

**RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**MUNICIPAL YEAR 2016 - 2017**

**CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD**

**5th OCTOBER 2016**

**AUDIT OF CHILD PROTECTION CASES HELD BY ASSESSOR CARE MANAGERS (ACM'S) DURING 2015/16**

**REPORT OF THE GROUP DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY & CHILDREN'S SERVICES**

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**1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

The purpose of this report is to update members on the findings of an Internal Audit undertaken by Children's Services regarding Child Protection Cases held by Assessor Care Managers (ACM's) during 2015/2016.

**2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

The report highlights that the child protection work allocated and undertaken by ACM's is of a comparable quality to that managed by a qualified Social Worker, and that there is no evidence that children and young people in these circumstances receive a lower standard of safeguarding. Members are asked to note the following recommendations and actions requiring further attention:

- This audit will continue to be undertaken on an annual basis until no Child Protection cases are held by ACM's and to ensure that the ACM's are monitored as specified in their job description.
- The conversion of ACM posts to Social Work posts continues to be prioritised.
- Team Managers/Senior Practitioners need to attend Case Conferences with ACM's.
- Consideration should be given to reviewing the Core Group template so that it is outcome focused and naturally aligned with the Child Protection Action Plan.

- Consideration should still be given to recording within Conference minutes the date on which Core Groups took place – making it easier to identify compliance issues.
- The results of this audit will be presented to both the Cwm Taf SCB Monitoring Sub Group and the Children's Services Management Team.

# Rhondda Cynon Taf Children's Services



Audit of child protection cases held by  
Assessor Care Managers during  
2015/16

## **Introduction:**

In the last year Children's Services has remodelled extensively, splitting geographically into East and West, rather than Rhondda, Cynon and Taf. MASH is operational and the wider service has also been restructured to enable it to respond to the early intervention and prevention agenda. The old Initial Assessment Teams are now called the East and West Enquiry and Assessment Teams (but retain responsibility for Initial Case Conferences), while the old Assessment and Care Planning Teams now make up the East and West Intervention Service (comprising 3 longer term teams, one DCT and one 16+ Team respectively). The level of change has been significant and some teams have seen their location and team membership alter.

The remodelling has enabled senior management to review the staffing levels across the service and agree and appoint to a sustainable staffing structure across Children's. This has resulted in a team structure that in the main comprises a Team Manager, 3 Senior Practitioners, 6 social workers, 3 ACM's and 1 CCSW each – although in practice there are a number of vacancy's across the service that we are waiting to fill. The Assessor Care Manager (ACM) role is well established within RCT Children's Services. At present across those parts of the service where there is a responsibility for carrying child protection cases (including East and West Enquiry and Assessment Teams, East and West Intensive Intervention, 16+ and DCT).

As part of the remodelling, the conversion of ACM posts to Social Work posts continues to be prioritised, which is contributed to by the number of ACM's from Children's Services undertaking the Social Work course; who are on target to qualify this summer.

ACM job descriptions state that if they needed to carry Child Protection cases they could, but only with the following agreement:

- If risk of significant harm was identified on any of the Child in Need cases they were responsible for, then they would report this to their Team Manager. The manager must ensure that a qualified social worker takes responsibility for the Section 47 investigation.
- The accountability of any Child Protection cases held on their caseload would remain with the Team Manager.
- The Team Manager (or the Team Manager's representative) as part of this accountability, would attend all core groups, case conferences and any reviews in accordance with Divisional guidelines and statutory responsibilities.

### **Purpose of Audit:**

The purpose of these audits is to ensure that the conditions stipulated in ACM job descriptions has been adhered to. The audit is undertaken on an annual basis and this one has focused on the CPR cases held by ACM's throughout 2015 and up until the end of quarter 1 of 2016.

### **Issues impacting on the allocation of child protection cases in 2015/16:**

As the figures below demonstrate, the total number of children registered on the Child Protection Register has recently started to increase again, compared with the same period last year, and although the volume of cp work across the service remains high, activity has not returned to the figures seen a couple of years ago.

	30/4/15	31/5/15	30/6/15	31/7/15	31/8/15	30/9/15	31/10/15	30/11/15	31/12/15	31/1/16	29/2/16	31/3/16
<b>CPR Numbers</b>	455	458	454	456	488	477	484	471	473	467	483	458
	30/4/14	31/5/14	30/6/14	31/7/14	31/8/14	30/9/14	31/10/14	30/11/14	31/12/14	31/1/15	28/2/15	31/3/15
<b>CPR Numbers</b>	486	484	510	504	528	519	526	512	528	478	497	449
<b>Variance</b>	-31	-26	-56	-48	-40	-42	-42	-41	-55	-11	-14	9

Children's Services have recently recruited to a number of vacant posts and these should be filled by August / September. We were not able to appoint to all our senior practitioner posts however, and are advertising again. Unfortunately as a result of recent advertising internally and externally for social worker and senior posts, we have lost a number of very experienced social workers, many of whom have been qualified 4/5 + years, and undertake complex child protection and court work.

Losing experienced staff on a cyclical basis, as happens within Children's Services, creates a significant pressure in terms of both allocation and wider support for the team managers/newly qualified staff, particularly as they are likely to be replaced by newly qualified staff, on whom there are restrictions imposed on undertaking Child Protection work until they have completed the appropriate training. In response a Workforce Development Group will be tasked to look at how we mitigate against and plan proactively for the recruitment patterns that have emerged within Children's Services,

### **Number of child protection cases held by ACM's in 2015/16:**

The yearly figures were as follows:

**Quarter 1**- 30/06/15 – 3 out of 454 cases, equalling **0.66%** children on CPR allocated to an unqualified worker (ACM).

