

<b>28 January 2014</b>		<b>ITEM: 8</b>
<b>Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee</b>		
<b>Safeguarding and Child Protection</b>		
<b>Report of:</b> Barbara Foster, Head of Care & Targeted Outcomes		
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> Key	
<b>Accountable Head of Service:</b> Barbara Foster		
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Carmel Littleton, Director of Children's Services		
<b>This report is Public</b>		
<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.**

**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.
- Children who go missing from home or care.

- The wider protective duties held within the Council – Education Welfare Service (EWS), children not attending school, the management of 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 implementation of Munro and timetable for change.

### 3. Child Protection Intervention

3.1 Thurrock continues to receive a high number of contacts to the Initial Response and other teams (projected number for 2013/14 is 10,427, average 868 contacts per month, similar to the previous year which was 10,620 contacts). Each contact has to be 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 remains below the national and statistical neighbour average. The reason for this could be that the way in which referrals and contacts are recorded in other Boroughs differ, hence the variation. The following table shows the referral rate in Thurrock, nationally and a comparison with Thurrock’s statistical neighbours, per 10,000 child population.

Year	March 2008	March 2009	March 2010	March 2011	March 2012	March 2013	Projected March 2014
National Rate per 10,000	490	497	548	555	534	521	Not available
Statistical neighbours rate Per 10,000	427	525	560	550	555	608	Not available
<b>Thurrock</b> rate per 10,000	528	1046	671	416	361	<b>449</b>	487
Actual Number of Referrals in Thurrock	1901	3, 805	2,477	1554	1391	1748	1893

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 of 433 per 10,000 of the population, the national average is 387 and statistical neighbour average

401. The expectation is that the young person will be seen and an initial assessment will be completed within 10 working days. Thurrock's performance in this area is 86% completed within timescale, against a national average of 76% and statistical neighbour average of 77%. 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 377 Core Assessments Per 10,000 of the population, the national average is 204 and statistical neighbour average 220. A Core Assessment must always take place in a child protection investigation and in wider circumstances of concern about children. The number of core assessments being completed within the 35 day timescale is 74%, the national average is 77% and statistical neighbour average is also 74%.

- 3.4 The number of referrals which lead to a child protection investigation (s.47) stands at 159 per 10,000 of the population, the national average is 112 and statistical neighbour average is 108. The actual projected number of investigations in Thurrock for 2013/14 is 838, averaging 70 per month. This is a significant increase with a 26% increase in child protection investigations since last year. Most other local authorities are reporting a similar increase in activity of this nature, however, up to date comparative data is not currently available. This would also 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. All social care staff have received training in the same practice model – the Victorian Risk Assessment Model. The use of this model offers some consistency to the analysis of risk. On-going quality assurance of the implementation of the model continues to ensure that risks are being correctly identified.
- 3.5 As part of the Children and Young People's plan, a 'mock' inspection took place for a period of 1 week during November 2013. Currently the findings are in draft form; however they suggest that there are no obvious issues with the thresholds being applied. With the full implementation of the Early offer of Help it is hoped that children and families who require support will receive appropriate intervention to prevent the need for statutory child protection intervention. It is hoped that over time this will be reflected in the reduction of the S.47 investigations and children subject to child protection plans.
- 3.6 Further development work has been undertaken. The Early Offer of Help has continued to be developed and the next stage with the launch of a multi-agency safeguarding hub, or MASH, is due for implementation in Spring 2014. This will see a major shift in the way that services are offered at an early stage of identification to minimise escalation into statutory services. The Council's excellent staff training programme continues to cover all aspects of child protection and diversity but we continue to remain a department with a high level of statutory intervention in family life. The development of a comprehensive Quality Assurance Framework, was launched in September 2011. This continues to be a key area for the department in order for it to continue to strengthen the learning culture which is already embedded in the service. The on-going development of the Quality Assurance Service has

helped to understand the effectiveness of the Council's intervention both from a qualitative and quantitative perspective.

- 3.7 Thurrock's Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy was launched at the end of 2012. Since that time a Joint Strategic Group has been established co-chaired by Cllr Okunade representing Children's Services and Cllr Gaywood representing Public Protection. An action plan is being developed and implemented.
- 3.8 Following the success of the 2012 Annual Conference, the Local Safeguarding Board hosted another excellent conference in December 2013. The attendance represented all agencies and the voluntary sector. The theme was The Voice of the Child and guest speakers both of local and national recognition raised the profile and highlighted the challenges for this important part of safeguarding. The conference provided the platform and challenge to all services across the Borough who come into contact with children, to ensure that the Voice of the Child is recognised, heard and where appropriate acted upon.
- 3.9 Thurrock's Missing Children Panel which regularly reviews children who go missing is being recognised as evidence of good practice and is being considered for replication across Greater Essex. There is excellent partnership involvement for Social Care, Essex Police, Health and Education Welfare. The panel has consistently tracked children who regularly go missing from home or from care. It also monitors children who go missing from education. The panel has recently expanded its remit to incorporate young people up to the age of 21, therefore highlighting any vulnerable young people who are care leavers.
- 3.10 Critical attention continues to be paid to the caseload required to be held by each individual social worker. The safe capacity is for there to be a maximum of 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.

