

<b>Meeting:</b>	<b>Children and young people scrutiny committee</b>
<b>Meeting date:</b>	<b>Monday 16 July 2018</b>
<b>Title of report:</b>	<b>Child Protection Numbers</b>
<b>Report by:</b>	<b>Director for children's wellbeing</b>

## **Classification**

Open

## **Decision type**

This is not an executive decision

## **Wards affected**

(All Wards);

## **Purpose and summary**

To inform the children and young people scrutiny committee of the action taken to reduce the child protection plan numbers following the increase of the numbers during November, December 2017 and January 2018.

To allow the committee the opportunity to review and make further recommendations on the approach and outcome of the action plan.

## **Recommendation(s)**

**That:**

- (a) The children and young people scrutiny committee review the robustness of the action plan at appendix 1 and determine any recommendations it wishes to make to the executive to secure further improvement.**

## Alternative options

1. There are no alternative options; it is a function of the committee to make reports or recommendations to the executive with respect to the discharge of any functions which are the responsibility of the executive.

## Key considerations

2. The purpose of a child protection plan is to address the safeguarding needs of the child. This intervention is planned and reviewed to enable a family to address the concerns held by professionals, it is not viable for a child to remain on a plan for over eighteen months without improvement.
3. The process that is followed that may lead to a child becoming subject to a plan is a referral into the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) is assessed and considered in the line with the threshold document at Appendix 2. A multiagency strategy meeting is held where the outcome is a child protection investigation (Section 47) and the outcome of the investigation leads to an initial child protection conference.
4. This process is implemented across the country under the Working Together to Safeguard Children guidance 2015.
5. In November 2016 the number of children subject to a child protection plan was at its lowest point in recent years, throughout 2017 figures showed a steady increase to a figure in line with Herefordshire's under 18 population.
6. Between November 2017 and January 2018 the number of children subject to a plan increased by 53%. Following investigation into this increase it was found that;
  - there was an increased number of referrals being received;
  - that the threshold guidance was not being applied consistently; and that
  - there was a lack of challenge and oversight of decision making at the point of a strategy meeting and consequently following a children protection investigation.
7. In January 2018 an action plan was devised at appendix 1. This plan focused on;
  - Additional challenge and oversight of the decision making process
  - A review of all children made subject to a plan within the previous three months
  - Refreshing multiagency professional of the threshold guidance
  - A programme of training to support practitioners develop their skills
  - Increased management oversight of trends
8. Following the introduction of this action plan the number of children on a plan has steadily reduced, the number of children on a plan on the 25 June 2018 was 172. Included within the action plan at appendix 1 progress is commented upon.

## Community impact

9. In accordance with the adopted code of conduct Herefordshire Council achieves its intended outcomes by providing a mixture of legal, regulatory and practical interventions. Determining the right mix of these is an important strategic choice to make to ensure intended outcomes are achieved. The council needs robust decision-making mechanisms to ensure our outcomes can be achieved in a way that provides the best use of resources while still enable efficient and effective operations. Decisions made need to be reviewed periodically to ensure that achievement of outcomes is optimised.
10. The council must ensure that it has an effective performance management system that facilitates effective and efficient delivery of planned services. Effective financial management, risk management and internal control are important components of this performance management system. Herefordshire Council is committed to promoting a positive working culture that accepts, and encourages constructive challenge, and recognises that a culture and structure for scrutiny are key elements for accountable decision making, policy development, and review.
11. It is a priority of the corporate plan to 'Keep children and young people safe and give them a great start in life'. The child protection process is fundamental to this aim.

## Equality duty

12. Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the 'general duty' on public authorities is set out as follows:

A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to -

- a. eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
  - b. advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
  - c. foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
13. Protected characteristics and reasonable adjustments are considered for all children who are subject to child protection arrangements. Such consideration enables Herefordshire Council to meet its obligations under the Equality Act 2010.

## Resource implications

14. None associated with the recommendation. Any resource implications of recommendations the committee may determine will inform the executive's response to those recommendations.

## Legal implications

15. The Human Rights Act 1998 provides under Article 8 that:
  - a. Right to respect for private and family life.

- b. Everyone has the right to respect for his private and family life, his home and his correspondence.
- c. There shall be no interference by a public authority with the exercise of this right except such as is in accordance with the law and is necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security, public safety or the economic well-being of the country, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.

16. The reduction in numbers of children on the child protection register reflects the authority implementing this principle. The department needs to be alert to children being repeatedly registered as this may reflect on going systemic family problems which need to be addressed.

## Risk management

17. There is no identified risk for this recommendation, the risks identified below are in relation to poor application of child protection processes

Risk / opportunity	Mitigation
Inappropriate application of threshold which may lead to children being subject to a plan unnecessarily OR children not being made subject to a plan and left at risk	Refreshed multiagency awareness of the Threshold Document and put in place additional checks which included the employment of an independent reviewing officer
Missed opportunity to work with families at a more appropriate lower level	As above

## Consultees

18. None

## Appendices

Appendix 1 – CP reduction action plan

Appendix 2 – Threshold guidance

## Background papers

None identified