

TITLE OF REPORT: Integrated Referral & Assessment Team

REPORT OF: Caroline O'Neill, Strategic Director, Care Wellbeing and Learning

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. To inform the OSC of changes to the Referral and Assessment Service.
 2. To give an overview of the rationale behind those changes and the resulting evidence on emerging outcomes.
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Policy/Legal Context:

Legal and statutory guidance context

1. Section 17 of the **Children Act 1989** imposes a general duty on Children's Social Care (CSC) to safeguard and promote the welfare of children who are *'in need'* and to promote the upbringing of children in need by their families by providing a range and level of services to meet those children's needs.
2. Section 17 of the Children Act defines a Child in Need (CIN) as a child:
 - who is unlikely to achieve or maintain, or to have the opportunity of achieving or maintaining, **a reasonable standard of health or development** without the provision of services;
 - or a child **whose health or development is likely to be significantly impaired**, or further impaired, without the provision of services;
 - or a child who is disabled.
3. Section 47 of the Children Act places a duty on Local Authorities to investigate children in their area where there is reasonable cause to suspect they are or are likely to suffer significant harm. This is known colloquially as a Child Protection investigation or enquiry.
4. Under both section 17 and section 47 other agencies have a duty to co-operate with CSC in carrying out this duty to assess the needs of children and to provide services as necessary.
5. To determine the needs of a child and the support that they and their family may require, CSC will carry out a child and family assessment by a qualified

Social Worker. This is known as a Child in Need Assessment which where necessary will run concurrently alongside a section 47 investigation.

6. Working Together (WT) to Safeguard Children (DFE 2018) is the statutory guidance that informs and instructs the Council on how to enact this legislative framework. WT 2018, inter alia, also places the responsibility on CSC to establish a process for receiving referrals and acting as the principle point of contact for safeguarding referrals relating to children.
7. In Gateshead it is the Integrated Referral Team (IRT) who deliver this service and the Assessment and Intervention (A&I) Teams who principally undertake section 17 and 47 assessments.

Background

Triage and Duty function-known as the Integrated Referral Team (IRT)

8. Before May 2018 the duty function colloquially referred to as the 'front door' consisted of a rotating group of Social Workers and Managers processing and responding to referrals. A review of the service identified that the practice reality for managers to scrutinise and oversee the work of both the Duty and the Assessment components of the service was regularly compromised. A short pilot took place between May 2018 and August 2018 that trialled a dedicated Team Manager and Duty Team. The pilot showed an improved and consistently applied rigour and pace to the work and reaped dividends in terms of process flow, threshold application and partnership working. It also showed that it enabled other managers in the service to focus on their supervision groups practice and performance. In light of these successes the approach was formally adopted from September 2018.
9. From June 2018 the triage meeting began meeting daily to consider contacts from the Police known as child concern notifications (CCNs). This process filters out inappropriate contacts and redirects them towards the most appropriate disposal, thus reducing demand on the duty team. The Police, Early Help (including the Domestic Abuse Service), 0-19 service are all formally represented at the triage meeting.
10. The 'duty room' function determines what becomes a referral and, having applied professional judgement informed by the multi-agency threshold document considers whether the referral becomes a Child in Need (CiN) assessment under section 17 or requires urgent action to protect a child. The function also allows for the duty team to do short proportionate CiN assessments where appropriate.

Assessment and intervention teams

11. Before January 2019 referrals requiring a CiN assessment were allocated to Social Workers in one of 4 teams outside of the Duty component but within the previously named Referral and Assessment Service. Once the CiN assessment was completed and where a CiN plan was deemed necessary the case transferred to Safeguarding and Child Protection (SGCP) service. Similarly, cases that had escalated to a Child Protection Plan or where the child had become looked after would also transfer to SGCP.

