

SUMMARY REPORT ON THE AUDIT OF CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE RECORDS FAMILY SUPPORT SERVICES

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1. Introduction

This report provides a summary of the findings from the audit of Children's Social Care Records in the Referral and Assessment and Children in Need (CIN) Teams for the period October – December 2010.

The audit period has seen significant changes in the permanent to locum ratios in both teams, overall the service has seen a 31% rise in permanent staff. The table below shows a breakdown by team:

Month	Referral & Assessment % of Permanent staff	Children in Need % of Permanent Staff
September 2010	58. %	38. %
December 2010	88. %	57. %

The impact of this has been positive in terms of quality assurance and consistency but has placed added pressures on the current management team in order to ensure standards are maintained and raised where needed.

There is a performance culture of raising standards and a commitment for the service to be staffed by a permanent workforce.

2. The Audit Process

The audit tool was adapted for the following reasons:

- To enable the new Service Manager to undertake a review of the safeguarding standards, identify strengths and areas for development.
- Preparation for an unannounced inspection in the referral and assessment service.
- To ensure standards of practice were consistent across the different teams, particularly during significant changes in staffing.

During the 3rd quarter a total of **210** audits were completed using a comprehensive audit template across the two teams.

The audit process aimed at scrutinise the work of the referral and assessment and children in needs teams using both qualitative and quantitative methods of auditing. It is important to note that the electronic case file has an in-built audit process that ensures managers authorise each assessment. The audit tools used in this audit process included the following:

- Auditing of the electronic case files.
- Thematic audits (chronologies, case recordings and management decision making).
- Reflective Practice seminars with managers and social workers.
- Discussions with stakeholders (police, schools, health).
- Feedback from service users.

3. Performance Standards:

The key findings are detailed below for both the referral and assessment and children in need teams.

Performance Management: Referral and Assessment Service

The audit of the frontline Child Protection (CP) service highlighted an outstanding management team who were able to evidence an excellent overview of cases and ensure good practice. There was a real team work approach, staff being nurtured and supported leading to high morale.

In October 2010, the quality of assessments were high, however the required timescales were not adhered to consistently. Action was taken to imbed a performance culture with greater management accountability in regards to meeting key performance indicators. Systems were developed and implemented by the Service Manager. These included weekly performance management meetings (PMM) together with reflective practice seminars for social work staff, both chaired by the Service Manager, this has lead to a 'can do' approach to achieving timescales. The table below evidences the progress made:

INITIAL ASSESSMENTS

Details of Key Performance Indicator	September	October	November	December
Percentage of Initial Assessments Completed within 7 working days	65.8%	64.7%	87.8%	81.9%

CORE ASSESSMENTS

Details of Key Performance Indicator	September	October	November	December
Percentage of Core Assessments completed within 35 days	80.0%	83.1%	74.5%	89.2%

Our key performance indicators compare favourably with our statistical neighbours for both Initial (Hounslow: 56.2%, Ealing: 79.5%) and Core Assessments (Hounslow: 71.8%, Ealing: 85.6%). This progress is remarkable in light of an entire turnover of staff within the

Initial Assessment Team in September, some of whom had no previous inexperience of working in the duty team.

Work Flow: Referral and Assessment Teams

The volume and throughput of work is shown below. The ratio of initial assessments to core assessments continues to be high alongside children subject to child protection plans. Whilst there has been some movement further work is needed. Both areas will be addressed at the weekly management meetings (PMM).

Month	Number of IA's Completed	Number of CA's Completed	Number of Section S47 investigations	Number Of ICPC (initial child protection conference)	Number of Care Proceedings & LAC	Total Number of Cases Transferred to CIN and CIC (children in need & children in care teams)
October 2010	203	71	55	20	4 (2)*	18
November 2010	156	76	55	28	3	16
December 2010	163	60	30	10	2	22
Total Number	819	292	206	72	9	56

Audits undertaken highlighted that whilst chronologies were consistently being completed they were not being completed on the electronic files and the quality varied. Following the implementation of a strategy aimed at equipping Social Workers with the skills to complete all chronologies on the electronic file and have a greater management overview of the quality, standards have improved significantly with all chronologies being completed on the electronic file.

