

15 May 2003



**The Laming Enquiry into the
Death of Victoria Climbié –
Workload Implications for Durham**

Report of Peter Kemp, Director of Social Services

Purpose of the Report

- 1 Following the initial briefing provided to Cabinet on the 11 February 2003, the Department was asked to provide further information relating to the specific social services implications of Lord Laming's report that directly relate to the optimum workloads for social work staff who work with vulnerable children in need.
- 2 This report provides Cabinet with information relating to:
 - Implementing Lord Laming's recommendations in terms of workloads.
 - Current workload and staffing establishment issues for the Social Services Department.
 - The work being undertaken to address recruitment and capacity issues in Durham.

Background

- 3 The Laming Inquiry was commissioned following the death in February 2000 of 8-year-old Victoria Climbié, at the hands of her carers. The report of the inquiry was published in January 2003. 48 of the 108 social care recommendations were directed towards Social Services.
- 4 The report submitted to Cabinet on 4th February 2003, identified specific issues which relate to workload:
 - **Social Worker caseloads** should number between 12-15
 - **Temporary and inexperienced staff** (usually unqualified social work assistants) should not be employed at the front end to undertake statutory duties.
 - **Child protection investigations** should only be undertaken by appropriately trained social workers.

- **Issues in relation to unallocated cases** - all Children in Need cases should be allocated to a Social Worker who is actively working with the child, with a monthly update to Cabinet.
 - **Effectiveness of Front Door Duty Systems and the role of "One Stop Shop"** - in Durham this relates to both Social Care Direct and duty systems within Children in Need Teams.
- 5 The Government's response to Lord Laming's report will be contained within the Green Paper on Children at Risk, to be published in late May at the earliest.

Current Situation in Durham

- 6 Fieldwork services to children within the department are currently provided through 11 children in Need teams, 2 Children Looked After & Aftercare teams and a Disabled Children's team.
- 7 The current structure is predicated on caseloads of 20 in the Children in Need teams and 25 in the Children Looked After and Aftercare teams. The restructuring of Children's Service that took place in April 2002 was cost neutral and the review of the restructuring has identified significant pressures on both the Children Looked After and Children in Need teams. There are also local variations in terms of workload and allocation practices which are being addressed as far as possible within current staffing establishments.
- 8 The Laming implications will directly impact on the 11 Children in Need teams because they deal primarily with the front door to Children's Services and respond to Children in Need.

Caseloads and Staffing Establishment

- 9 Social Workers in the eleven Children in Need teams in Durham currently have responsibility for an average of 23 allocated cases; the expectations arising from the Laming Report is that social work caseloads should be between 12 and 15 cases.
- 10 There are, on average, 10 cases allocated to each Social Work Assistant in Children in Need Teams. The Laming Report is clear that Social Work Assistants should not supervise statutory work.
- 11 Vacancies exist in 27 of the 76 posts on the establishment of children in Need Teams; however, additional resources allocated to improve the salaries of child care social workers has already begun to make an impact.

The Implications for Durham should Lord Laming's Recommendations be Implemented in their Entirety

- 12 Given that the maximum caseload recommended is 15 cases per Social Worker, the implications for staffing establishment are:

- Children in Need Teams - the establishment would need to double to meet the Laming recommendations.
 - Disabled Children Team - the establishment would need to treble
 - Looked After Children/Aftercare Team - the social work establishment would need to increase by 25%.
- 13 This increase in establishment would in theory address the workload issues. However, Durham, in common with all Local Authorities, is struggling to fill current social work vacancies in Children in Need teams.
- 14 Work is therefore being undertaken to develop a model of casework and task responsibility within Children in Need Teams which best employs the components of Team Manager, Senior Practitioner, Social Worker and Social Work Assistant. A cascade system of case responsibility and commissioning of tasks, which enables the best and safest use of Social Work Assistants, is under consideration.
- 15 The issue of caseload numbers is not in itself a useful measure of the complexity of work being undertaken. This will be a consideration within the model of service delivery being developed. The emphasis will be upon safe service delivery taking account of the experience, skills and training of staff commissioned to undertake tasks. However both the gap between where Laming would like us to be and where we are, the position of Durham in relation to its neighbours, as well as the interim evaluation following our restructuring, indicates that an additional injection of staff is required to create more manageable workloads and a greater focus on prevention. This will inevitably form part of our Invest To Save Strategy during 2003/04. The picture will be refined following the completion of the Child Protection audit required by the Social Services Inspectorate and presented to Cabinet on 1 May, once it has been validated by the Business link Inspector.
- 16 The Human Resources Strategy within Children's Services has a high priority, and includes targeting the retention and recruitment of experienced Social Workers able to undertake the specialist areas of Child Protection and Court work.
- 17 The Children's Branch has no difficulty in recruiting high quality Social Work Assistants.
- 18 Social Care Direct is working to ensure that systems are absolutely watertight and that the service is adequately resourced in terms of both establishment and skills. Any shortfalls in this service area will directly impact upon the pressures experienced by the Children in Need Teams.

Recommendations

19 Cabinet are requested to note:

- (a) That current workload demands are already exceeding existing staffing capacity at the caseload levels established at the time of the Children's Services restructuring in April 2002. The Laming recommendations related to caseload size, if simply applied, indicate an even more significant under resourcing issue.
- (b) The work in progress to develop a realistic working model for Children in Need Teams in Durham.

Background Papers

Report of Peter Kemp, Director of Social Services to CMT on 4th February 2003
- The Laming Inquiry into the Death of Victoria Climbié - The Implications for Durham County Council.

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Appendix 1: Implications

Finance

The recommendations in terms of workload of the Laming Report if applied literally would have very significant financial implications.

Staffing

The recommendations in terms of workload of the Laming Report if applied literally would have significant staffing implications.

Equal opportunities

All developments within Children's Services are congruent with Durham's equality programme.

Accommodation

No immediate issues

Crime and disorder

The capacity of the organisation to respond to Children in Need is directly related to community safety

Environment

N/A

Human rights

All consistent with the UN Convention.

Localities

Local variations in workload and practices are currently being addressed

Young people

Adequate staffing establishment/improved skill mix in teams will directly impact upon services to children and young people.

Consultation