12. In October 2018 the Social Work leadership team began to consider other feasible models of delivery driven by the following premises:
- (i) We know that the opportunities for sustained change in the lives of the children and families we work with are improved markedly when meaningful relationships are established and crucially sustained between the family and SW. (Harry Fergusson et al).
 - (ii) The current structure has built into it several potential transfer points which we know inhibits and interrupts positive sustained relationships with children and families. As such the current structure runs contrary to Gateshead's development of Strength based and relational approaches and systemic practice.
 - (iii) We also know that CiN cases, often requiring a range of complex interventions delivered over time, are in danger of having a lower profile and level of scrutiny, than CP cases which can impact on the priority given to them by Social Workers. Social Workers and many other agencies recognise that some of the children within this cohort require high levels of intervention due to the complexity of their needs and adversity. However, Social Workers' endeavors in providing this are often frustrated due to high caseloads which unwittingly necessitate the prioritising of their focus onto those cases that sit above this threshold, such as Child Protection, legal proceedings and Looked After Children. As a result, CiN cases become vulnerable to drift until the child's circumstance become sufficiently worrying to warrant higher level intervention.
 - (iv) The response to CiN is not consistent, with different teams offering varying types and levels of interventions
 - (v) The Council is facing unprecedented budgetary pressure which requires services to manage demand differently and create opportunities to save money, including the de commissioning of family support providers.
13. In determining the future structure for how the delivery of Social Work would look the following principles were adopted.
- (i) Transfer points for children and families should be limited as far as possible.
 - (ii) Strength based relational approaches be embedded in a systemic practice model
 - (iii) No manager of frontline staff should have more than 8 reports.
 - (iv) Caseloads should be within the range of 16-20 children.
 - (v) Service Managers should have no more than 7 direct reports
14. From January 2019 the R&A service formally became the Assessment and Intervention (A&I) service holding Child in Need cases from assessment through intervention to closure or transfer if escalated to Child Protection plan, legal intervention or the child becomes looked after. There are 6 CiN teams, including the Edge of Care Team.

Our approach to Social Work – Gateshead CAN

15. Children's Social Care (CSC) has a commitment to putting the 'social' back into social work. For us, social work is about the relationships we build, the conversations we have, the direct work we do with the children and families who need our services. Gateshead CSC puts an emphasis on reclaiming *practice* as the central tenet of social work. We are investing in learning and

developing systemic and strengths-based practice skills to enable our social workers to support real sustained change in the lives of vulnerable children.

16. Our approach to Social Work practice is not limited to one model or ‘way to do it’. **Gateshead CAN** is an overarching systemic and strengths-based approach which recognises the interrelationships between **C**ontext, **A**ction and **N**arrative. Some of the methods and models our social workers use are Relational Genograms, Ecomaps, Solution-focused and motivational interviewing, Signs of Safety, Narrative techniques and tools from positive psychology.
17. Our Social work practice is driven by our aspirant vision that “*Children and families are at the **heart of everything** we do, ensuring all children can **thrive** and reach their **full potential**”*. Our ethical driver is rooted in the belief that our responsibility to children and families in need of help should start from the position that families are empowered and supported to make positive changes, enabled to make self-determined choices and seek their own solutions that build on existing strengths and resilience within the family network. Our firm resolve is to work relentlessly in supporting families to remain together and where a child’s needs demand alternative living arrangements these will firstly be sought from within the child’s own family network.
18. Professionals involved in delivering statutory Social Work regardless of which service they belong to hold a determination to seek the opportunities for change within families, utilising the families own resources, by demonstrating reflexivity in their thinking and seeking to reach proportional and evidenced based conclusions.

Impact:

Early indications of impact based on performance Data

Anticipated Impact	What the data tells us	Practice Impact
As a result of the daily triage with Police we will see a reduction in the number and percentage of Police CCN contacts.	Police CCN contacts have decreased from 2648 (52.5%) during February 2018 - January 2019 to 2209 (39.9%) during September 2018 – August 2019 – this represents an actual decrease of 16.6%.	The reduction in Police CCNs has reduced demand in the duty room thus creating capacity for duty workers to undertake short proportionate assessments.
More Child in Need Assessments will be completed in shorter times	CIN assessment durations remain generally consistent when comparing February 2018 - January 2019 to September 2018 – August 2019, with 54% of assessments being completed within 40 days, and 36% of assessments being completed between the 41 – 45day mark. This does, however, continue to show improvement compared to	Early indications are that practice is shifting towards shorter proportionate assessments, being completed in shorter timescales which suggests plans are being established more quickly once the needs are understood and intervention begins. However, we recognise on

