



## HEALTH, SOCIAL CARE AND WELLBEING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 23RD OCTOBER 2012

**SUBJECT: CASEWORK AND MANAGEMENT UPDATE REPORT**

**REPORT BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR - SOCIAL SERVICES**

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### **1. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 To update the Health, Social Care & Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee on case allocations and workforce variations within Children's Services.

### **2. SUMMARY**

- 2.1 This report builds upon the current processes of Elected Members being provided with information on the allocation of Child Protection, Looked After Children and Child in Need cases. It will also provide members with information on the stability of the workforce by highlighting vacancy rates on a monthly basis.
- 2.2 This report follows on from information given to Elected Members in December 2011. It was agreed updated information would be provided to this Scrutiny Committee on at least an annual basis.
- 2.3 All children on the Child Protection Register and those Looked After have remained allocated throughout the past year as has been the case in Caerphilly over a number of years. There has also been a successful drive to maintain the low numbers of unallocated children in need cases.
- 2.4 An ongoing recruitment exercise aims to fill vacancies to ensure that the teams are adequately staffed to ensure that the statutory duties are fulfilled. It is important that the council is well placed to deliver a service that is amongst the best in Wales and to this end a robust recruitment and retention policy has been devised.

### **3. LINKS TO STRATEGY**

- 3.1 The Community Strategy
- 3.2 The Caerphilly Safeguarding Children Board's Strategic Plan 2009 – 2012.
- 3.3 The Assessment and Care Planning Strategy.

### **4. THE REPORT**

- 4.1 Recommendation No. 54 of the Laming Report requires the Head of Children and Family Services within Local Authorities to regularly report on case allocations and vacancy levels to

Senior Management and Elected Members.

- 4.2 The Corporate Director Social Services, the Cabinet Member for Social Services and the Lead Member for Children and Young People's Services already meet with the Assistant Director for Children's Services on a regular basis and so receive up to date information and have the opportunity to ask questions about the services provided by social workers. They have also completed visits to some of the front line assessment teams in order to ensure that they hear about the challenges faced from the social workers themselves. The Cabinet Member for Social Services and Corporate Director Social Services also receive weekly information on the number of unallocated cases.
- 4.3 This report sets out the allocation of work and social worker vacancy levels from October 2011 to August 2012. The report focuses upon the front line social work teams where there have been historical issues around recruitment and retention of staff. This includes the three assessment teams and the six long-term children services teams within Children's Services in Caerphilly County Borough Council.

### **Changed up to here**

#### **Staffing**

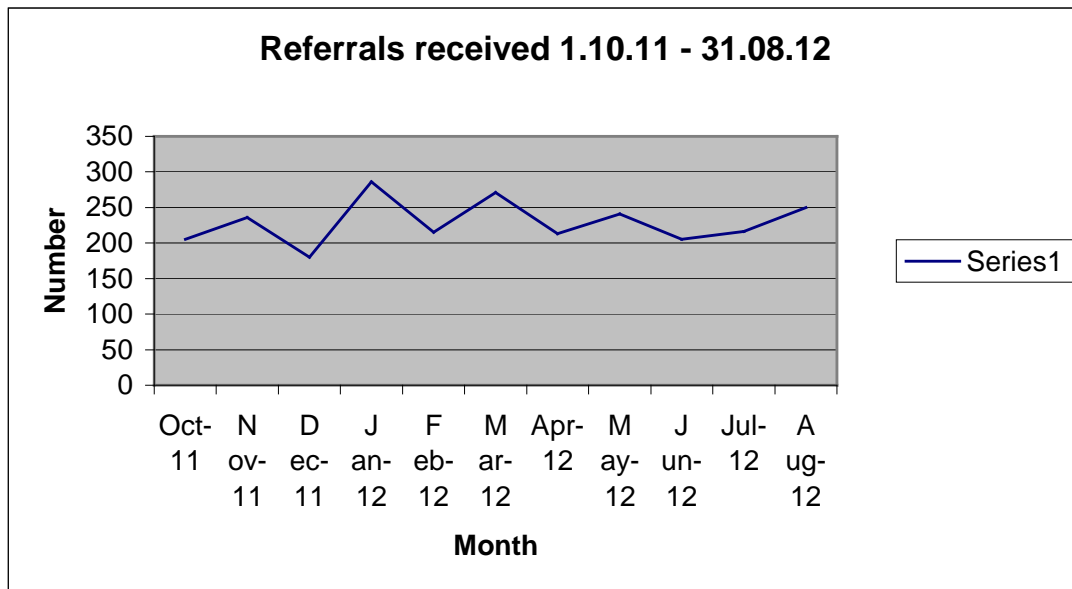
- 4.4 As of the end of September 2012 there was only one social work vacancy. The recent recruitment drive has been successful and teams are waiting for new staff to arrive. Agency workers are covering some of these posts whilst awaiting the new starters.
- 4.5 There remains a strong commitment to recruit to vacancies. A report on Recruitment & Retention was endorsed by the HSCWB Scrutiny in September 2010 and subsequently by Cabinet in July in 2011. Since then various measures have been put in place to assist in the recruitment of qualified Social Workers. In April 2012 a permanent advert was placed on the Caerphilly Internet site for Social Workers/Senior Practitioners. This has to date proved successful as posts have been filled on an ongoing basis. 10 staff are currently seconded onto the Social Work Degree programme in addition to the appointment of 3 Trainee Social Workers. To support newly qualified staff to gain the necessary experience a Senior Practitioner/Mentor has been appointed to assist this process. Support from agency staff has been required though due to sickness, maternity cover and during times when waiting for new staff to commence employment.
- 4.6 Each children's services team continues to have a permanent Team Manager. Last year there were 3 Senior Practitioners acting up in this role in several teams due to sickness and maternity covers. However in April this year the vacant Team Manager posts were filled with permanent managers. One of these managers has successfully completed the Team Manager Development programme (this is a Welsh Government funded course aimed at training the managers of the future) and two others are completing their second modules on this course. There is a continued commitment to nurture and mentor the senior practitioners within the department and several experienced staff have been given the opportunity to study on the Team Manager development programme. If Manager vacancies were to arise in future then there are experienced internal staff who will have been appropriately trained to meet the challenges. If in future there are Team Manager vacancies due to maternity leave then there is a commitment to cover these posts.