Evidence of good management direction on all files was confirmed by the audit process. An area identified for development was use of the supervision template in a consistent way, ensuring good analysis of risk and decision making. This is an area that requires ongoing training and monitoring. The data collected from the electronic files confirms the supervision template is now being used.

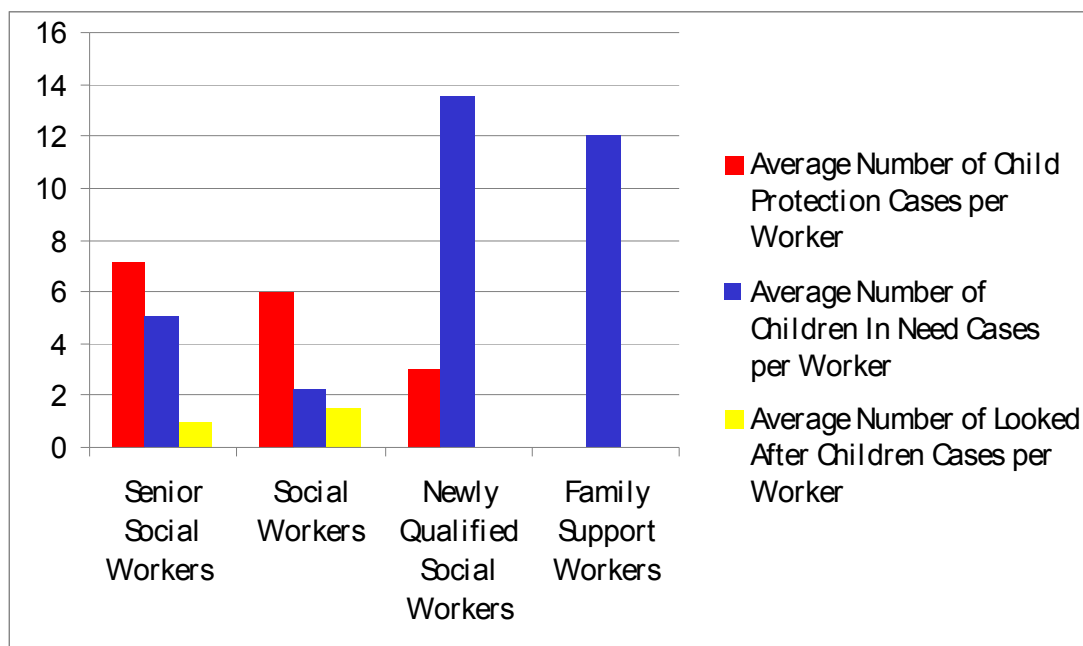
Performance Management: Children in Need Teams

The Children In Need teams have historically experienced a high turnover of staff due to high case loads and lack of management support. Significant changes have been made to the quality of Social Work staff resulting in a 75% change of the workforce during the October – December period. The changes have had a positive impact on creating an environment where there is good management overview of cases leading to Social Worker's feeling better supported and wanting to make a permanent commitment to the LB Hillingdon. The area of recruitment and retention has been a priority and it is envisaged will result in a high proportion of permanent staff.