**Quarter 2**- 30/09/15 – 5 out of 477 cases, equalling **1.04%** children on CPR allocated to an unqualified worker.

**Quarter 3-** 31/12/15 – 3 out of 473 cases, equalling **0.63%** children on CPR allocated to an unqualified worker.

**Quarter 4-** 31/03/16 – 0 out of 458 cases, equalling **0%** children on CPR allocated to an unqualified worker

Despite the recent increase in CPR numbers, this did not result in an increase in allocations to unqualified staff, which is most likely attributable to improved staffing levels, the reduction in the size of caseloads within the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of the year, the inherent complexity of the work and an ongoing focus from management on allocating CPR cases to qualified staff.

This equates to 5 children from 2 families, supporting the evidence that the numbers of allocations to unqualified staff remains low.

2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015/16
10	9	8	10	9	5	6	5

This indicates that we are meeting our annual target of 1% of children on the Child Protection Register being allocated to an ACM's.

When analysing the minutes from the various meetings the following was found:

#### **Initial Case Conferences 2015/16:**

**Cases 1-3: (Bayliss x1 aged 3yrs, Jones x1 aged 7yrs and Dennis x1 5 months)**

**Category: Neglect**

Conference attended by TM and ACM. Decision to register unanimous. ACM identified as key worker and Core Group member. Other sibling also registered, but allocated to social worker in DCT.

**Case 4 and 5: (Williams siblings - aged 8yrs and 7yrs)**

**Category: Emotional Abuse**

Case already held by ACM on CIN basis. Conference attended by Senior Practitioner and ACM. Decision to register not unanimous. TM identified as key worker and Core Group member within minutes, as the SP was leaving imminently to take up another post. However the SP picked up and maintained supervisory responsibility for the case for three months, with support from the ACM as there were delays in her recruitment process.

#### **Review Case Conferences 2015/16:**

**Cases 1-3: (Bayliss x1 aged 3yrs, Jones x1 aged 7yrs and Dennis x1 5 months)**

**Category: Neglect**

Involving 2 Review Case Confereneces. Neither the TM or ACM attended the first or second review, their report being presented by the DCT social worker; who attended both. At the second review conference a unanimous decision was made to remove the children's names from the CPR. Same key worker identified to work case on CIN basis.

**Case 4 and 5: (Williams siblings aged 8yrs and 7yrs)**

**Category: Emotional Abuse**

Attended by Team Manager. SP had left post. De-registration agreed – unanimous decision. New key worker identified to work the case on a CIN basis.

**Summary:**

The audit has highlighted that Team Managers will only seek to allocate to ACM's when staffing is a particular issue (occasionally identifying themselves as key workers in these circumstances) and only for a short period of time whenever possible. Recent data suggests that as the teams have become better staffed, the practice of allocating to ACM's has stopped altogether.

**Initial/Review Core Groups 2015/16:**

**Cases 1-3: (Bayliss x1 aged 3yrs, Jones x1 aged 7yrs and Dennis x1 aged 5 months)**

**Category: Neglect**

The ACM chaired the first, second, fourth and fifth Core Groups, the DCT Social Worker the third, sixth and seventh Core Groups. All Core Groups were held within timescale.

The minutes completed were generally comprehensive. Although the progress of the CP plan could be determined from the minutes, those sections that make specific reference to the effectiveness or otherwise of the CP plan and the outstanding Core Assessment Actions to be completed, were sometimes left uncompleted

**Case 4 and 5: (Williams siblings aged 8yrs and 7yrs)**

**Category: Emotional Abuse**

Core Groups were all completed in timescales and all were attended by the Senior Practitioner / Key Worker, who also chaired them. Some concerns highlighted by mother within the second Core Group that the level of visiting was not as regular as it should be, although this appears to have been resolved subsequently.

The minutes completed were comprehensive. Although the progress of the CP plan could be determined from the minutes, those sections that make specific reference to the effectiveness or otherwise of the CP plan and the outstanding Core Assessment Actions to be completed, were sometimes left uncompleted

### **Summary:**

Although only a small number of minutes were reviewed, it was routine for ACM's and qualified staff to leave certain sections of the Core Group template blank, perhaps feeling that they had covered these issues in the body of the meeting discussion. Training needs to reinforce the expectations concerning recording and managers need to be checking that this is being done. There continues to be no evidence that Core Group minutes are being chaired or completed by staff other than Children's Services professionals, a practice it would be encouraging to see some improvement in.

### **Findings:**

Evidence suggests that every effort is being made by Team Managers to allocate Child Protection cases to qualified social workers and there has been a reduction in these cases being held by ACM's.

This audit continues to confirm that the Child Protection cases held by ACM's are being primarily managed as specified in the ACM's job description, although every effort will continue to be made to ensure that Child Protection cases are allocated to qualified Social Workers.

Overall there is no evidence within the information seen that children receive a lower level of safeguarding because their key workers were ACM's, but the below recommendations should help to address those issues highlighted within the report as requiring further attention.

### **Recommendations and continuing actions to be taken:**

- This audit will continue to be undertaken on an annual basis until no Child Protection cases are held by ACM's and to ensure that the ACM's are monitored as specified in their job description.
- The conversion of ACM posts to Social Work posts continues to be prioritised.
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**Julie Clark**  
**Head of Intensive Intervention (June 2016)**