	<p>previous financial years i.e. in 2017/18, 46% of assessments were completed within 40 days, and 43% of assessments between 41 – 45 days</p>	<p>this issue we have more to do, and as the new model embeds further, we anticipate further reductions in timescales, which we will monitor through our established performance clinics.</p>
<p>Having been provided support and closed, fewer cases will require a further referral to Children Social Care</p>	<p>Re- referral rates have dropped from 79.7 per 10,000 during February 2018 - January 2019 to 55.5 per 10,000 during September 2018 – August 2019</p>	<p>The reducing rate of re-referrals is indicating that that interventions undertaken more recently have successfully addressed need and sustained change.</p>
<p>We will work with more children at CIN level, and will see a reduction in the numbers of children subject to Child Protection Plans</p>	<p>There has been a reduction in children becoming subject to an Initial Child Protection Conference (ICPC) from 390 in during February 2018 - January 2019 to 348 during September 2018 – August 2019 – a reduction of 11%. Similarly, there has been a 9% reduction in numbers of children subject to a child protection plan in January 2019 (284) to August 2019 (258) and a 11.6% reduction in the number of children being placed on a CP plan (335 – Jan 2019 vs 296 – August 2019). The proportion of children who have an ICPC and then go on to be CPP is remaining consistent at around 85% suggesting thresholds at conference have not changed.</p>	<p>These reductions are indicating cases are being proactively worked as CiN plans with interventions achieving sufficient change for families and children reducing the need to escalate into Child Protection processes. This suggests that risk is being managed proportionately by working with families in the CiN framework rather than the arguably more punitive and deleterious Child Protection framework. Our Ofsted inspection in May 19 told us that decision making was appropriate and safe, meaning there is no evidence to suggest that the move to support children as CIN more is putting them at risk.</p>
<p>Fewer cases will require step down to early help, having received the appropriate level of support by Children Social Care</p>	<p>Step downs to Early Help following CIN assessment have reduced from 385 (17%) in February 2018 - January 2019 to 252 (12%) during September 2018 – August 2019.</p>	<p>Our data indicates that where CiN assessments are undertaken they are correctly targeted at the right families where intensive statutory support is required. A recent dip sample audit confirmed this.</p>

Early indications of the impact on A&I Social Workers

19. Social Workers in A&I who had worked under both approaches were asked to state their level of agreement, on a scale from 0 to 10 where 0 meant the statement does not describe their feelings and 10 meant the statement is entirely correct. There were 18 respondents. The 5 statements related to the implemented changes -see appendix 1.

<u>Scale Score</u>	0-2	3-4	5	6-7	8-10	Not applicable to current role
1. I feel that my work with children and families has more impact and value now I remain involved beyond the assessment period.	<u>0</u>	<u>2</u> <u>11.1%</u>	<u>3</u> <u>16.6%</u>	<u>1</u> <u>5.5%</u>	<u>8</u> <u>44.4%</u>	<u>4</u> <u>22.2%</u>
2. I think that the longer-term relations I can now build with children and families enable me to better understand the needs of the family	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>4</u> <u>22.2%</u>	<u>1</u> <u>5.5%</u>	<u>9</u> <u>50%</u>	<u>4</u> <u>22.2%</u>
3. Knowing that the case can remain with me under a CiN plan helps me to consider better informed options for ongoing interventions		<u>2</u> <u>11.1%</u>	<u>4</u> <u>22.2%</u>	<u>1</u> <u>5.5%</u>	<u>7</u> <u>38.8%</u>	<u>4</u> <u>22.2%</u>
4. My knowledge of a variety of possible interventions has increased since January 2019	<u>0</u>	<u>1</u> <u>5.5%</u>	<u>4</u> <u>22.2%</u>	<u>3</u> <u>16.6%</u>	<u>10</u> <u>55.5%</u>	<u>0</u>
5. My job satisfaction has increased under the new arrangements.	<u>1</u> <u>5.5%</u>	<u>1</u> <u>5.5%</u>	<u>7</u> <u>38.8%</u>	<u>1</u> <u>5.5%</u>	<u>4</u> <u>22.2%</u>	<u>4</u> <u>22.2%</u>

20. Most staff responded with scores that indicated they felt positive about the changes and believed their ability to work effectively with children had been enhanced. Strikingly the vast majority of staff had scored 5 or above with 7-10 staff scoring in the 8-10 range for statements 1 to 4. Job satisfaction also appears to have increased for most staff with some staff reporting that their Job satisfaction was already high, so this had only increased slightly. This probably accounts for the majority scoring 5 for the statement. Those who responded with NA were all members of the dedicated duty team.

