

## **WIRRAL COUNCIL**

### **CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 16 NOVEMBER 2010**

#### **REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES**

#### **CHILD PROTECTION ACTIVITY**

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### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**This report, requested by members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, outlines the statutory framework and the current level of child protection activity in Wirral.**

#### **1 Statutory Framework**

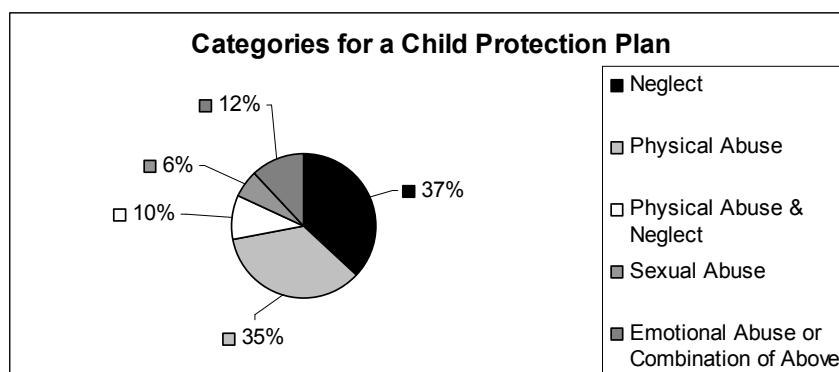
- 1.1 The statutory framework for children is governed by the Children Act 1989 which outlines the legal basis under which child protection activity is undertaken. In accordance with Section 47 of the Act, the local authority should make enquiries where it is believed that a child is at risk or is likely to be at risk of significant harm.
- 1.2 Working Together to Safeguard Children (DCSF 2010) provides the statutory guidance for how these enquiries should be undertaken, who should be involved and the arrangements for children in need of a child protection plan.

#### **2 Context**

- 2.1 Social workers in Wirral are based in 4 Assessment Teams and 9 Care Management Teams (including children with disabilities). These teams are based in four Districts – 2 Assessment Team and 4 Care Management Team in Birkenhead, 1 Assessment and 2 Care Management Teams in Wallasey and 1 Assessment and 1 Care Management Team in South/West Wirral. There is a staffing complement of 115 social workers.
- 2.2 In addition to working with children with a child protection plan, social workers are also currently working with over 1,000 “children in need” under s17 of the Children Act 1989 and 647 Looked After Children. “Children in Need” are defined as children whose development may be delayed without the provision of services to them. These children are children on the edge of having a child protection plan or becoming looked after; who need the specialist input of a social worker to assess and co-ordinate a plan, involving all appropriate agencies, to meet their needs.

### 3 Wirral Child Protection Activity

- 3.1 Since the Baby Peter case there has been an increase in the number of children with a child protection plan. The reasons for this are complex and include: better awareness of safeguarding issues across all agencies; a high uptake by these agencies in the use of the Common Assessment Framework and Team Around the Child mean that issues are being identified earlier. The impact of the Baby Peter case nationally has also meant that agencies are more cautious about managing cases where there is a level of risk without the security of a child protection plan
- 3.2 Referrals have increased during this period with a higher number of referrals leading to an assessment – in the last quarter 90% of referrals received an assessment, which shows that generally the thresholds for determine which children should receive a service are correct.
- 3.3 Wirral's activity has increased from 228 children with a child protection plan in April 2009 to 337 in September 2010. This rise is not unique to Wirral and is reflected in local authorities across the country. At the end of March 2010, north-west authorities reported an average 14% increase in children with child protection plans. Wirral had a particular increase in plans in June, July and August this year.
- 3.4 The categories for a child protection plan are set out in Working Together. At the end of September 2010, 37% were under the category of neglect, 35% physical abuse, 10% physical abuse and neglect, 6% sexual abuse with the remainder emotional abuse or a combination of the other categories. Domestic Violence is not a separate category but is included under the category of physical abuse.



- 3.5 The highest numbers of children with a child protection plan are in Birkenhead (53%), followed by Wallasey (25%) and South and West Wirral (20%). 7.2% are with the Children with Disabilities Team – this figure includes siblings of a disabled child.

- 3.6 The majority of children are aged under 5 (44%), followed by age 6-12 years (39%) and 13-17 years (17%).
- 3.7 Managing child protection plans is intense and resource demanding for social workers, with children requiring a minimum of weekly visits for the first three months and a minimum of fortnightly visits thereafter. Core group meetings with partner agencies and parents, to manage and monitor the child protection plan, are required every 6 weeks. Additional time is required to prepare for the child protection conference, such as the production of reports; completing ongoing assessment and the production of evidence of progression of the child protection plan at each review.
- 3.8 In accordance with Working Together, the Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB), has a duty to set and thresholds monitor the safeguarding system across all agencies who work with children or who provide a service that impacts on children. The LSCB receives quarterly performance information on all areas of safeguarding activity. This includes the number of referrals that went on to be lead by CYPD, those that were deemed to be requiring no action, or another agency to lead on action such as Team Around the Child.

#### **4 Financial Implications**

- 4.1 The total budget is £8,397,700 (including CIN, Court Costs, Legal & Medical Costs, Area Teams and Assessment & Care Management).

#### **5 Staffing Implications**

- 5.1 Wirral has been successful in recruiting social workers, since we have a good reputation for support, supervision and training in this complex and challenging area of work. The workload is demanding and presents challenges for staff and Managers. The authority ensures that where there is long-term sickness or where staff are absent through maternity leave agency social work cover is provided, to manage the demands on the staff and also to ensure that children are still supported.
- 5.2 Adverts are placed monthly, to ensure social workers are continuously recruited to replace any vacancies. Recruitment to the posts which were established by Cabinet in March 2009, such as extra social workers, Advanced Social Work Practitioners, Practice Managers and Principal Team Managers, are part of the strategy to increase front line social work capacity and increase the level of supervision and oversight. This is making a positive impact, and a further recruitment drive is currently underway to fill the remaining vacancies on a permanent basis.

## **6 Equal Opportunities Implications/Health Impact Assessment**

6.1 It is essential to promote safeguarding of children throughout all communities in Wirral.

## **7 Community Safety Implications**

7.1 Members of the public have also had their awareness of safeguarding raised and are more willing to refer to children's social care if they are worried about a child.

## **8 Local Agenda 21 Implications**

8.1 There are no Local Agenda 21 implications

## **9 Planning Implications**

9.1 There are no planning implications

## **10 Anti-Poverty Implications**

10.1 The high numbers of children with a child protection plan because of neglect and physical harm are more prevalent in areas where there is high socio – economic deprivation, where for example, more families are in receipt of benefits or low incomes, live in social or private rented housing and where together with other factors such as drug or alcohol misuse; this contributes to children experiencing poor outcomes for their education, health and emotional well being.

## **11 Social Inclusion Implications**

11.1 Many of the children subject to child protection plans, are vulnerable to social exclusion; their child protection plans, as well as mitigating specific risk of harm, are focused on supporting vulnerable children and families to be more socially included.

## **12 Local Member Support Implications**

12.1 There are no local member support implications

## **13 Background Papers**

13.1 Children Act 1989 (HMSO)  
Working Together to Safeguard Children (DCSF 2010)

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended for members to note this report.

**David Armstrong**  
**Interim Director Children and Young Peoples Department**