#### **4. CHILD PROTECTION PLANS**

- 4.1 The Thurrock numbers of children subject to child protection plans remains high (actual number of children as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2013 was 204, which is 52.2 per 10,000 of the population, the national average is 37.9 per 10,000 statistical neighbour average is 33.5). Numbers have risen even faster than in other parts of the country. A regular exploration of thresholds is undertaken and the recent 'mock' inspection has not raised any significant issues. It is not clear as to why these numbers have increased, however this is a general trend which is reflected across the UK.

	Neglect	Physical Abuse	Sexual Abuse	Emotional Abuse	Multiple <sup>5</sup>
2012/13 Thurrock	<b>57%</b>	<b>1.5%</b>	<b>1.5%</b>	<b>24%</b>	<b>16%</b>
2011/12 Thurrock	64.6%	2.4%	0.0%	22%	10%
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 224 children became subject to a child protection plan and 186 child protection plans have been ended. 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. However it is hoped that with the implementation of the Early Offer of Help this year this would, in time, help to reduce the numbers requiring statutory intervention. Child protection thresholds have been shown to be consistent.

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

5.1 The department has successfully completed its first year of the “Troubled Families” Programme. The team targets families where there are issues with unemployment, school attendance and parents with mental health or substance misuse issues. It is a three year programme which encourages agencies to pool resources and be creative in the way it supports families. To date the service has engaged with 199 families. The scheme operates under a payment by results criteria set out by the government. To date 38 payment by results have been received with a further 30-40 families being submitted in February 2014. This will represent just under half of the families currently being worked with. Other successes and progress has been made however, this has not always met the strict government criteria for the payment by results scheme. This is seen as a major step forward in turning around the lives of some extremely difficult families to engage.

5.2 Council staff work in several partnerships to promote child protection. Taking key roles in the Health and Wellbeing Board, The Local Safeguarding Children’s Board and all the relevant sub committees. As well as participating in the Adult Safeguarding Board.

5.3 Thurrock Council works in partnership with The Local Safeguarding Children’s Board. The Board continues to scrutinise all the partnership members

regarding their safeguarding responsibilities, ensuring that safeguarding is truly seen as “Everyone’s Business”.

## **6. CHALLENGES**

- 6.1 The economic situation continues to present a challenge to child protection services. The balance between providing outstanding services but also meeting an increasing and changing demand continues to be a challenge. The numbers of children and young people who require statutory services continue to rise both locally and nationally, this will require an on-going commitment from the council and partner agencies to ensure that outstanding services are provided to those most in need of protection when needed.
- 6.2 The implications of the Social Reform Bill are becoming apparent and Thurrock is beginning to see a migration of families in need of services moving from the London Boroughs.
- 6.3 Sexual exploitation and on-line abuse is creating new challenges for safeguarding services. Thurrock is developing services and knowledge in order to respond efficiently and appropriately to this.
- 6.4 Thurrock continues to see a change in it’s population profile with an increasingly diverse population which also brings new challenges for child protection services such as Honour Based Abuse and Female Genital Mutilation. These issues are relatively new to Thurrock and create new challenges for staff.

## **7. IMPLICATIONS**

### **7.1 Financial**

Implications verified by: **Kay Goodacre**  
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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, however in a period of Budget austerity there has been the requirement to increase the budget in this area over the last two financial years, putting pressure in all areas of the Council’s budget. If this demographic trend continues, this may lead to further budget pressures, in what are already very difficult budget periods.

### **7.2 Legal**

Implications verified by: **Lindsey Marks**  
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There are no legal implications arising from this report.

### 7.3 **Diversity and Equality**

Implications verified by: **Samson DeAlyn**  
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The numbers of children subject to a Child Protection Plan who are non-White British shows an under representation. Work continues to explore the reasons as to why this may be.

### 7.4 **Other implications (where significant)**

## 8. **CONCLUSION**

8.1 For information.

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

- Monthly Performance Data Figures

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

- Appendix 1 – The Southend, Essex and Thurrock Child Protection Procedures
- Appendix 2 – Staffing of Thurrock Child Protection Social Work Teams, January 2013

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## Appendix 1

### The Southend, Essex and Thurrock Child Protection Procedures

The Children Act 1989 provides the legal framework for defining the situations in which local authorities have a duty to make enquiries about what, if any, action they should take to safeguard or promote the welfare of a child. There is also national guidance in the format of "Working Together" which was reviewed and reissued in 2011 and gives detailed processes as to the investigation of child abuse. It is anticipated that new guidance in the format of a new version of "Working Together" will be issued very shortly. On a local level, every area has to be part of a Local Safeguarding Children Board who must issue local guidance on child protection. Thurrock is party to the Southend, Essex and Thurrock Child Protection Procedures ("SET" procedures).