Comments from Ofsted-regulatory ILAC short inspection -April 2019

21. On the 'front door' IRT....

'The local authority has recently restructured its front door, supporting an effective response to referrals. Professionals appropriately contact the integrated referral team (IRT) when they are concerned that a child needs help or protection. The co-location of the police, early help and health 0–19 service, with the addition of other partners through virtual arrangements, supports effective screening, triage and referral systems. Manager oversight and decisions are clear and identify what information social workers need to collate to enable the most appropriate decisions to be made. This facilitates social workers to identify the right level of service matched to need and risk. The team completes proportionate assessments where required, providing a swift and analytical understanding of children's needs to ensure that they get the right help.'

22. On Triage.....

'The daily screening of all police notifications, including domestic abuse concerns, is effective and means that children receive an appropriate and timely response, with the swift identification of services.'

23. On Assessment and Intervention....

'Children in need, and those in need of protection, are quickly allocated to the newly formed assessment and intervention teams. Where children are at risk of significant harm, the response is swift and effective. Strategy meetings include key agencies and identify immediate protective actions. The resultant child protection enquiries are thorough, providing a good understanding of risks to children. Most assessments are timely, thorough and analytical, leading to effective and timely planning and intervention'

24. On the Gateshead- CAN approach.....

'The local authority has developed a bespoke model to underpin its social work practice. This overarching systemic approach is supporting social workers, with a range of tools to develop the effectiveness of their practice with children and families. This means that children and their families are benefiting from a tailored approach to their individual needs. The quality and impact of social work practice is good. Children and young people are seen regularly by their social workers, who know their children well. Social workers spend time understanding children's lived experiences to provide the most effective support to improve their circumstances'

Conclusion:

25. There are encouraging indicators that the redesign and remodelling of the Referral and Assessment service into the IRT and A&I service has had positive impacts on performance and Social Workers relationships with families. Ofsted's comments provide further validation that the service redesign is a credible approach.
26. Strength based approaches are effective in establishing a trusting change oriented working relationship. The new arrangements seek to enable those relationships to develop unfettered for Social Worker's and families under CiN arrangements so that, over time, many of those families will have been helped to achieve sustained 'second order change' and this outcome will be clearly evidenced.
27. In January 2020 the service changes will have been in operation for one year. A detailed evaluation is planned from January and February 2020 which will include feedback from children and families as well as partner agencies. The evaluation will be completed and available in March 2020.

Recommendations

1. The committee is asked to continue to champion the work undertaken by the Council's Children's Social Workers.
2. Note the content of this report.
3. The committee receive and consider the annual evaluation in March 2020

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Appendix 1. ref OSC 31/10/19

A&I Quick survey

Name:

Since January 2019, when A&I started to retain CiN cases and work under a plan, on a scale of 0-10 where 10 is 'I strongly agree' and 0 is 'I don't agree at all' please answer the following statements:

1. I feel that my work with children and families has more impact and value now I remain involved beyond the assessment period.
2. I think that the longer-term relations I can now build with children and families enable me to better understand the needs of the family
3. Knowing that the case can remain with me under a CiN plan helps me to consider better informed options for ongoing interventions
4. My knowledge of a variety of possible interventions has increased since January 2019
5. My job satisfaction has increased under the new arrangements.

Guidance to scoring:

- 0- This statement does not, in anyway, describe my feelings
- 3- This statement is partly true but on balance I disagree with it more than agree
- 5- This statement is partly true and on balance I agree with it more than not.
- 8- This statement is mostly true
- 10- This statement is entirely correct

Optional free narrative 'The one thing that could improve the new arrangement is