#### **Caseloads**

- 4.7 The period from August 2010 to September 2011 was very busy. There were some changes of staffing and increasing work pressures from child protection referrals and court work. There had been a significant increase in the number of initial contacts from families and agencies and the service was seeing these high numbers feeding into the longer term work in terms of Child Protection Registration, pressures on the looked after system and the number of court proceedings. There had been a significant increase in referrals increasing from 194 in January 2011 to 331 in March 2011. However this year shows a steady referral rate.

There was a decrease in December 2011 with 180 referrals being made, which increased to 286 in January 2012 which was the highest referral rate this year to date. The introduction of the Team Around the Family has enabled the local authority to signpost families to lower tier services resulting in less referrals being processed for the Assessments Teams. Although this does mean that it is the more complex cases that are being processed for assessment currently.

- 4.8 The graph below shows the number of referrals processed by the Contact and Referral Team from October 2011 to August 2012. The number of referrals is indicative of the number of initial assessments needed.



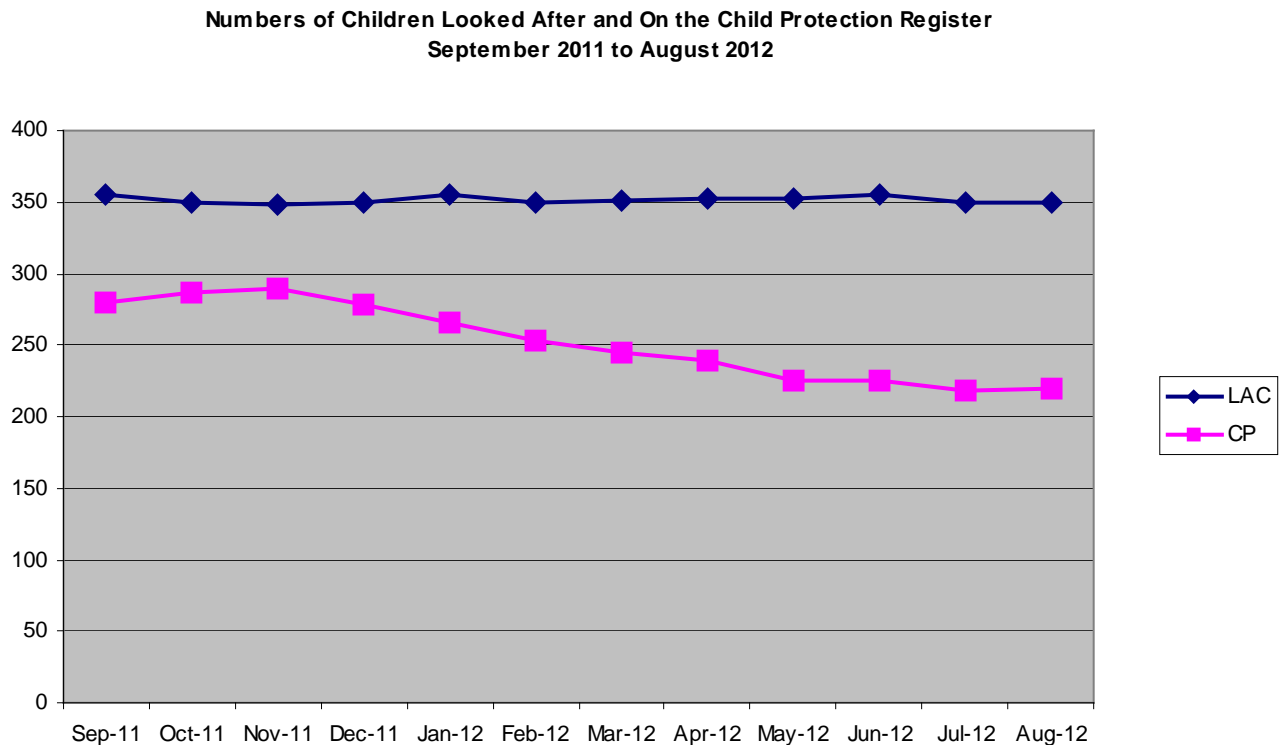
- 4.9 There continue to be pressures on front line staff with demands put on them to keep updated with legislation and providing a responsive service. For example, visiting looked after children in their placements on a regular basis, and completing assessments within timescales. However Managers within the teams strive to ensure that their statutory responsibilities are met, for example, that there are no unallocated cases within the teams and that all children on the child protection register and looked after children are allocated to a qualified Social Worker.