The SET procedures were reviewed and re-written in 2010 by officers of the three authorities. This is an onerous task of great responsibility. The procedures are convenient for all those in the police service and health services which cover the three authorities but their production is a costly drain on staff time. There is a possibility that the Eastern Region Safeguarding Project (a consortium of all the local authorities) may consider commissioning an external agency to review and rewrite the local safeguarding procedures for the relevant local authorities within the Eastern Safeguarding Region.

Working Together 2010 offers the following definitions:

Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children is defined as:

- Protecting children from maltreatment
- Preventing impairment of children's' health or development
- Ensuring that children are growing up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care
- Undertaking that role so as to enable those children to have optimum life chances and to enter adulthood successfully

The SET Procedures define the following forms of child abuse

- Physical abuse which may involve hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning or scalding, drowning, suffocating or otherwise causing physical harm to a child and it may be caused by an adult fabricating symptoms or inducing illness in a child
- Emotional abuse which is the persistent emotional ill treatment of a child which causes severe and persistent effects on the child's emotional development. This may involve conveying to children that they are worthless or unloved, humiliating the child, imposing developmentally inappropriate expectations, causing children to feel frightened or in danger (e.g. witnessing domestic abuse), or the exploitation or corruption of children

- Sexual abuse involves forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, which can include non-contact activities such as provoking inappropriate behaviour or forms of internet abuse such as viewing abusive images or being party to their production
- Neglect involves the persistent failure to meet a child's basic needs so that their health and development is likely to be seriously impaired. This may involve a lack of food, clothing or shelter, lack of protection from physical or emotional harm, inadequate supervision, lack of medical care and/or failure to meet educational needs.

When a child or children are drawn to the attention of the Local Authority because it is believed that they have been the subjects of significant harm, the Local Authority must exercise Section 47 of the 1989 Children Act which states that if a local authority has “reasonable cause to **suspect** that a child who lives or is found in their area is suffering or is likely to suffer significant harm’ the authority shall make, or cause to be made, such enquiries as they consider necessary to enable them to decide whether they should take any action to safeguard or promote the child’s welfare.”

In practice this means that a plan of action is initiated whereby a strategy meeting of all relevant professionals decide how the matter will be investigated and the investigation is then planned. It may be undertaken by the Local Authority social workers as the single agency or it may be a joint investigation with the police. Depending on what is found, medical examinations of the children may be required. The law requires that children are interviewed away from the alleged perpetrator of the abuse and parents are asked to give their consent of this process. However, their views may be over-ridden if they do not cooperate and the police may exercise their power to arrest if there is a suspicion that a crime has been committed.

In general, children are much more at risk of abuse within their own families than from abusers outside the home and child protection investigations reflect this, being mainly concerned with abuse by parents and other family members. However, some investigations are undertaken when the abuser is outside the family or even a member of the child care workforce.

These are described as cases of organised abuse, defined in the SET procedures as circumstances which may involve a number of abusers and/or a number of children. In these circumstances, it may be that abusers have gained access to their victims by work or by volunteering in leisure or welfare activities.

What is well known to social workers and police is that some children are much more at risk than others. Additional vulnerability may be because the child is unprotected and available to abusers or is threatened and exploited as to seeking help by disclosing the abuse. Thus, SET procedures give specific guidance on the groups of children such as those seen begging, those where there are particular beliefs that they may be possessed by spirits, victims of trafficking, children who are disabled, victims of female genital mutilation, forced marriage, children who are in care and more generally, those children who are moved around different areas or whose parents fail to engage in services.

Where possible, the work undertaken after a child protection investigation is that changes are made to improve the protection of the child by means of the parents and other family members cooperating with professionals. At the other extreme, cases may be so serious as to require immediate care proceedings. Mid-way, there are children whose parents need the Council and other professionals to use the authority of a child protection plan in order for changes to be made.

Where there is concern that a child will continue to be at risk, has already suffered ill treatment and will continue to be at risk of significant harm an interagency meeting of all the professionals involved will discuss with the parents that a plan is drawn up whereby an experienced social worker and other identified professionals will work together to achieve some time limited objectives. These should concentrate on ensuring the future safety and wellbeing of the child, should be regularly monitored and should be accompanied by a contingency plan as to what will be the consequences for the family if progress is not achieved.



## Appendix 2

### Staffing of Thurrock Child Protection Social Work Teams, January 2013

<b>Team</b>	<b>Team Managers</b>	<b>Practice Managers</b>	<b>Social Workers</b>
<b>Initial Response Team</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Disabled Children's Team</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Family Support Team 1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Family Support Team 2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Family Support Team 3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Family Support Team 4</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>7</b>