a particular rise in the numbers of very young and unborn children being referred.

4.3 It is felt that the higher numbers of children subject to a plan reflects good safeguarding. Child Protection thresholds have been shown to be consistent, the percentage of children becoming subject to a Child Protection Plan measured against the number of section 47 investigations undertaken has remained consistently at about 50% for a 5 year period, despite changes in staff personnel. This is largely in line with both the national and statistical neighbours' figures for the same period.

## **5. OTHER SAFEGUARDING AND CHILD PROTECTION WORK**

5.1 After the well publicised tragedy of the death of Victoria Climbié, Lord Laming's report established the core value of safeguarding being everybody's business and the duty was set out in The Children Act of 2004 that all public sector organisations hold this responsibility. Members are asked to note that there is substantial further work in the Council which contributes to safeguarding and to core child protection services – the contribution of the whole children's workforce and especially the child minders, day-care staff and teachers who see children daily and are most likely to receive children's disclosures and requests for help. Other functions of local authorities that make an important contribution to safeguarding are housing, sport, culture and leisure services, and youth services.

5.2 Council staff work in several partnerships to promote child protection. The Local Safeguarding Children Board is also on the same agenda as this report to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Members will see that the LSCB has a key role in scrutinising services and staff training. This creates a direct link with the Stay Safe Sub-Group of the Children and Young People's Partnership Board which is also separately reported.

## **6. RESOURCES**

6.1 Thurrock is a member of Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) which draws up an annual picture of the spending across different local authorities. CIPFA data shows that Thurrock well into the lower half of spend on child protection services (a chart of staffing is attached, Appendix 3)

## **7. THE USER VOICE AND QUALITY ASSURANCE**

- 7.1 The service was allocated the growth of two further Child Protection Advisers for this financial year in addition to the one existing post-holder. There was some delay in recruiting to these posts as it was essential that the staff recruited were of a high calibre. This additional capacity ensures that the LADO has a managerial role in the quality assurance work which involves service evaluation and improvement as was recommended in the last unannounced inspection.
- 7.2 Given this new capacity and in line with the Quality Assurance Framework, the service has been able to undertake a number of qualitative audits; contacts which do not progress to referral, Core Assessments which do not lead to any further involvement and currently the ethnicity profiles of referrals received and whether there is an under or over representation in the child protection forum for certain ethnic groups.
- 7.3 In terms of feedback on the service, a survey was conducted in 2010 and is currently being repeated. 240 service users were interviewed by telephone. High scores were achieved on staff being clear why social care had contacted people (64%), being honest and open about the seriousness of the concerns (76%), being respectful in speech (92%) and in how they dealt with people (82%). When it came to people feeling that staff had explained the process, the reasonable scores (58%) were accompanied by the respondents saying that their recollections of their use of the service were affected by their high stress and distress as to the circumstances which had drawn them to the social work teams and this was an important reminder to staff. Nevertheless, 67% of service users were sure that staff had shared the assessment with them and that they had been kept informed (52%) and that they had been listened to as to what they had to say (82%). Staff punctuality ranked at 70%.

## **8. THE MUNRO REPORT ON CHILD PROTECTION**

- 8.1 Overview and Scrutiny looked at the Munro Report entitled the Child's Journey and have had separate reports on the Early Offer of Help Projects. In December 2011 the Minister for Children and Families, Tim Loughton, answered a question in Parliament as to the progress being made nationally. He confirmed that there will be a new version of Working Together in 2012, and that there will be new child protection performance indicators which concentrate on the child's experience of the child protection service by measuring, for example, how many social workers they have seen. There is a work programme within the Health service which was published in October 2011 and the reforms of social work are underway. In Thurrock, our development of the Early Offer of Help will be the corner stone of Professor Munro's new vision for child protection. Funding has been made available in Thurrock for a newly designed post of Principal Child and Family Social Worker as from the new financial year. Further changes are anticipated in the future inspection arrangements of local authorities but here in Thurrock we await being inspected on the existing model.

## **9. IMPLICATIONS**

### **9.1 Financial**

The report highlights an increased need in the number of children and young people requiring safeguarding and protection. This will be managed as part of the overall Care & Targeted Outcomes budget. If this demographic trend continues, this may lead to pressures within the medium term financial strategy.

Implications verified by: Michael Jones  
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### **9.2 Legal**

There are no legal implications arising from this report.

Implications verified by: Lindsey Marks  
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### **9.3 Diversity and Equality**

The numbers of children subject of a Child Protection Plan who are non-White British shows an under representation and similarly is the case for disabled young people. Work is currently underway to explore the reasons as to why this may be.

Implications verified by: Samson Dealyn  
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### **9.4 Other implications (where significant)**

## **10. CONCLUSION**

10.1 For information.

## **11. BACKGROUND PAPERS USED IN PREPARING THIS REPORT:**

Monthly Performance Data Figures

## **12. APPENDICES TO THIS REPORT:**

Appendix 1 - The Southend, Essex and Thurrock Child Protection Procedures

Appendix 2 - Children and YP's Safety

Appendix 3 - Staffing of Thurrock Child Protection Social Work Teams, January 2012

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