### **Looked After Children and Child Protection**

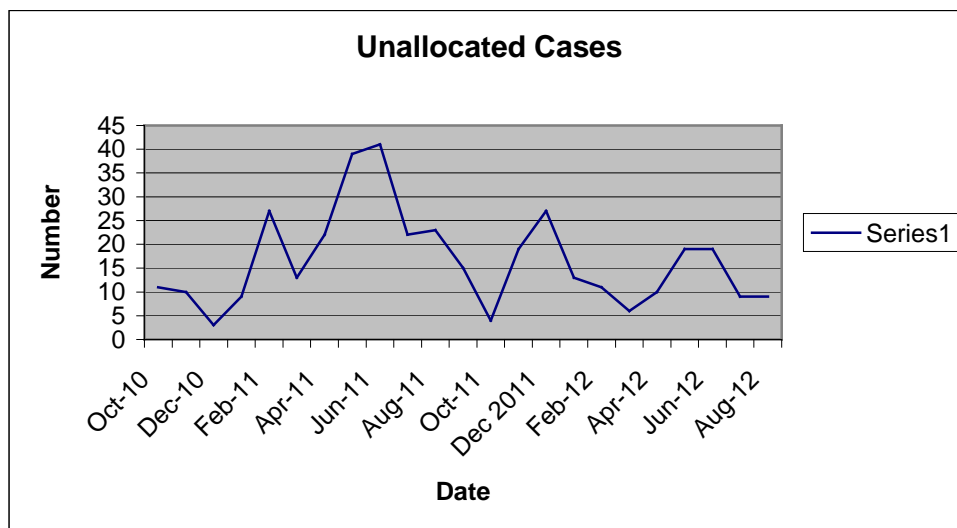
- 4.10 The general trend for the last year shows that the looked after children population has remained quite steady. Each had an allocated qualified social worker. With the formation of the Immediate Response Team work has been completed with families where there is an immediate risk of children coming into care, having a placement disruption or being placed on the child protection register. The team has undertaken 91 separate interventions with young people and their families since it started on 10th October 2011 until 30th September 2012. Of the 91 interventions, 5 were re-referrals where we worked with the same young person for a second time. They will also be looking to support children who are already accommodated out of county to return to the Caerphilly area. The children placed out of county is monitored on a regular basis and where appropriate these children are being brought back into county.
- 4.11 In November 2011 the Child Protection Register peaked at 288 and within the Divisional Management Team it was agreed that a proactive approach would be taken to address this. It was agreed that cases would not progress to Initial Child protection Conference without first discussing with the Service Manager for that area. This would allow detailed discussion about the case and looking at resources that may not have previously been considered before proceeding to conference. The Immediate Response Team, which was set up last year has assisted this as it has been an extra resource teams can use when families require immediate assistance. As a result of our intervention the Child Protection Register has reduced to 219 in

August 2012. It is recognised that there will always be a fluctuation of the numbers of children on the Child Protection Register. The trend will continue to be monitored and evaluated.