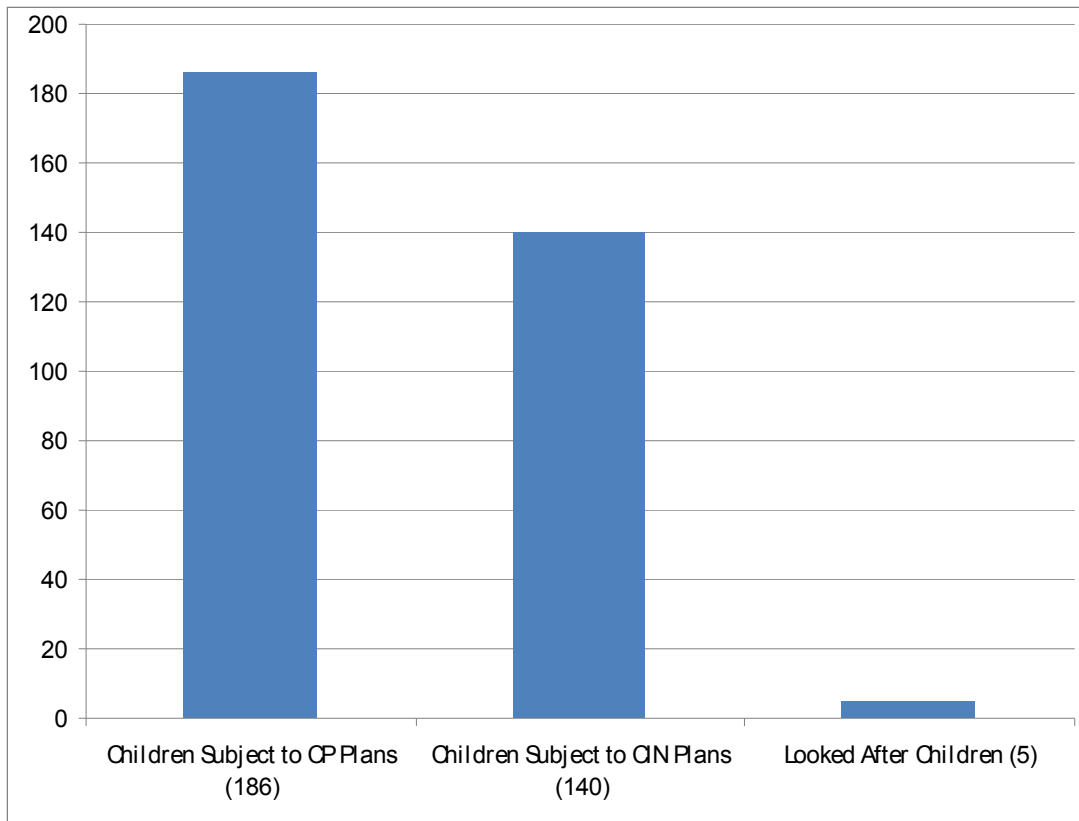
The case load audits have highlighted the need for a consistent workforce to enable efficient throughput of work. A great deal of activity has been aimed at raising standards of practice including management direction to enable positive changes to occur with children remaining with their families where ever possible.

During this period it has been necessary for there to be a high level of management presence to ensure staff feel listened too and supported.

The case file audits have been helpful in identifying strategies to reduce case loads over the next three month. The table below shows the average case load for experienced social workers to be between 13 - 9, depending on case complexity:



The number of children subject to child protection plans has continued to grow with the workforce essentially remaining the same. This has led to added pressure on an already stretched workforce. The ratio of CP to CIN cases continues to be high, although strategies are in place to reduce the number of children subject to Child Protection plans through targeted interventions and closer management monitoring. The Children In Need teams are currently working with 331 children; the individual categories are shown below:



The audits of children in need cases flagged up similar issues seen in the Referral and Assessment Team. There are additional pressures resulting from the electronic case file systems functionality and training. Due to the prescriptive nature of protocol and duplicate systems, for instance the requirement to complete separate assessments (core assessments and chronologies) for each child when much of the information is similar, has resulted in increased time spent away from direct work with families and staff leaving due to the overly cumbersome system and lack of technical support.

The high turnover of staff has impacted on standards including the quality of assessments and management overview. Weekly performance management meetings have led to significant improvements with managers now required to complete five case file audits a week in order to meet the target of each file having been audited by the end of February. The Children In Need Team requires a high level of monitoring to ensure standards are raised without delay.

Conclusion

The October – December period is marked by a drive to raise standards of practice together with retaining good quality staff whilst dealing with performance issues. There is further recruitment drive which will enable targets for permanent staff to be met. The audit process has highlighted a correlation between having permanent committed staff and achieving high standards in social work practice.