4.12 The graph below shows trends in the number of children on the child protection register and looked after excluding respite from September 2011 to August 2012:



- 4.13 As outlined above the Service Managers continue to monitor closely the figures on the Child Protection Register. There has been successful recruitment of permanent Team Managers to all the children services' teams, which has had a huge impact on morale and stability within the teams. There has been the successful recruitment to the Immediate Response Team, which has been a good resource for the teams, and prevented Looked After Numbers increasing in the past year. There has also been the introduction of the Team Around the Family to assist in lower tier cases.
- 4.14 There has been a commitment by managers to ensure robust care planning and ensure good outcomes for children and young people. There continues to be a number of revocations of Care Orders. The children placed at home on Care Orders has reduced from 35 in 2010 at its highest figure to 9 currently. This will assist the number of Looked After Children being reduced.
- 4.15 The management of cases remains a high priority for Managers. Performance Management information is available to staff regularly, and there continues to be monthly meetings between Service Managers and the Assistant Director to monitor information. As at 31.08.12 there were 9 unallocated cases across the Teams. This figure relates to new cases that have been progressed for assessment the previous day and will be allocated at that point. This is a significant decrease on past highs:



4.16 As part of setting priorities within the department and providing an effective and efficient service it is important that staff are spoken to and their views gathered about the challenges faced. The Chief Executive and Cabinet Member for Social Services, the Corporate Director Social Services and Assistant Director have visited frontline teams in an attempt to do this. This report also details some of the feedback from frontline managers.

4.17 The following represents views of Team Managers within Children’s Services in relation to the challenges the teams have faced and the current state of morale.

There have been some difficulties in certain teams with high staff absences due to sick leave, maternity and paternity leave. This is difficult for the managers but also affects the morale within the teams. One Manager noted that ‘on a positive note those who are in work have pulled together to support one another, and part time workers have increased their hours to assist the team.’

Managers are pleased that they have been able to recruit to Social Worker vacancies within the teams. There has been a good response to recent adverts, although the majority of these applications are from Newly Qualified staff. This has caused some anxieties as a high proportion of new staff are newly qualified. However Since April 2012 there has been a Mentor Senior Practitioner in post whose role is to support and mentor all newly qualified staff within children’s services. The Mentor offers group training and supervision, joint visits, co working cases and supervision aside from the support the worker receives from their team manager. This has been used widely by all teams across the authority and is a valued resource at present.

Generally morale within teams is good, as vacancies have been filled as soon as they have arisen. Team Managers feel supported by Senior Management and know there is a commitment to fill these front line vacancies. When there has been a delay in recruiting new staff then the Assistant Director has agreed for agency staff to assist in the short term.

There have been pressures in the front line teams due to demands on particular services. For example there has been a high level of young people who have presented as homeless. This has financial implications for the department as well as staff implications regards assessments and such like. On the 1st and 2nd October social services staff will be completing joint training with housing to consider this and to draw up a joint protocol to assist and improve this area of work. Team Managers and Service Manager will be attending this training.

Team managers feel that the introduction of the Team Around the Family (TAF) has begun to show a reduction in referrals in Assessment Teams. This in many ways is a positive but has impacted on the complex work that the team are now involved in assessing. TAF can also be used as an exit strategy for families that social services are involved with.

There have also been concerns about the level of illegal substances available in the area and how this has impacted on the young people social services are working with. There is a high demand for specialist resources in this area.

Managers continue to monitor the unallocated cases and ensure that all Looked After Children and Children on the Child Protection Register are allocated to a qualified worker. There are regular management meetings to update staff on what is occurring in children's services.

Managers feel supported by their line managers, and find them approachable and accessible when needed.

Staff continue to show a great commitment to Caerphilly and are working exceptionally hard to achieve high standards. The challenges of managing a children's social work team are huge but managers feel they are assisted in this role through clear management direction. The teams also have strong links to other professionals and agencies, working effectively with them to best meet the needs of and safeguard children and young people.

4.18 In summary there are a number of key themes evident in this report:-

- There is a commitment to manage caseloads.
- The local authority maintains the commitment to improve services and the family support strategy has demonstrated this e.g. the introduction of the Immediate Response Team and TAF.
- Each team has a permanent manager who is supportive to their team members.
- The number of Looked After Children and Children on the Child protection Register will continue to be monitored.
- Support is offered to manage absences from work in respect of sick leave, and maternity leave.
- The increase in Newly Qualified staff being appointed and how to best support them.
- The complexity of the work carried out by front line teams.

4.19 Overall, morale is good within the department and it is well placed to continue to improve and maintain its performance. There remains a lot of pressure to manage caseloads and this requires close line management support and regular supervision. It must be acknowledged that staff are working extremely hard at present and teams are very busy. Staff are striving to achieve good outcomes for the Children and Families they are working with.

## **5. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 This report is for information purposes, so the Council's Equality Impact Assessment does not need to be applied.

## **6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

6.1 There are no financial implications.

## **7. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS**

7.1 There are no personnel implications.

## **8. CONSULTATIONS**

8.1 The views of those consulted have been incorporated into the report.

## **9. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 9.1 It is recommended that the content of the report be noted. The purpose of this report is to update the Health Social Care & Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee on case allocations and workforce variations within Children and Family Services.

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